James Brandt — a turfgrass pioneer for 'the educated'

BY YVON PUTNEY

As with so many future golf course superintendents "way back when," James W. Brandt learned the game "from the ground up," gaining practical and international status on the way.

The Jenks, Okla., native, who retired last winter after 35 years as superintendent at Danville (Ill.) Country Club, launched a near-lifetime connection with the sport in 1953 when, "James W. Brandt learned a new way to cut lawns," according to the Danville Bulletin.

At 16, he began working on the maintenance crew there under John Price and decided to make this interesting and challenging profession his career.

That long-ago choice was capped last February at the annual Golf Course Superintendents Association of America conference in New Orleans, where he received the group's 1989 Distinguished Service Award, an honor reserved for those who have excelled over a lifetime of work in the industry.

The 37-year GCSAA member served as a director in 1982 and became president in 1988.

The road to the top was long but rewarding. When Brandt was a teen-ager, most superintendent positions were filled on an apprenticeship basis.

Brandt decided a college education would better prepare him for such a career. There was no turf management program at Oklahoma State University, so he continued working summers at the golf course while studying soils, field crops and plant pathology, earning a bachelor's degree in agronomy in 1948.

After receiving a master's degree in agronomy from Purdue University in 1950, he became an assistant superintendent at the famed Tam O'Shanter Country Club in Northbrook, Ill., which was hosting the "World Championship of Golf" tournament at the time. He learned first-hand how a course was prepared for a major tournament.

The next year, Brandt became director of golf for the city of Indianapolis.

Seed Research cites Wian

Seed Research of Oregon recently honored Martin Wian as its Course Superintendent of the Year.

Wian, superintendent at Llanoch Golf Club, Havertown, Pa., was cited for contributions to the turfgrass industry.

Wian was singled out for "excellent success" in converting fairways from poa annua to 95 percent perennial ryegrass. He was termed progressive, innovative and highly skilled in turf management.

Wian used SR 4100 and SR 4000 "with outstanding results." A 1981 graduate of Penn State, where father Charles works on turfgrass research plots, Wian has been Llanoch super five years. Previous posts were at Olympia Fields CC, Chicago, Ill., and Wilmington, Del., CC.

Seed Research, a producer and marketer of elite turf grasses, is headquartered in Corvallis, Ore.

Patton Md. Turfgrass president

Diana Patton, sales manager of Turf Center, Inc., has begun her reign as first female president of the Maryland Turfgrass Association.

The 34-year-old Patton has worked for 10 years at Turf Center, a sod growing and marketing company in Eastern Montgomery County which was started by her grandparents.

Unidentified Japanese investors bought the affluent Riveria Country Club in Pacific Palisades, Calif., for $180 million.

Some members of the 61-year-old, 160-acre course have sought contributions to a legal fund in fear that their membership rights may be in jeopardy.

Previous owners, in the meantime, have assured them no such danger exists.

The 16 charter members have increased to 143, of whom 121 are current, said Patton.

Brandt in 1968 was president of the Midwest Regional Turfgrass Foundation of Purdue University, and with Ben Warren and Bert Root founded the Illinois Turfgrass Foundation.

This body was the prime mover in furthering turfgrass research at the University of Illinois Ornamental Horticulture Department. Brandt headed that group in 1962 and 1963.

Brandt was an early advisor to the turfgrass program at Danville Area Community College, and regularly used students to allow them to complete their educational occupation.

For 13 years, Brandt was superintendent-general manager at Danville CC, but returned to be strictly superintendent when the position became too demanding.

Brandt received the Illinois Turfgrass Foundation's Distinguished Service Award in 1981 and the Outstanding Lifetime Service Award of the Central Illinois GSA in 1986.

He has spoken at seven of International Turfgrass Conferences. Brandt notes one big change in the course superintendent occupation. "When I applied for the job at Danville, there were only two other candidates. My successor was chosen from among 45 applicants.

"When a desirable position becomes available, there now are many well-qualified candidates."