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COPING WITH CONSTRUCTION...

...Not to mention the military way of doing things, and the agronomics of living in the Miami Valley. Those are the challenges of Rick Boehm.

by Jerry Roche, editor

His cronies are tearing up his golf course. There's nothing Rick Boehm can do but grin and bear it, except sometimes grasp his forehead in disbelief.

"Keeping the grass looking good is simple, compared to all the other

problems," says Boehm. He is charged with maintaining the Wright-Patterson Golf Club at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Dayton, Ohio—not an easy task, considering the constant interference from outside equipment.

For starters, a 14-inch deep trench

spanned the fairways of holes No. 10 and 14 this spring. It forced Boehm to temporarily shorten both holes until a 69,000-volt electrical line was installed. ("Fortunately, they didn't hit any of my irrigation lines," Boehm says. "I marked them the best I could.")

Elsewhere, a new portion of Interstate 675 that will be the base's main entrance is cutting the No. 11 tee off short. When that project was announced, Boehm had to move his tree nursery.

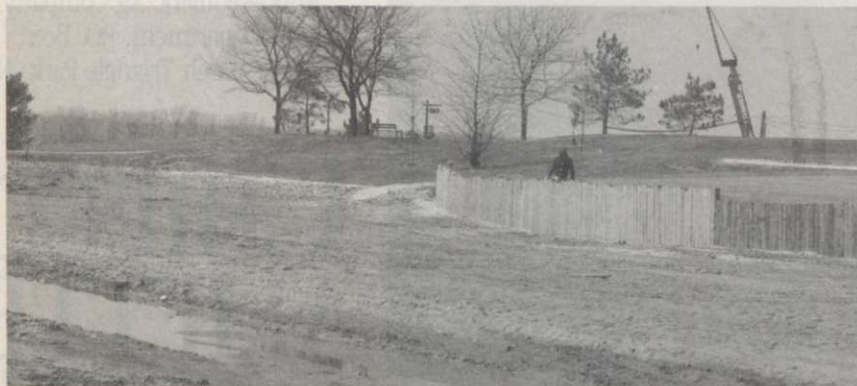
"Ninety-nine percent of the construction is not for the golf course," Boehm announces. "The only golf course construction is rerouting a water line on No. 11."

Coping secrets

How does Boehm cope?

"I've been here for 16 years," he notes. "We're a 27-hole course, but in that time I've had to construct and reconstruct about 54 holes.

"It's crazy at times. Every day,



The general suggested adding railroad ties to the the 16th green, next to a pond. Since the base's environmental consultants looked disapprovingly upon using railroad ties, Boehm's crews were busy this spring constructing a vertical wall of landscape timbers.

something seems to go astray. Every day is different, depending on mowing, weather and construction. There isn't another course I know of that has problems like us."

No, but many landscape managers who fit into the government sector (like Boehm, a WS-10-grade government employee) face some of the same problems as he. Beginning with red tape.

"It was difficult when I first got the job," remembers the veteran. "My whole theory was to try and make the best course. That doesn't fly with the military.

"You don't just go out and build a

bunker. To do it the way they wanted took two years. It was awful.

"At first, I'd walk around pulling my hair out, trying to fight the system. But we've found out we have to work within the system."

"Working within the system" means two sets of pesticide records (one for the Air Force, one for OSHA) and putting up with the complaints of uninformed military personnel.

"If there are any bird or fish kills, I'm the first one they call," Boehm notes. "One time, the vehicle maintenance department was stacking its old batteries and acid was getting washed down into a pond. There was a big fish

kill. I was the first one to get called on the carpet."

"Working within the system" also means donating part of the club's proceeds to what is called the base's Morale, Welfare and Recreation Fund. (This meant opening the membership up to the first 100 civilians to apply. Last year was the first year that civilians could play, which boosted annual rounds to about 70,000.)

Unearthing relics

Because of the continual reconstruction, some lower holes are built on a former dump and others on former sites of barracks.

"Once, we actually pulled up live ammo from an old gunnery site," Boehm says. "We pull up old knives and forks from the dump. From those old barracks, there are old sanitary sewers and electric lines—big lines."

Because of their placement, greens are also very difficult to keep moist during droughty periods. Boehm must continually reseed the roughs, Kentucky bluegrass cut to two inches.

Another factor that has influenced his maintenance program was the Air Force Logistics Command's (AFLC) interpretation of an EPA rule. According to Boehm's superiors, he couldn't use pesticide spray equipment (including a John Deere 1500 self-contained sprayer) for anything but spraying. The final interpretation, after Boehm tried to clarify things, has yet to be determined.

