

Russ Ghere was a tough, old-school coach

To say that Russ Ghere was old school is like saying that water is wet.

If you were making a movie about a small-town coach in the 70s, I think he would be the one to cast.

The man was tough as nails to his charges, though he had an impish sense of humor that he rarely, if ever shared with his students. One that I wasn't made aware of until years later when I talked about him with Mr. Homma, who was one of his longtime assistants and who briefly took over head coaching duties when he retired the first time.

Of course, he had to be tough. I didn't know it when I had him in high school, but he was the 13th of 17 children in his fam-

ily, born and raised in Arcola during the great depression. I would imagine that competition was steep for everything, and he grew up to be a great athlete. Amazingly, he and six of his brothers, John, George, Don, Harry, Bobby, and Jim, all served in World War II. Seven young men from the same family, serving this great country of ours. Awesome and amazing stuff, to be sure.

As for my relationship with him, well, let's just say it was complicated. To be truthful, I didn't like him a whole lot when I was a kid. I chafed at his stern guidance in many ways, and I didn't really respond to his gruff leadership style, in much the same way that I didn't really re-

Hook, Line and Sinker

By Tony Hooker



spond well to my company commanders in Navy boot camp.

I would be lying if I said that Mr. Ghere, along with the aforementioned boot camp leaders, Chief Clark, and Petty Officer Bennett, didn't profoundly shape the person I am by teaching me much-needed discipline, but many times I had to be

dragged, kicking and screaming, to their way of thinking.

Again, I didn't always like them, but I respected the hell out of them, and a piece of that respect was probably because I also feared them, just a little. They never beat me, but they certainly laid hands on me a time or two, and every time, I

richly deserved it. Sometimes, my mouth wrote checks that my behind couldn't cash, as the saying goes.

In a lot of ways, that's why I think coaching can be so difficult these days. That little fear factor is absent, and maybe there are brutes out there that abuse their charges physically, but without it, it's easier for a kid to disrespect a teacher or coach. It's why a player can refuse to exit a game and then get trucked on the next play without fear of ramifications. I shudder to think of what would have happened if a player tried that with Coach Ghere, Mr. Powell, Mr. Boyer or Mr. Homma. I would bet that they would need track shoes

instead of cleats at Monday's practice, because they would be remarkably familiar with the old cinder track that surrounded the field that carries Coach Ghere's name.

At any rate, my relationship with Coach Ghere deteriorated, at least in my eyes, to the point where I didn't play football my senior year. I am sure that he didn't really miss having a smart aleck bench warmer darkening his practices, but to this day, 42 years after the season, I regret not sucking it up and being out there with my boys. For 99 percent of the population, there's a definite 4-year window on being one of the boys of fall, and I let my pride rob me of one of them.

I met an extraordinary person; two, really

Yesterday I ran into an extraordinary person. He was the supervisor of an employee who was applying for another job in another state. This other job required a background investigation to be conducted before a job offer was officially submitted and I was the person conducting the background investigation.

All background investigations are similar. There is an acronym, CARLAFAD, that background investigators use as a template when interviewing associates of the candidate. CARLAFAD stands for Character, Associates, Reputation, Loyalty, Ability, Bias, Finances, Alcohol, and Drugs. You can get a fairly good idea of someone by obtaining the answers to CARLAFAD.

As I was interviewing this

So there I was

By Pete Buckley



supervisor, I asked the question about Character which went like this: "Have you been given any reason to question the individual's character?" Most times when I ask this question, I get an answer of yes or no. This supervisor gave me an answer that floored me. He answered, "I have no reason to question this person's character and I will tell you why. This person is an excep-

tional employee. I call him a 1 %er, which means that I trust him to make such good decisions that, as a supervisor, he only takes up 1% of my time.

"Several months ago, this employee came into my office and I could tell from his demeanor that something was bothering him immensely. He went into great detail about his father's ill health and that his father had a bucket list that

he wanted to complete. The employee handed me his letter of resignation, stating that he would like to resign because he wanted to give his father this wish before he died and he would need six weeks to take his father to all the places on his father's list and he did not have that much time-off accumulated. The employee also recognized that taking six weeks off would place me in a bind because someone else would have to take up the slack and complete the job that the employee had been doing."

