

Jim Bar

After 43 years at Niakwa Country Club, an 18 hole, private golf course, I resigned to become superintendent at a 9 hole, public course, called Wildewood Golf Club.

The first difference became very apparent when I had to walk through 3 feet of snow from the road to the maintenance shop to start a very cold front end loader, and clear the 100 yards, to access the 8 degree workshop.

I had arrived at my next stage in life and I did so with a smile on my face, albeit a frozen one. No warm cab for me on the tractor!

It is only to be experienced to understand why one who was approaching 60 years of age and having those many years on a golf course would not simply retire and leave the daily troubles we all know, occur, to younger golf superintendents.

Retiring was never considered. I was going to keep working somewhere, as stopping after being totally immersed in my work for so long would not have been good for my wellbeing or my wife's wellbeing! Again, it has to be experienced.

My first course of action after raising the temperature in the shop to well over 12 degrees was to itemize the equipment and set a game plan for servicing the equipment, in advance of spring. Servicing the equipment? I had not had to do that since 1985 and even then, I was limited to changing spark plugs and oil filters. I was a deer in the headlights, and that was after 43 years! Yikes!

Those first few weeks were spent pushing and dragging frozen equipment from one side of the building to the other, determining whether parts were available, the correct wrenches were in the tool box and whether the owner would approve the expense.

That was one of my first learning curves. I actually had to get approval for filters, oil and all of the things I had taken for granted for all of those years. Yes, I did have a budget at Niakwa, however, once approved I was on my own and never considered whether we should buy 4 litres of oil or 20 liters. I would always say the 45 liters, of course!

As the snow melted I was still as nervous as someone starting their first golf superintendent's job. All I wanted to do was maintain the golf course in the same condition I had heard Dave Linstead had maintained it for seven years. He was worshiped there and I was extremely concerned I would fail miserably.

To my relief the course wintered well, obviously to the credit of Dave and his fall preparation.

At Niakwa the staff would be hired and at least 6-8 employees were brought in to ready the course for opening day. Wildewood had myself and one employee who was probably wondering why wouldn't they have hired someone even 10 years younger! The two of us did manage to open the course even though our combined age was slightly over 125, but that scary thought, was offset by the 85 years of golf course experience shared between the two of us.

Older employees did not cause me any problems, however older equipment began straining the limited knowledge, I had slightly exaggerated, in the interview. One of the things I soon realized was that I should have inventoried the number of band aides in the first aid kit. Now, all the swearing I heard through my office door over the many winters at Niakwa was coming from my mouth and



it was directed at the designers of turf equipment, wherever they keep them.

They cannot possibly expect mechanics to get their four hands into areas meant for one. If I had a phone in the maintenance building I would have called up Toro, Jacobsen or John Deere and relate my displeasure. And if I had a phone line I would hook it up to the 1985 computer and download a repair manual so I could look at pictures of how to attach that spring to the throttle linkage. Gone were the days when the two desktop computers and the one laptop generated so much heat we were forced to install an air conditioner in the office at 760 Niakwa Road. I think I may have been spoiled!

With the equipment at least starting, and 3 more staff hired, spring work could now progress and the tasks mirrored everything I was familiar with, edging traps, cleaning downed branches and readying the pump house for irrigation start-up.

The irrigation system. Another flashback to the 80's at Niakwa, however Dave had kept his 707's and 808's in a little better condition than I back then. They worked! The first time this spring I turned on the pump I did so with the door wide open, one hand on the switch, one foot on the sill of the door ready to jump through when parts went flying. The only thing that happened was that the pump started, noisy, but running...and pumping!

This was one centrifugal pump, not the three turbines I was used to, but it filled the lines just the same and provided the water the greens needed, that day. With no pressure relief, and certainly no variable speed drive we were forced to place a number of sprinklers on fairways to allow for handwatering. This again brought back memories.

Spring turned into summer and while I always carried a weed eater in my cart I used it only occasionally. At Wildewood I found that the number of trees were in the thousands and their numbers were only matched by the number of stumps. They all needed trimming! It became a weekly workout program and I'm happy to report 15lbs of fat disappears quickly and this is only a nine hole course.!



With all of these trees came shade, at times of the day when I thought you had to be inside a building to see less sun. I really believe parts of three or 4 four greens do not receive any sunlight during the summer.

I quickly found out dollar spot loves shade. A spray program was developed and it consisted of, see disease, spray disease! Up until this point I am amazed that with all of the hours the sprayer is getting, it continues to work. To have brakes, lights, hydraulic lift arms and a pump shut off would help slightly, but we have managed thus far and a replacement unit is lower down the priority list than one would think it should be.

So far, 2014 has been a real eye opener for me. I was in my own world being at a private club, where, pressures were ever present and expectations intense, however I had the resources to pretty much address any concerns that came along. At Wildewood, innovation becomes the norm to complete some of the simplest tasks. I have developed a great respect for the many superintendents who are currently

working at smaller budgeted courses, where I know they are doing great things. We are all working at the job we love with the same goal every season, to have the best conditioned golf course we can with the resources we are given.

While I would never trade all my years at Niakwa for anything, this first year at Wildewood has been refreshing and invigorating. I just don't think I could do it for 42 more! I guess I could if I just had, a mechanic, an automatic irrigation system, a new fleet of equipment, a.....

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