In this issue I would like to share some excerpts from comments made by Robert Trent Jones, Jr. at the 1993 Green Section Education Conference:

"...No one is quite sure when the term was contrived. Perhaps it was back in the teens or even before that, but many of our early golf courses were called "country club." These early clubs and courses were located well out of the inner cities — out in the country. One reason they were there was because golf not only requires space, but they were also there because of the environment they provided for members and players of all ages.

In those early days, you went to your club in a horse and buggy or, later, in a Model-T with your clubs in the rumble seat. The streets of the city were littered with horse manure and, later, with smoke-belching autos. The environments of the major metro areas were not at all that delightful and even today, some say that our cities are no better.

But at that country club, all was bright and beautiful. One hundred acres or more could be found of green grass, white sandy bunkers, and often a glittering blue sky. There were no horse droppings, no smoke, no noise, no clutter, no urgency, no problems...unless you considered a tough golf shot a problem.

With this in mind, we can say that "greens keepers" can be thought of as early environmentalists. They provided players with a place to go to enjoy nature and the great outdoors. These superintendents kindled the beliefs that courses provide habitat for wildlife and green spaces for all of us.

Isn't it strange that the game that found its earliest roots in environmentalism is often attacked today by those who call themselves environmentalists? Many of those people don't truly understand or appreciate the game of golf. They see it as a giant club with privileges not to be enjoyed by the populace; they see it as a wasteful use of land and water; and they see it as a residue of chemicals gone astray.

There are obviously some misconceptions and misunderstanding here, and it is our mission to heal this void and to bring more true understanding to these detractors and to make them realize that we — all of us superintendents — are true environmentalists.

This is not something new with us or with the game of golf. Golf course superintendents, with our absolute professionalism and sharp attention to maintenance methods, provide the best, cleanest and most wholesome environment we possibly can.

We must carry the message to these critics that golf may once have been a game for the well-to-do, but now it is played by everyone. Take them out to our municipal courses. Let them see the seniors, the women, the juniors, the peewees and the handicapped who play this game.

Let them see our strict adherence to tight regulations on chemical use, whether it is pesticides or fertilizer. Show them that we follow the rules — we often do better than what is regarded as standard practice.

We are what we have always been, with a long history and thousands of golf courses to prove it. We are dedicated environmentalists, and we are getting better at what we do each and every passing day!

So the message today is loud and clear. The environmental movement is here to stay and we are a major part of it. As devout and dedicated as we have been in the past — we can be even more so in the future.

The golf industry demands that we be good at what we do because there is no place for us if we aren't. We prove how good we are every day, just as the golf pros do on the tour. Just as those talented players have the best equipment with which to play the game, we also have remarkable tools and pieces of machinery to help us with our work.

It is time for each superintendent, and all others associated with the game of golf, to stand tall and proclaim that golf is not an environmental problem. Golf is an answer, one of the best answers we have, to make this world a better place in which to live, to play, and to enjoy a clean and healthy outdoor environment.

Golf is a solution, not a problem

Plotner's Page

Greg Plotner, CGCS
Publications Chairman