

How the Plain Golf Course Came to Life, 1971-73

Mary Jane Diehl Liegel and Ken Kraemer¹

It has been fifty years since the Plain community created the Westbrook Hills Golf Course. So, now is an appropriate time to look at the story of how it came to life, who some of the actors were, and the contributions (financial, equipment and human) that made it happen. Ralph Soeldner and Les Gruber were the original organizers for the project. So, one afternoon, we met with them at I-Diehl Tap to seek out the story of how this huge feat was accomplished, essentially with volunteer labor and equipment. There were so many questions.

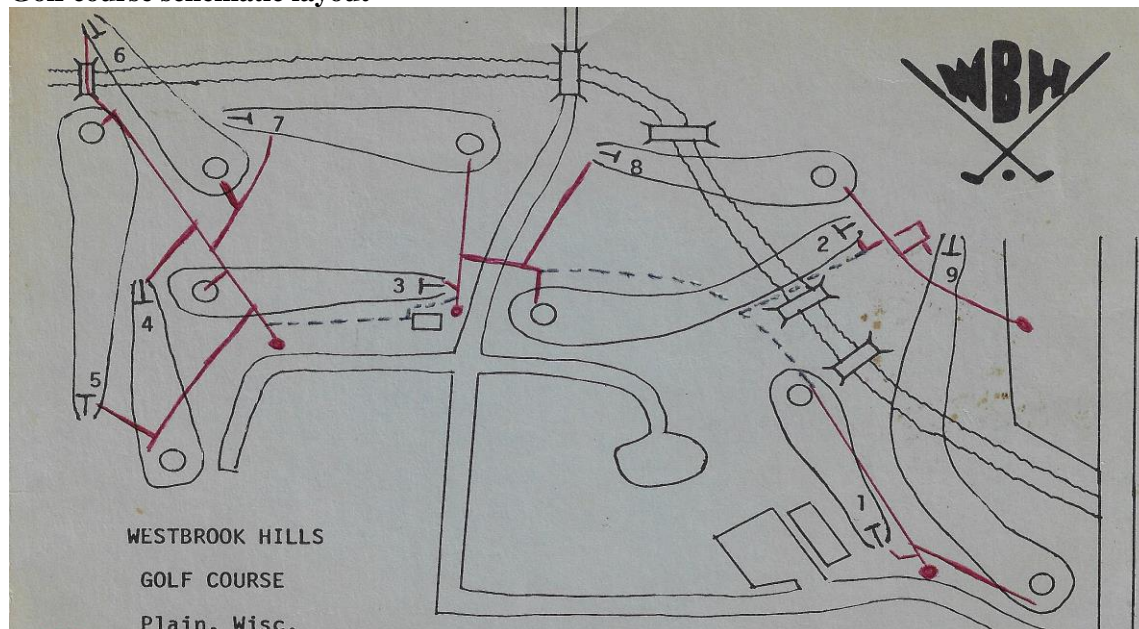
Genesis

First question - how did the idea of building the golf course in Plain get started? Ralph answered. "As the three of us, Terry Galloway, Les Gruber and I were working at Ed Kraemer and Sons, we would talk about a golf course on our coffee breaks. Why shouldn't Plain have a golf course; the surrounding communities had golf courses?" The talk continued almost every day. Ralph knew that the original blueprint to Westbrook Subdivision had a rough golf course plan, designed by Robert Graves. It was on the flood plain, so no houses could be built on it. What else would you do with that land? They continued to talk and talk and talk. The talking eventually followed them to Delmar's Bar after work each night. Before they knew it their talk was turning into action.

Village approval

Ralph was designated to secure permission from the village to build a golf course on village land. He met with village president Fred Viney. Fred owned Woody's Bar, which was located where the bank is today. Ralph claims his selling point was, "No increase in taxes for the village; it would be covered by donations." Fred Viney gave his approval for the golf course, and the committee was off and running.

Golf course schematic layout



NOTES: Water lines in red.

Electrical wires to controllers for water lines in blue dashed lines.

¹ This story is an update and expansion on a story that Mary Jane Diehl Liegel wrote for the *Weekly Home News* in 2016. It also includes material that she developed for an exhibit about the golf course history for the OFTHS museum that year. Ken integrated and organized the material and did the final wordsmithing.

Opposition

Of course, there were people completely against building the golf course. Some were concerned about possible tax increases. Some felt it would not be used. Some felt it would only be used by the village elite. Some felt that there would be downstream costs for maintenance, repairs, flood damage, etc., and that the Golf Club could not pay for itself with memberships, so it would end up on the village dime. But no one fought the project. They simply did not support it or otherwise engage with it.