Keeping it military

This is a very military base. Very, very military: the AFLC's commanding officer, four-star Gen. Alfred Hansen (who is an avid golfer), has a house overlooking the course. Not long ago, the general suggested adding railroad ties to the the 16th green, next to a pond. Of course, Wright-Patterson's environmental consultants looked disapprovingly upon using railroad ties because of possible creosote contamination. So Boehm's crews were busy this spring constructing a vertical wall of landscape timbers. ("Maybe we'll name the hole after him," Boehm says with a wink.)

His responsibilities sometimes transcend the usual responsibilities of a civilian golf course super. He not only must maintain the course, but also some parts of its perimeter, along roads that make up the base's VIP tour. ("It's a pain.")

Boehm also received some bad marks when he began to deviate from what the airmen and officers thought the golf course should look like.

"They say I plant too many trees," says Boehm. "But I'll plant any I can

This man has been around



After 16 years of practice, superintendent Boehm has mastered the art of working with military bureaucracy.

Rick Boehm has only worked on two golf courses. But he's been around.

Boehm, who started as assistant superintendent at Weatherwax Golf Course in Middletown, Ohio, is now at Wright-Patterson Golf Club. But, as a graduate from Ohio State University in agronomics, his talents are always needed elsewhere.

"If I had ever opened up a consulting business, I'd be rich now," the jovial Buckeye says. "Everybody at the base comes to me."

Boehm has, in the past, been TDY (military terminology for "temporary duty"), consulting at Robbins AFB in Georgia, Tinker AFB in Oklahoma, Chanute AFB in Illinois and Homestead AFB in Florida. On these trips, he's lent his expertise to other Air Force superintendents.

He has also consulted for the

southern Ohio cities of Cincinnati and Dayton horticulture departments.

Boehm is also very active in the Miami Valley branch of the GCSAA and the Ohio Turfgrass Foundation. He is a former president of the Miami Valley GCSA and was its newsletter editor for nine years. He is currently the organization's video librarian and a member of its board of directors. He is also a former OTF board member. How does he explain this involvement?

"A lot of new people need information, and I feel I'm one of the old farts in the organization. I get involved with everything."

Boehm's top employees are assistant Jeff Caldwell, who has been with him since 1977, and irrigation technician Bob Hoover. Besides those two, Boehm hires nine seasonal workers from a Non-Appropriated Fund list supplied to him by the Air Force.

"These are seasonal people who are required to apply by the last two weeks of February, so we have very few people to draw from." This year, though, four of the nine seasonals are back from last year.

The last conversation that LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT had with Boehm (as this issue went to press), he was having more of the same problems as earlier in the year.

"You should have been here this week," he told us. "Every contractor that was on the course hit an irrigation line."

We wished him luck.

"Thanks, I need that," he laughed.

—Jerry Roche □



Despite the constant struggle with military contractors, Boehm's course looks great.

get my hands on (6,000 since 1972)." He also extensively uses about 8,000 annuals, perennials, 100 tubs of ornamental grasses per year, and wildflowers. Sometimes he uses them thanklessly.

"There was some bitching at first because everybody wanted the 'military look.' But they got used to it,"

Boehm explains. "Because of the placement of some trees and ornamentals, the golfers are starting to play their own hole more, rather than adjacent ones."

This use of lovegrasses, sheeps fescue, flowers and the like is not cheap. "It's pretty intensive work, but people enjoy the areas more," he observes.

"We have a lot of women who enjoy the flowers and we try to appease them," even though wildflower maintenance sometimes runs twice that of turf.

Happiness is...

So why has Boehm lasted so long under such extreme working conditions?

"I love the area where I live," he answers. "I enjoy what I do. I've taken a golf course that was nothing and created something."

He likes to talk about Wright-Patterson's beautification program. Base personnel, he says, want to make the rest of the base as delightful to the eyes as the golf course is. "That makes me feel pretty good too," he beams.

Despite his 16 years at Wright-Patterson, Boehm remains on the cutting edge of new developments. His course last August became the first in Ohio to install a combination weather station/RainBird Maxi computer irrigation system.

The fruits of his labor are paying off. Late next month, Wright-Patterson Golf Club will be the site of the AFLC golf championships. A week later, the All-Air Force championship will be held there. And the following week, the all-service championships will invade. This is the first time all three major military title matches will be held at one facility in one year.

"Golfers from all over the world will be here," Boehm beams proudly. "These are serious golfers. We have to feed, house and transport them—show 'em a good time. It's going to be big."

And Boehm's course will doubtless be up to the task. Unless, of course, the engineers decide to put in a few more electrical lines. **LM**

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