



# Within the Leather

by David Kazmierczak, CGCS

Last Thursday I had the pleasure of making a road trip with a few fellow MGCSA associates to

Fargo, North Dakota for the 2014 NDGSA scholarship event. We left at sunrise, played and returned to the Twin Cities well after sunset making this a true road trip.

We caught a really great day too, as mid-September in North Dakota is no gimmie. The sunny, breezy day came and passed with marginal golf, good conversation and for me, a unique look at how another superintendent association functions and the dynamics within it. It was pretty strange walking around before and after the golf at what looked and felt like a MGCSA event, but all the faces were unfamiliar.

The scramble was held at Edgewood Golf Course, a municipal course located on the Red River. We teed off on the first hole, and right away my playing partner Steve Randall from the GCSAA, started to fill me in on some of the changes at the golf course as he had played it years ago growing up in the area. I had heard and read about

Edgewood, along with some other North Dakota and Minnesota courses located on the river concerning the flooding issues they have had to deal with over the years. By the time we got to the fourth hole, which ran right by the river, major changes, (new berms and dykes) became evident. New tees, acres and acres of seeding, and even a new 18th green, elevated to avoid flooding, showed themselves off as we finished the round. For all the destruction and construction that obviously had gone on in 2014 for the guys given the job of maintaining Edgewood, I thought the place looked great and more importantly, played great.

When we finished the round, we met Mark Lindberg, Superintendent at Edgewood. We exchanged greetings and talked a bit and then he related to us that this was it- this was his last year. He was retiring. He wasn't really retiring from work- he said he would probably continue to work within the parks department, but he was done being the head man at Edgewood. He had simply had enough of the rising waters of the Red River and the putting the pieces back together when they receded.

We all wished him luck, ate and sat through the awards presentation. At the end, a tall fellow seated to the right

of us asked if he could say a few things. Victor Heitkamp, superintendent of Osgood Golf Course, who was hired by the mechanic at Edgewood while Mark was away for a few days, was accosted by Mark when he returned to work and asked “who the hell are you?” Mark gave Heitkamp two weeks to prove himself, and the relationship is still going. You see, Mark was Heitkamp’s mentor, and his emotions concerning Lindbergs’s retirement were very evident and touching. It was clear what Lindberg meant to Heitkamp’s career and life.

I have heard the same speech before. Which is a wonderful thing. This profession allows for that. In a job that so much is learned on the greens, tees and fairways and not the classroom, having a good mentor can mean the difference between success and failure. Most successful superintendents can identify one, maybe two or three if they’re lucky, individuals that took them under their wing and helped propel them to new heights, sometimes higher than the mentors themselves. This is called Legacy.

The day after we got back, I started considering my Legacy. It was my 47th Birthday, and I began to think about my mentors, and anti-mentors, and the assistants that have worked for me. I thought about the high school and college kids that worked for me. Did I do enough to help them? Had I guided

them or extolled what knowledge and experience I possess so that they could succeed? Tough question to answer.

As I have aged, I have found that I have not been as communicative with my crew. I have tried to delegate more authority to people under me, which is good, but perhaps lost some communication in the process. I’ve even been told that information has to be “pried” out of me at times. That certainly is not good mentoring.

So I have something to work on the rest of the year, and in future years. I guess I knew this, but it’s funny how something like that trip to North Dakota opened my eyes to this subtle notion that there is an area I need to address. I’m sure there are other areas as well. Maybe the next MGCSA event will be another eye opener, who knows. But I do know that I want to be like Mark Lindberg when I retire. Not because of any personal satisfaction or accolades, but because it is so vitally important to be that guy (or gal). To be somebody that helps shape lives and careers. The position of Golf Course Superintendent lends itself to do that so easily and readily and it doesn’t take too much effort.

As long as you aren’t under water!