Project headquarters - Rings Bar

Rings Bar was often the headquarters for the project. The guys would meet there after work to discuss and plan. "There were also 'deliveries' from there, because it took considerable liquid to keep things going smoothly," says Duane. When asked if they would put some 60 pictures taken by Les Gruber into some kind of order as to how things happened, Ralph and Francie said there was no order. Five things might be worked on at one time and sometimes only one thing. If you knew something you could do, you did it.

Cash Donations

Cash donations were an early issue. When they started to collect money, Francie Hetzel claimed they decided any donation would be accepted. It didn't matter how small. When you look at the records, it is surprising to see 10 cents, 15 cents, and \$1.00 donations with a name by it. By 1973 the group had collected \$8,582.24. Les Gruber worked on Accounts Receivable at Ed Kraemers and used his skills to record all income and expenses. He kept wonderful records with the income shown below.

Donations for Westbrook Hills Golf Course as of 4/27/1973

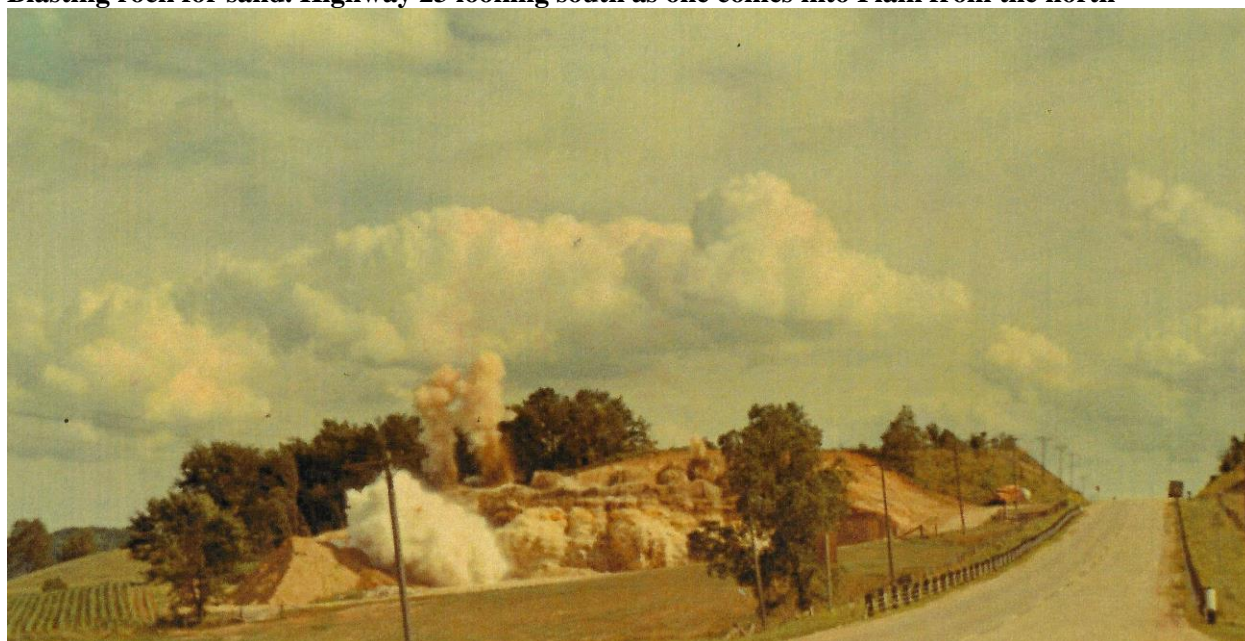
American Legion Aux.	\$25.00	Floyd Gruber	25.00	Knights of Columbus	100.00
Anonymous	50.00	Les Gruber	355.00	Mike Liegel	76.00
Anonymous	15.00	Sam Gruber	20.00	Ray Liegel	10.00
Anonymous	40.00	Frank Haag	5.00	Vic Liegel	125.00
Anonymous	50.00	Clete Haas	50.00	Fritz Lins	107.00
Phil Bettinger	75.00	Charles Hausladen	25.00	Reggie Lins	58.00
Joe Blau	5.00	Heiser Barber Shop	10.00	Pete Lins	3.00
Willard Brechtel	40.00	Roy Heiser	20.00	Susie Lins	5.00
Willard Brechtel	25.00	Speeder Heiser	20.00	Lions Club	2,544.23
(in memory of Butch Hutter)		Francis Hess	20.00	Russ Mallon	1.00
Ray Brey	10.00	Francis Hetzel	300.00	Donald Meister Family	50.00
(honorary donation)		Hillcrest		Bob Meixelsperger	40.00
Ray Brey	275.00	Snowmobile Club	25.00	Gary & Mary Ellen	
Chicago Bears	40.00	Bill Holster	5.00	Nachreiner	21.00
Green Bay Packers	1.25	Leon Kippley	1.00	Louie Nachreiner	100.00
Doug and Jackie Coons	20.00	Edward Kraemer	125.00	Jim Neider	30.00
Pat Crasper	1.00	Ed Kraemer & Sons	275.00	Dr. O'Leary	25.00
Ed Crowley	50.00	EKS Accounting Dept.	13.91	A.L. Olson	
Randy Diehl	51.00	(J. Brey, J. Coons,		(Hustler Booster Club)	1.00
Harold Dode	20.00	N. Conant. V. Steele)		Larry & Doris Olson	20.00
Bob Elmer	19.75	Tim's Shell Service	50.00	Harold Peck	20.00
Fred Eulberg	25.00	Dick Umhoefer	137.00	Plain Fire Department	300.00
Harlan Fingerhut	13.50	Joe Voelkel	10.00	Gene Pletzer	0.10
John Frank	100.00	Eddie Weiss	15.00	Cathrine Pratt	10.00
Terry Galloway	10.05	Woody's Bar	108.00	William Prem	20.00
Bob Graves	4.50	Plain Indians vs		Bob Randall	5.00
Curt Greenheck		CYO Benefit	73.00	Terry Richard	30.00
(Spot Tavern)	5.00	Norm Kraemer	250.00	Richard's Sanitary Svs.	15.00
Christine Gruber	20.00	Tom Kraemer	5.00	RV Education Assoc.	25.00

