



Joe Konwinski 1915-2002

## The Will Rogers of Turfgrass

by Mark Jarrell

Joe Konwinski, one of the Florida Turfgrass Association's founding fathers and its first president in 1952, passed away Aug. 17. He was 87 years young. This master of one-liners quipped to one of the last friends to visit him at the hospital, "Get me out of here - this place is full of old people!"

Joe never met anyone he didn't like, and the overflowing crowd at his funeral was testament to the inestimable number of people who were touched by this perpetually smiling, gracious, and witty human dynamo of service to others. Some, like Ralph White, Mike McLaughlin, Gerry Millholen, and Alan Puckett - all past-presidents of the FTGA - drove many hours to pay their final respects to their dear friend who was an icon of the golf and turf industry. Joe said in 1983, shortly after then-Lake Worth Mayor Betty Cortese declared June 18 "Joe Konwinski Day," that he wanted it to be remembered "that sometime in life I've helped someone like they've helped

me." One wonders if he had any idea how well he succeeded.

The headlines of his lengthy obituary columns in the two local newspapers read "Goodwill Ambassador Dead At 87," and "Joe Konwinski, 87, promoter of Lake Worth, avid volunteer." His passing rated a front-page photo in the *Greenacres Observer*. Joe's memorial folder featured a photo of him receiving an award from former Lake Worth Mayor Tom Ramiccio and Gov. Jeb Bush. While the golf and turf industry for many years has embraced him as an invaluable envoy, promoter, and activist, only upon his passing do we learn the depth, range, and diversity of Joe's service to others.

Joe volunteered his time to the Special Olympics, the Boy Scouts, the Girl Scouts, the Salvation Army, and the American Heart Association. He served on the Palm Beach Community College Beautification Committee, the John F. Kennedy Hospital Development Council, and the Lake Worth High School Advisory Board. He was club

secretary for the Rotary Club of Lake Worth for 43 years, on the board of the Palm Beach Habilitation Center for 31 years, master of ceremonies for the Lake Worth Chamber of Commerce monthly breakfast meetings for 20 years, and founder of the American-Polish Club of Lake Worth, serving as its president for 17 years. When he returned home each summer to Iron River, Mich., he would promote Lake Worth and South Florida as a guest on a radio show.

Joe entered the turf world in 1946 after leaving the U.S. Army Air Corps, where he served four years as a glider pilot throughout World War II at 21 different bases. He was the superintendent of the Lake Worth Municipal Golf Course from 1946 to 1958, worked for Ousley Sod Co. from 1962 to 1974, and consulted at more than 100 golf courses, resorts, and sports fields throughout his career. He taught a turfgrass management course at Palm Beach Community College for more than 20 years. He officiated at numerous industry functions as a speaker, an emcee, and an installer of officers. He

was friend and mentor to many young turf neophytes who have gone on to become successful golf course superintendents and sports field managers. It was hoped by all of us who knew and loved him that he would be the special honoree at the FTGA's 50th anniversary celebration in September.

We all remember Joe's infectious grin, positive attitude, and eternal optimism; his one-liners, funny stories, and ability to get a hug from every woman in the room. We all have our special stories and memories of this beloved gentleman. I will always remember the years I helped Joe with his booth promoting the turfgrass industry at Lake Worth High School's annual Career Day. We always had a large baking pan on which I placed a slab of putting green turf and a miniature soccer goal that Joe felt grabbed the kids' attention and drew them to our booth. He also liked placing pie tins of various colored fertilizers (like the blue Nitroform) to gain notice, and got such a kick out of telling the kids to bend over and smell this very fragrant material called Milorganite. We both were amazed at the number of students who knew ammonium nitrate could be used to make bombs, but had no clue it was a plant fertilizer.

Joe leaves behind four generations of relatives, including a brother, daughter-in-law, and numerous grieving nieces, nephews, grandchildren, and great grandchildren. His beloved wife Lucy, 1994, and son Joey, 1977, preceded him in death. His service was Aug. 27 at E. Earl Smith & Son Funeral Home in Lake Worth, and he was interred at Pinecrest Cemetery. Numerous and various means of honoring his memory have been suggested and are in the works.

On the last page of Joe's memorial folder was a poem so apropos of this remarkable man and the life he led:

*Goodbye Is Not Forever  
When you lived your life for others  
and you loved without condition  
When you made so many laugh  
and your smile won't be forgotten  
When you left behind an empty place  
that no one else can fill  
When the friendships that you shared  
long to be renewed  
When you built your life on hope  
and fulfilled it every day  
The footprints that you left behind  
will bring us face to face  
So, goodbye is not forever,  
you're only steps away*

AS IT LIES

## All Aboard!

The rebate on this ticket is bigger than the cost

Many songs have been written about trains. The list of titles and authors would fill pages. Until 40 years ago, they were a main source of transportation in this country. To all of us old-timers, who actually rode on trains and may have had a Lionel model set up at Christmas, trains held or still hold a wonderful mystique.

By Jim Walker

Sadly, trains in this country do not still run as successfully as they do in Europe. On the Continent, it is faster to ride the train than to fly in a lot of cases, given that airports are so far out of the city and many travelers' destinations are in the city.

I still get goose bumps when I watch an old movie and the conductor leans out from the passenger steps, waves his lantern or flashlight and bellows those famous words: "All Aboard!" So much for the nostalgia, now on to the heart of the matter: Why you should get aboard and join your local chapter's board of directors.

For me, it took 16 years of slopping at the trough until the guilt became so intense that I realized the time had come for me to give something back for all those years of meeting, eating, and playing golf.

I will never forget my first board meeting. It was at Sunrise Country Club where Machine Gun Al Ross hung his hat. From that first meeting I have never been sorry for stepping up and getting on the train. People like Bill McKee and Dale Kuehner made me feel at home and I was comforted in the fact that they were glad to have me involved.

There they were some of the movers and shakers of our chapter, and all nice guys when you got to know them. In the beginning, the part of the meeting I enjoyed most was after, when everyone would go to dinner and shoot the bull about work. I learned so much at those dinners, whether sitting and listening or ask-

