



A Look Back At Stanford Golf Course and Mr. Ellis Van Gorder

By Gary K. Carls CGCS

As we continue to look back at the history of GCSANC, we need to take a look at some of our founding fathers and their roles in the evolution of our chapter. A critical time in the evolution of the chapter was in the time period surrounding World War II. Most chapter activities stopped during the war and it took some hard work by some dedicated members to get things rolling again after the war ended. One of members who help lead the chapter through that period was Mr. Ellis Van Gorder.

Ellis Van Gorder graduated from U.C. Berkeley with a degree in Agriculture. Following college Mr. Van Gorder was involved in construction at Castlewood C.C. from 1926-1929 with architect William Bell before moving on to supervise the construction of Stanford Golf Course with Bell in 1929. Throughout the years the Stanford G.C. has maintained a reputation as one of the finest University golf courses in the world. Mr. Van Gorder was a charter member of the chapter and during 1932, Stanford G.C. was the host of one of the first local meetings. He was also a member of the chapter's first board of directors in 1932. The first Public Relations effort of the chapter began when Mr. Van Gorder sent a letter to the San Francisco News in September

of 1932 about the superintendent and his role in the upkeep of golf courses. In 1935 he was elected to serve as chapter president the first time.

Mr. Van Gorder was in charge of the local Victory Garden at Stanford during World War II and was very proud to be involved in the war effort at home. After the end of World War II Mr. Van Gorder took an active role in getting the chapter back on its feet and returned to the board of directors in 1949. Eventually Mr. Van Gorder served as chapter president two more times in 1952 and 1961. He was also Vice President of the State Wide Federation Turf Council in 1956.

The family, with two daughters and a son, lived on the family farm and in the old house that is still used by the course superintendent today. They had cows and chickens and raised vegetables on the family farm. His son, Terry Van Gorder, who helped me in researching this article, worked in the golf course design and construction business for many years before moving on to a successful career in the theme park business at Magic Mountain and Knotts Berry Farm in southern California. Among other courses, Terry and his father worked together on Peacock Gap G.C. in Marin County in 1960 and did a presentation on the development of the course at a chapter

meeting in May of 1961.

Mr. Van Gorder enjoyed walking and it is reported that he walked the entire golf course twice a day during most of his years at Stanford. He truly loved the outdoors and his time away from the course was often spent with his family on fishing trips or backpacking excursions in the Sierra Nevada mountains. Despite his many activities he always knew the importance of spending quality time with his family and enjoyed his time away from the course.

During his tenure at Stanford he loved to do a lot of his own research on the golf course. He had a wide variety of test plots on the course related to anything new he wanted to try. This interest in research led to a long career in many areas of the golf world. Besides remaining as superintendent at Stanford until 1965, Mr. Van Gorder also became involved in golf course design and construction throughout the west and was involved with many courses in the area including Crystal Springs G.C. and several courses in Idaho. He also acted as an agronomic consultant to many of these facilities. He did several projects with Robert Trent Jones and William Bell over the years. Later he developed a great friendship with Bill Bengeyfield of the USGA and

was very involved in the formation of the Western Region Green Section. After leaving Stanford Mr. Van Gorder continued to do consulting work in golf course design and construction. He also started a landscape construction company. Eventually he retired to Guaymus, Mexico.

Despite his many years of service to his chapter and other professional pursuits, Mr. Van Gorder remained humble. He didn't seek the spotlight. He just wanted to help others become the best that they could be. He took a great deal of pride in being able to help out younger superintendents. Many of the problems he faced at Stanford are the same problems Ken Williams faces today. Despite all the new technology of the past 70 years, some things never seem to change. It just demonstrates how much our jobs are influenced by factors such as climate or nature, that we cannot control. Terry Van Gorder said his father would be very proud of the Stanford Golf Course today and the great job Ken and his staff do.

I hope this article has helped give us all some insight into one of our early chapter leaders. Let's all hope that as we look back on our careers that we can leave a legacy such as Mr. Ellis Van Gorder did at the Stanford Golf Course.

Max Slack Tournament to be Held at San Juan Oaks GC October 29, 2001

Please join us on October 29th for the Max E. Slack Memorial Golf Tournament to be held at San Juan Oaks Golf Course. This one time only event is being held to raise money for an endowment fund for students in the Turf Science program at Purdue

University. This endowment will provide scholarships for future turf students who plan to work in the golf course maintenance field.

Details of the Max Slack Tournament are —
7:30 am registration
9:00 am shotgun start -

scramble format w/ 4 man teams.
Cost - \$150/person includes golf, cart, range balls, BBQ lunch, all nonalcoholic drinks,

Prizes
1st, 2nd, 3rd prizes for low gross teams, closest to pin & longest drive.

If you have questions, or would like information, please contact Andy Slack 408-288-8153, or email - aslack@spotwater.com.