The supervisor told me he immediately grasped the gravity of the situation. His reply to the employee was astonishing. He told the employee that if he were to resign, the employee and his dependent father would lose their health

insurance. Plus, the employee would have no salary to finance the six weeks to accomplish the goal of completing his father's bucket list. The supervisor refused to accept the employee's resignation. He told the employee to take the six weeks off, with pay, and that the employee would be considered an active employee and expected to return to work following the completion of his trip with his father.

Six weeks later the employee returned to work. According to his supervisor, the employee walked into the supervisor's office, closed the door, and, with tears in his eyes, thanked the supervisor for allowing him to take his father on the journey of a lifetime, a trip that exceeded any expectations the employee

had. The supervisor explained that upon his return to work, the employee was again an exceptional employee who was a 1 %er. The supervisor told me this story as an example of the employee's character, for the employee was willing to risk everything, his job, and his future in order to help his father achieve a lifelong goal.

I wrote in my first sentence that I had met an extraordinary person. I should have said I met two extraordinary people. I don't know who is more extraordinary... the employee willing to sacrifice his job and his future to grant his father a last wish... or his supervisor, who bent the rules to help an exceptional employee in need of assistance. I think it's a tie.

Farm Bureau prioritizes on new bill prior to election cycle

Douglas County was dry again going into August and got some much-needed rain on Aug. 7 and 9. We had only light showers of rain since early July. I know of places that had over five inches total from the event. A measure of how dry we had become was that little water ponded up and the creeks and rivers rose only slightly. The dry soil soaked up all the rain.

The Douglas County Farm Bureau marketing committee has conducted a corn yield survey for many years. The survey has been quite accurate through the years, coming close to the county average computed after harvest is complete. Last year was an outlier when we underestimated the final yield by 27 bushels. The official U.S. Department of Agriculture yield was 210. Our estimate was 183.

The yields are based on the number of ears of corn in a set length of row and the number of corn kernels on three ears pulled out of that length of row. There is also a variable for kernel size. The Douglas County yield check this year came in at 232 bushels per acre. That would be a good yield after the slow cold start to the growing season and considering that we have spent a large part of the summer in varying degrees of drought.

At least two grain elevators in the area will conduct their own yield surveys in the coming days. The computations will be more accurate as the corn nears maturity and ear size is more set. A highly watched multi-state crop tour kicked off on Aug. 21. It follows set routes across the main corn-producing states. Farmers, grain companies and the end users of corn are all trying to guess what the size of the corn crop will be at harvest.

There are formulas to estimate the soybean yield too, but Douglas County does not try that. These seem highly inaccurate to me. Our soybeans

are a long way from maturity with the plants still flowering and setting pods. The weather for the rest of August and the first part of September will have a huge influence on the final soybean yield. The tour of the major corn states counts the soybean pods in a square yard and compares that to the preceding year but does not really estimate yield.

The grain markets have a good crop penciled in and prices have moved lower. Russia suspended the agreement that let ships loaded with Ukraine-sourced grain out of the Black Sea after threatening to do that many times. They have also renewed their attacks on Ukraine export facilities. Part of the reason could be that Russia has a large wheat crop to export and can stop Ukrainian competition this way. The markets had little reaction to the shutdown.

There are other disruptions to the trade of food, fuel, and fiber. Mexico still says it will stop the import of genetically modified white corn for human use. They have relented on part of the decree and will continue to import genetically modified yellow corn for animal feed. There is not a large production of non-modified white or yellow corn anywhere in the world. Mexico can't find the quantities of non-GMO white corn they need and there is no difference nutritionally anyway.

Mexico is the United States' second largest customer for corn and largest customer for agricultural products. Illinois does not grow much white corn, but we need them to buy our yellow corn. Mexico signed the Mexico-Canada-America trade agreement, and they are breaking that agreement with this decree. Several of Illinois' U.S. Representatives are calling for the Biden administration to file a formal protest against Mexico.

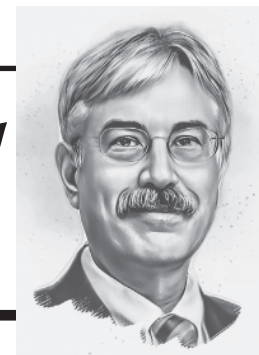
Even with good rain much of Illinois and much of the western Corn Belt remains in abnormally dry to severe drought conditions. The rain we have gotten has been well-timed for the growing crop. It is easy to find pictures of dried-up corn fields and short soybeans. We are lucky to appear to have a better than average harvest ahead of us. The wheat areas of the southern plains will be the next area of concern as they are planted into dry soil.

