

# Who Made You?

By Dan Burkett

**W**ho made you? This is not a question of theology or creation, but rather an introspective of what events and more importantly what people shaped you to the person you are today. We are all driven by goals and events that will occur in the future and we work hard to ensure that each step we take is driving toward that goal. How often do we stop to reflect on how we arrived to our current position in life? How often do we appreciate the people who influenced and molded us to who we are? This is my homage to those people and events that have made me.

Although it took personal effort, it is people who guided me to my position here at Bent Tree Country Club. After a diverted path through several unsure moments, I have landed back close to the people who influenced me. I have been here only three years and have encountered countless others, re-established old friendships, and created new relationships with people who will no doubt impact me from here. One of the great advantages of being at Bent Tree is that I have the ability to create personal relationships with many of our members. They have been extremely supportive of our maintenance operation and appreciate a hard day's work. The club has a vision to the future that honors its past. We have made strides forward in conditioning and will continue to do so. As we accomplish small goals in our effort for improvement, I will always take the time to reflect and appreciate the people who molded me.

## ... The Guide

I will not start at the beginning, but rather at my first eureka moment. I was fifteen and visiting my grandparents. My Granddad was a successful business man who had never met a stranger. He could make a ditch digger feel like The President and vice versa. He treated everyone with dignity and respect and inspired and commanded respect in return. He told me the most poignant statement that has guided me since. He said, "Never take a job to make money, figure out what you love to do, immerse yourself in it, work hard, and you will be rewarded with personal satisfaction." Now all I had to do was figure out what it was I wanted to do.

## ...The Painter

By this time my Dad had instilled in me a sense of responsibility and he represented the epitome of work- ethic. To him, anything worth doing was worth waking up for and worth doing right. Work came before play, although we worked hard and took time to play hard. My parents were both educators. In the summers Dad either painted houses or worked on golf course maintenance crews. He enlisted me on his paint crew when I was nine. I started as a grunt, moving ladders, scraping paint, doing cleanup, and being the gopher, that's go-for. Those first few summers I yearned for the day that I could actually paint something with a brush or even better to use the sprayer. As I earned my stripes and moved up the skill chain, I saw the value of my previous menial position. I had not earned enough stripes to have my own ladder man or gopher. I did however, get the opportunity to hone my craft and even carve a niche for myself as the finish man. This job entailed walking around the house over and over at completion and touching up blemishes and refining every detail. This was the signature of our work and in my mind a reflection of our integrity and worth as painters.

By high school Dad was an administrator and was doing school business year round. I took over the business, brought in some help, trained them, secured jobs, paid the bills, and continued the tradition and reputation of an honest, high quality paint crew. Between jobs I hauled hay, did general farm labor, maintained the tee-box, chipping green, and picked balls at our driving range in the back yard. In addition to being our high school principal, Dad was our golf coach.

## ...The Super

The summer of my junior year I worked on the crew at Hurricane Creek Country Club for Pat Manning and his assistant Mike Hundley. I found myself in the position of grunt again. I raked bunkers, ran a string trimmer up and down more miles of fire ant and poison ivy infested creek bank than I care to remember, hand picked goose grass and Bermuda runners out of our push up bent grass greens and picked up thousands of cords of pencil sized sticks. Eventually, I was

trained on a triplex and then a walking greens mower. I also did set-up and checked greens on those hot Texas afternoons. With a behind the scenes look into the world of course preparation, I still loved golf but did not foresee a career in maintenance following this experience.

## ...The Dean

I had done plenty of hard labor and was really beginning to see the value of education. I graduated high school and went to Texas A&M. I entered school arrogantly as an aerospace engineering major. After a semester of underwhelming effort and a bout of late-night induced narcolepsy, I finished the semester with a 1.0 GPA and a letter from the dean informing me of my impending scholastic probation. I took care of business my second semester, regained my good standing with the university, and humbly returned home for the summer. I could see that aerospace was not the place for me. I did some soul searching and decided that I wanted to do something in golf. I still was not keen on the idea of maintenance so I decided to pursue the club management side. To gain food and beverage experience, I worked my way up from a server to a manager-in-training at a national chain restaurant. Although the schedule was convenient for my continuing education and I was able to go to the range and hit golf balls every day, I was not getting the personal satisfaction Granddad had told me to find. More soul searching ensued and I realized that I enjoyed working and being outside and that I enjoyed seeing a tangible finished product after a days work. Then my second eureka moment hit. While hitting balls at Hurricane Creek before an evening shift, up drives Mike Hundley. Common courtesies were exchanged and he finally asked bluntly "What are you doing?" I told him of my grand plan to be General Manager of a golf course. He responded with the information that started me down my career path. "Get down to Texas A&M and get a Bachelor of Science in Agronomy with a Turf Management Option." That was it. I could work in the golf business, utilize my intellect and love of science, and work in a profession that would give me personal satisfaction.