Clete Ring	25.00	Ilene School	20.00	Ralph Soeldner	316.00
Delmar Ring	75.00	Jim Schulte	25.00	Dr. Tuma	5.00
River Valley Jaycettes	50.00	Rube Schutz	20.00	Fred Viney	10.00
Rich Schmid	1.00	Bob Schweiss	3.50	Bill Weiss	125.00
Scott Schoenmann	0.15	George Soeldner	20.00	Wis. Power & Light	100.00

Sand for the Greens

Building a golf course needs lots of sand, in fact, truckloads of sand. No one knew who talked Alois (Mooney) Liegel into donating the sand. They just knew that it was never paid for. This farm today is Bob and Barb Palmer's farm. As one goes north out of Plain, on your right and just over the hill, you will see a dirt road where all the sand was trucked out. Duane Kraemer did the blasting of the hill. Ralph Soeldner took a great picture of that blasting.

Blasting rock for sand. Highway 23 looking south as one comes into Plain from the north²



Equipment to build the course

There was a need for big equipment to dig, haul, move, and blade the sand. Ed Kraemer and Sons donated all the equipment and fuel. Duane Kraemer had the task of getting the equipment home to Plain on Friday nights and back to the job sites on Monday morning. "I knew where the equipment and men were because I traveled a big area," said Duane. "There was never a problem getting people to work, they were excited to see the project go."

² This photo, as well as the others in this article, is one of some 60 pictures of the golf course taken by Les Gruber as it was being built in Plain, Wisconsin, in 1971.



Duane remembers many who helped: "There was Tony Ruhland, Andy Soeldner, and Charlie Hausladen from the Kraemer shop, who could fix anything. Harry Frank, Ernie Cady, and Buzz Jewell were shovel operators who loaded sand on the trucks. Harry Diehl was an end-loader operator who moved the sand around to form the greens. Joe Voelkel fit in wherever help was needed. Some of the semi-drivers who delivered equipment to Plain and returned it to Kraemer job sites early Monday mornings were Eddie Blum (Sauk City), Duane Meyer (Sextonville), Walt Gerber (Plain) and a few more I don't

recall. There were many truck drivers involved, and I just can't come up with their names. For my part I blasted the sand and dug a ditch from the street to the creek with a backhoe. If you ever wanted to see a community come together, this was it," Duane said.