Preparation for harvest is well underway. I have seen several combines sitting in front of shops with the side shields up. Farmers are looking over these complicated machines and trying to diagnose what needs to be replaced for a trouble-free harvest. Belts, chains, and bearings are looked at closely. Older machines can have metal fatigue after years of running wide-open days at a time.

We have part of our grain bins ready to go. Old grain and other debris are swept up, fans

Douglas County Agriculture

By Larry Dallas



and burners checked for operation and doors bolted in. The doors must give the bin integrity when it is full. Modern bins have simple door setups. The doors on our older bins are like jigsaw puzzles with one piece needing to go in before the next piece or panel will go in. Mice like to chew on the wiring in fans and burners. It is better to find that now than when we want to fill a bin.

The next Farm Bill remains a Farm Bureau priority. The present legislation expires on Sept. 30 after 5 years in effect. Washington will turn its attention to the November 2024 election soon. Farm

groups want a new Farm Bill before the politicians go full-time on getting re-elected. An extension is possible and has happened before. A fresh bill is preferred, however.

Food assistance will be allotted over 80% of the farm bill funding, over \$1.2 billion at present. Soil conservation got some funding in the Inflation Reduction Act earlier this year, and some want to add the Farm Bill conservation dollars to food assistance. Taking that funding out of the farm bill causes concern about that money and the next farm bill 5 years from now.

We understand the impor-

tance of the nutrition title of the Farm Bill, and we are the people raising most of the food those dollars purchase. Farm Bureau and several of the commodity groups have an ongoing educational campaign to tell non-farmers and non-rural legislators the importance of the Farm Bill to their urban constituents. Over half of the House of Representatives has never dealt with passing this legislation that is so important to rural America.

With harvest beginning before I write again, I will ask again that you watch out for farm equipment on the road. The speed differential between farm equipment and a car is huge, and you will close on a combine or a tractor with a grain cart before you realize it. Please slow down when you see us moving between fields. The combine operator might not see you right away and might not be able to get out of your way immediately. Bear with us as we harvest our crops.

Thank you for reading about agriculture this month.

Tarragon and Voodoo seasoning

The other day I ran into a friend from Mascoutah, who told me he had the recipe for the very best chicken salad. He said he would get the recipe to me. Much to my surprise, an hour later, John Hinkle showed up at my door with the printed recipe and a sample of the chicken salad! And John is right, the chicken salad is wonderful! Thank you, John for sharing!

Ultimate Chicken Salad

Submitted by John Hinkle

2 lb. chicken breasts, cooked and chopped into half-inch pieces
2 stalks celery, diced
3 green onions, green and white parts, sliced
1 cup red grapes, quartered

Let's Cook

By Linda Hoskins



2 Tbsp parsley, chopped
1 Tbsp tarragon, chopped
1 cup mayonnaise
1 Tbsp Dijon mustard
1 lemon, juiced
salt to taste
pepper to taste

Mix the chicken, celery, green onions, grapes, parsley and tarragon in a large bowl. Add the mayo, Dijon mustard and lemon juice. Mix thor-

oughly until combined. Season with salt and pepper.

Serve immediately.

John suggested seasoning with Voodoo seasoning. That is something I had never heard of, and I had to look it up. It's a blend of onion, carrots, garlic and spices. It has a savory flavor that is great on poultry, ribs and vegetables. I will cer-

tainly be looking for this in the stores.

The above recipe calls for tarragon, which I think is widely underused in cooking. Tarragon is an herb that comes from the sunflower family. It is slightly sweet and may make you think of licorice or anise. I love the flavor boost from tarragon. The recipe calls for fresh tarragon, which you should use, but if you don't have it on hand, you could try using 1/2 tsp dried tarragon. And if you don't have dried tarragon, you could substitute dill for the tarragon.

If you have a recipe to share, please send it to letscook@heraldpubs.com or mail to Mascoutah Herald, PO Box C, Mascoutah IL 62258.