

A TULSA TREASURE

You don't need to be an engineer to figure out that Southern Hills is a top-flight golf course.

by Ken Kuhajda, managing editor

With a degree in metallurgical engineering and a reserved seat in law school, you'd expect Bob Randquist to be fighting traffic to get to his big-city high-rise for work each morning.

Or at least be a member of the wool suit, oxford shirt, silk tie, and loafer gang. Or at least drive a BMW.

However, Randquist doesn't fit into a nice, neatly-wrapped category.

an engineering career was out.

Bob Randquist stayed home, eschewing job offers in Houston and St. Louis, to work at Trospen.

Once an Oklahoman, always an Oklahoman.

"I've certainly never regretted it," says the 35-year-old. "Three years after I started at Trospen, I was accepted into law school (at OU) but didn't attend."

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—Randquist

He's not doing what you would expect someone of his age and education to do. He chooses turf over concrete, Cushmans over BMWs, open space over office space.

You can find him 12 months a year at prestigious Southern Hills Country Club in Tulsa, Okla., studying turf instead of metals.

He's been Southern Hills superintendent since December, 1979, directing a crew of 14 in preparation for events like the PGA Championship in 1982.

His big decision

While a student at the University of Oklahoma, Randquist worked for several golf courses during summer months, developing a fondness for the work.

"After I graduated, I had the chance to take a job as assistant superintendent with Trospen Park Golf Course in Oklahoma City," he says.

There was a good chance for advancement, which made the offer even more appealing. Strike one.

His degree in engineering meant he would probably have to move from his beloved Oklahoma to the big city. Strike two.

Wife LaVada still had another year of college at OU. Strike three:

By that time, he bled green, raptured by golf courses.

"I love the work, I love the game of golf," says the former 1-handicapper, now a 6. "I'm glad to be involved with it. I guess my only regret is the fact that I don't get to play enough."

When he does play, he sees things differently. "Being a player and involved in the maintenance end, I see things that I didn't see before. It makes it hard for me to concentrate while some guys can shut it out. I'm not one of them."

While golfing, he spends more time looking over a stress area than planning his approach. But he still enjoys playing—he holds his own against club members.

The course

Whether working or playing, Randquist enjoys the outdoors.

"What appeals to me about this business is that you get to see the results of your work," he says.

He also gets spiritual fulfillment. "I really have a deep sense of appreciation that I have the chance to do what I do. It's a chance for me to be a steward in part of God's creation."

His piece of God's creation is located in south Tulsa, nestled

among the rolling hills of northeast Oklahoma.

It's truly a fine course, one requiring both strength and finesse to score. Well-known in golf circles, Southern Hills has hosted two U.S. Opens (1958, 1977), two PGA Championships (1970, 1982), the U.S. Amateur (1965), and U.S. Women's Amateur (1946). *Golf Digest* ranks it 11th among U.S. courses.

It's not a long course (6,862 yards, par 70 at tournament time), it's not visually intimidating, but it can eat you quickly.

At tournament time, any shot in the rough (a mix of common bermuda, bluegrass, and ryegrass) almost assures the golfer of a bogey. The tight fairways are easy to miss.

At times, you can hit the fairway but not a particular spot and end up with a bogey.

The course's 3,500 trees come into play frequently. Despite its serene appearance, Southern Hills can spell disaster for those off their game.

Some say the first three holes (all par fours) are the key to winning a championship at Southern Hills. Numbers 1, 2, and 3 (447, 459, and 406 yards, respectively) call for accuracy right out of the shoot. An errant shot and even a pro is looking at a six.

Numbers 4 through 7 are considered fairly easy holes for the pro, perhaps a break for what lies ahead.

Hole number 8, a 215-yard par three, features a tight fairway, sloping green, and three strategically placed traps. Accuracy off the tee is paramount to solving this hole.

Numbers 9 through 11 allow the golfer a brief rest before tackling perhaps the course's most famous hole.

Number 12: 445-yards, par four.