### **...The Muse**

The following school year I returned to Texas A&M with my muse. I was 20 years old; I had a new bride on my arm and a sense of direction in my mind. My wife Julie went to work and I went to school. I took 21 hours per semester, worked

will always have Troon North as a benchmark for what is possible in golf course conditioning. I spent nine rewarding years in various positions with Troon Golf under the tutelage of Rod's counter personality and mentor Jeff Spangler. Although, I have Rod to thank for my manage-



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hard and played hard, was active in the turf club, made the dean's list a few times, and graduated in two and a half years. While at school, I made life long friends and learned the science and theory behind the art of green keeping. Upon graduation, I knew one thing. I knew nothing. While most of my classmates were taking Assistant Superintendent positions, I took a position making eight dollars an hour at the most magnificent golf course I have ever seen, Troon North in Scottsdale.

### **...The Mentors**

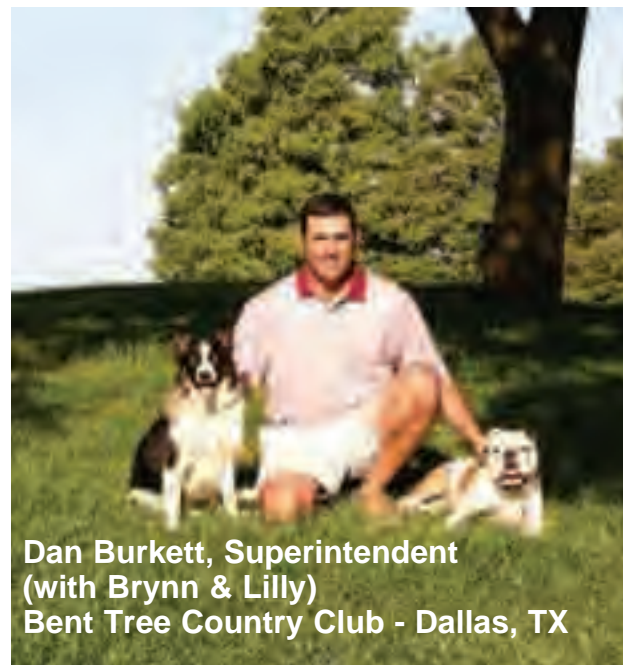
Once again I was a grunt. This grunt experience was different, it had purpose. Rod Myers was the Superintendent at Troon North. I have him to thank for most of what I know about the art of green keeping today. We worked countless hours alongside a great crew, at a great golf course, with a twelve month golf season, and great Scottsdale weather. It was here that I adopted my management style, my expectations for conditioning, my agronomic philosophy, and what I believe to be Rod's most positive attribute and the one I strive hardest for, the ability to be unflappable. No matter what happens, it is not the end of the world, there is always a solution, and no matter how good you think you are, you can always be better. Rod had the uncanny ability to take the most hectic situation and break it down into its simplest form and then attack it methodically to an impeccable end, all without increasing his heart rate. I will always cherish my time with Rod and

ment style, I have Jeff to thank for my agronomic philosophy and my expectation for conditioning. We can all only hope to have the drive and energy he has.

### **...The Experience**

What started as a cryptic message from my Granddad, turned into my mantra. Personal goals, professional aspirations, and even relationships I have had since that point have been guided by his words. Honor in a hard day's work, an attention to detail, a sense of integrity and accountability were painted into my psyche by Dad. The Supers gave me my first exposure to the inner workings of a golf course and pointed me towards my field of study. The Dean held me accountable and gave me a much needed wake-up call. My muse inspired me to expedite my education and career, has supported me in our travels throughout the contiguous states, and inflates my ego while maintaining my humility with prudence and a keen eye for the slightest blemish on my golf course. My mentors challenged me mentally, fostered me professionally, and created my benchmark.

As you drive relentlessly toward the next rung in your ladder of goals and aspirations, take time to reflect on the people and events, positive and negative that led you to this station. Learn from them, thank them if you can, and pass the favor on.



**Dan Burkett, Superintendent  
(with Brynn & Lilly)  
Bent Tree Country Club - Dallas, TX**

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