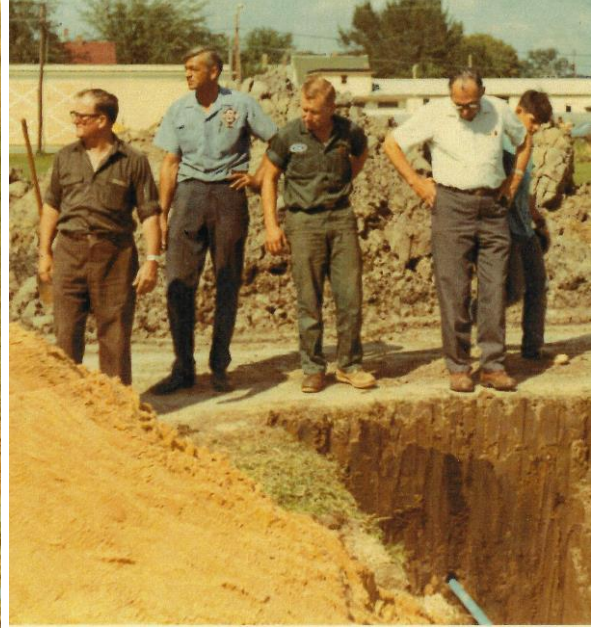
Much appreciation should be given to Edward Kraemer and Sons, Kraemer Brothers, and the people who ran their organizations for their generosity and interest in making their community a better place. Kramer Brothers donated small equipment like front-end loaders and trenchers. Edward Kraemer & Sons donated power shovels, a screening plant, dump trucks, trailer trucks for hauling equipment from job sites to the course and back again, and drilling and blasting equipment. Some Kraemer equipment was brand new. The golf course founders claimed there were some dump trucks so new they didn't have the Kraemer logo painted on the door. We found a picture of the assistant pastor, Fr. Holtz, driving one of the new dump trucks. Ralph remembered that Victor Kraemer, part owner of Ed Kraemer and Sons (EKS), saw the priest driving a truck and made the comment that maybe they (EKS) probably should have their own drivers running the trucks.

The greens were formed from 2 different golf course plans that Alfred Kraemer had. Those plans gave the men the information needed for the depth of the sand, and everything else they needed to know to create their golf course. Alfred laid out the Plain golf course so that the men knew where to place the tees, greens, sand traps, and irrigation lines.

Francie Hetzel laid the irrigation pipe. It was ordered at Prairie Plumbing where Francie worked at a cost of \$3,718.92. The irrigation system was the most expensive item purchased. He laid the pipe to the greens and set up the sprinkler system. Francie borrowed Frank Haag's trencher and auger and wore it out. Ralph proclaimed that Francie worked every night after work, on Saturday with all the men, and on Sunday all by himself. The golf course would get built! After 50 years, Francie's lines have never been repaired and a few original sprinklers remain.



Kneeling L>R: Tony Ruhland, Frances Hetzel.
Hetzel, Alfred
Standing L>R: Joe Voelkel, Charlie Hauslauden, unknown.



L>R: Joe Volkel, Clete Ring, Frances
Kraemer, unknown boy.

Buzz Jewell remembered his job working in the sand pit. He operated the shovel, along with Harry Frank, loading the dump trucks, and he kept everything moving. Buzz also ran Kraemer's screening plant (second photo below), which was used first to get all of the sod and junk out of the sand and peat, creating two large piles of sand and peat, and then mixing the sand and peat to create the proper base for each of the golf tees.



**Harry Frank and
Buzz Jewell ran the
power shovel.**

**Ralph Soeldner
spotting trucks with
screening plant in
background.**



Delmar Ring took it upon himself to take classes from UW Extension. He learned what kind of seed to purchase, how to nurture the seed, how to water the greens, how to keep the fairways mowed, what kind of grass to use, what kind of equipment to purchase for the mowing, and how to look after a golf course. He would be the one responsible in the future to keep the golf course maintained.

How long did it take to build? It took three years to complete. Ralph said once they got going, they went to work on the golf course every night after work. Saturday was the day the men from the bridge crews would be home and would donate their time to haul, load, dump, shovel, and dig. After the course was completed, Ed Kraemer and Sons restored Alois Liegel's sand pit to a usable agricultural field.

Expenditures for Westbrook Hills Golf Course

Irrigation system

Sprinkler irrigation	\$3,718.92
Prairie Plumbing	14.04
Milo Borstad (repairs)	20.00
Haag Electric (repairs)	100.00
Wisconsin Power & Light	88.19
Subtotal	3,993.65

Greens seed & fertilizer

Paul Kooiman (Peat)	280.00
Farm Bureau Spring Green	3.95
Sauk County Farmco	33.45
Harold Luther (fertilizer)	3.70
Seed (Village)	\$52.50
Greens Seed	197.50
Sauk County Farmco (fertilizer)	15.33
L.L. Olds Seed (fairway seed)	170.00
Wisconsin Turf	1,950.00
The Bruce Co. (Top dressing)	83.20
Wisconsin Turf (Tersan & Potash)	359.95
Bill's Feed Service	33.20
Subtotal	3,130.28