Both Ben Hogan and Arnold Palmer picked number 12, a dog-leg left, as one of the country's top par fours. A tee shot has to dissect a group of trees and land on the right side of the fairway for a long iron approach to the well-guarded green. Three deep traps and a pond add to the challenge.

When and if the golfer makes it past 12, he's faced with the course's longest par four, number 13 (465 yards, a 537-yard par five for members), a par three with six bunkers, and number 15, a par four, slight dog-leg left with three traps

LANDSCAPE PROFILE *continued*



The Southern Hills Country Club clubhouse in Tulsa, Okla.



This is what the golfer sees as climbs toward the 18th green.

tightly surrounding the green.

Sixteen is a birdie hole, a 569-yard par five, that typically plays downwind.

Number 17, the course's shortest par four (354 yards), requires a perfect tee shot for an approach to a shallow, hard-to-hold green.

The finishing hole, a 434-yard par four, is a severe right dog-leg, where an idyllic tee shot is required to reach the plateau green.

The smallish greens average just 4,800 square feet. Southern Hills is no picnic for both pros and 900 members, who average 30,000 rounds yearly on the 175 acres.

Public relations

Randquist, on a tour of the course, knows most faces he passes. That's intentional. "I eat lunch with them every day, which I feel is a real positive public relations move," he says.

His monthly meetings with the greens committee run smoothly, he says, provided he's done his homework.

"I give a report that highlights the major things we did, the projects we're working on," he says. "I give a future report where I break things down into 30-day, 60-day, and 90-day projects. As long as I give reports

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and stay organized, the meetings go smoothly."

As long as the club thrives, Randquist is in an enviable position. He has carte blanche over purchase of equipment and supplies, hiring and firing, and employees' wages.

He has a crew of 14 with two assistant superintendents: John Babe and Scott Mendenhall. Jim Lucius is the club pro.

Quiet efficiency

The 1982 PGA official program offers this description of Randquist: "quiet efficiency."

It's an apt account of the reserved Oklahoman with the gentle eyes and mild disposition.

He knows the game, he knows every inch of Southern Hills, he

knows his capabilities.

His programs work well but you'd never see him pat himself on the back. The members, who hired him in December of 1979, do plenty of that.

He reseeded all greens in September, 1984, with Penncross bentgrass and little fanfare. He's nurtured those greens through the intense heat of an Oklahoma summer.

He has the course playable 12 months a year despite the unpredictability of an Oklahoma winter.

Southern Hills continues as one of the country's top courses under his superintendency. Not bad for a guy with a degree in metallurgical engineering. **WT&T**

A super's view on golf: then, now, tomorrow

Bob Randquist, superintendent at Southern Hills Country Club, Tulsa, Okla., has 16 years experience on golf courses. In that time, he has developed ideas on many topics. Here's a nutshell report:

Wages: "My feeling about my crew is that I want to pay them enough to keep the ones I want to keep."

Chemicals and supplies: "We buy in January and February to take advantage of the discounts. With the financial position of our club, we're fortunate to be able to do that."

GCSAA: "The real core of information for anyone in the turf business. GCSAA has always been in the forefront with its research. The meetings are a great chance to meet people, share and exchange ideas, find out the latest thing on the market."

Agronomy degrees for superintendents: "It's more important that people in the business have a degree in something. It shows they've handled the work. But not



Bob Randquist, Southern Hills club superintendent.

having a turf degree has never hampered me."

His job: "It would be real difficult to leave here. One of things that attracted me was the fact that since Southern Hills was built (1935, with Perry Maxwell as architect), it's only had five superintendents and the one before me was here only two years. That shows stability."

Enjoy most about job: "No question—being outside."

Enjoy least about job: "The variability of golfers. We try to walk that line where we make the majority of the players happy."

Biggest challenge: "Getting maximum production from employees: doing it economically but doing it first class."

Another challenge: "Making the general golfing public aware of our efforts and our role in the game. We've got to do a better job. The golfing public has no idea of how important a superintendent is."

—Ken Kuhajda