Greens maintenance equipment

Ford Tractor	510.00
Wisconsin Turf (new greens mower)	482.50
Wisconsin Turf (used greens mower)	195.00
Mower	550.00
Wisconsin Turf Spiker	468.00
Bill's Small Engine	114.95
Wally's repair shop	12.00
Subtotal	2,332.45

Miscellaneous

Village Press	7.80
University of Wisconsin	24.00
Printing of Checks	2.59
Eulberg Drugs	35.30
Ihor Galarnyk	40.00
Church Bulletins	20.00
Bank of Spring Green loan interest	52.50
Village Press (keep off signs)	11.44
Fred Schreiner (garage rent)	33.00
Subtotal	226.33

Total **\$9,683.01**

Labor donations

Thousands of hours of labor had to be donated by the men of Plain to build the golf course. There is a list of cash donation with names, a list with golf club membership names, and a list of expenses - but not a list of labor. The Old Franklin Township Historical Society (with help from Duane, Ralph and Buzz)

has started that list below. If you know anyone else who worked on the golf-course project between 1971-1973, please let Mary Jane Diehl Liegel know.

Bob Bauer, TD	Floyd Gruber, PT	Duane Meyer
Eddie Blum, TD	Clete Haas, PT	Bob Neuheisel
Ray Brey, PT	Charlie Hausladen	Les Palmer, Tilling
Ernie Cady	Frank Haag, Trench digger	Delmar Ring, Seeding
Harry Diehl	Francis Hetzel, Water lines	Felix Ring
Ernie Floerke, TD	Father Holz, TD	Charlie Ruhland, TD
Stacy Floerke, Blending	Buzz Jewell, TD, SP, SO	John Ruhland, Grader
Harry Frank, SO	Duane Kraemer, Blasting	Tony Ruhland
Steve Frank, PT	Alfred Kraemer, Layout	Andy Soeldner
Terry Galloway, Organizer	John Marshal, TD	Ralph Soeldner, Organizer
Walt Gerber, TD, Blending	Jerry Meise, TD	Joe Voelkel

Notes: Abbreviations: TD = truck driver; SO = shovel operator, SP = screening plant operator; PT = planting trees. We apologize for any missing names or roles people played. There were no written records so we relied upon what a few people could remember.

First golf club members

Thirty-two people signed up for \$20.00 Golf Club Memberships the first year. Some were from Spring Green and one even from Sauk City.

Tim Bagget	Art Larson	Jeffrey Oyer
Henry Bolton	Louis Liegel	Fay Pope
Doug Coons	Gerald Liegel	Floyd Robinson
Stormy Diske	Dave Lins	Sauk City Motel
Don Evans	Mike Lins	Ray Schaitel
Maurice Fitzgerald	Walt McCarthy	Bill Schluter
Gene Gruber	Jim Mack	Bill Schoenmann
Rubin "L" Koenecke	Jack Meister	Ed Slaney
Bob Koenig	Stan Meister	Bob Zauner
Bill Krey	William Murphy	
Leo Lakey	Gerald Oyer	

Project was a financial success

The records show income of \$9,727.24 and expenditures of \$9,683.01 with a bank balance of \$44.23 as of April 27th, 1973. There was also a \$500.00 unpaid loan from the bank yet to be settled, but overall, the project was a financial success. One small accident occurred in three years, which is almost a miracle. There was a bill from Dr. Galarnyk of \$40.00 and from Eulberg Drugs of \$35.30.

Balance sheet as of 4/27/1973

Receipts

Cash collections	\$8,582.24
Memberships	645.00
Bank note	<u>500.00</u>
Total receipts	9,727.24

Expenditures

Bank balance	9,683.01
	44.23

Liabilities

Bank note (unpaid)	500.00
Membership tags	<u>148.50</u>
Total liabilities	648.50

This story of three guys talking at work, taking action, and getting their entire community involved for three years is truly an awesome story. As Duane Kraemer said, “There was never a problem getting people to work. They were excited to see the project go. If you ever wanted to see a community pull together this was it.” Of course, the community continually pulls together in support of the Catholic church and school, but this was different.

Over the years, the golf course has been a tremendous asset to the community. Many people have played on it for many years. Young and older people have learned to play golf on it. Some have outgrown it and now play larger and more challenging courses. But for most of the people of Plain, Westbrook has been “their” golf course through the years that they could golf.

It is useful to remember that the golf course has been more than just a place for golfing. It serves as a link in snowmobile trails in winter; a “park-like” open space to look at, and a place to walk in spring, summer or fall; a Three Kings Tableau at Christmas time; a backdrop (the bridge) for banners announcing Strassenfest and other celebrations; and a place to meet (Club House) before and after golf. It is truly a “community” asset.

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