Canada’s Super of the Year: Thorn Charters maps way for progress at home and away

Canada’s 1992 Superintendent of the Year, Thorn Charters, would refuse the pedestal. But he could be offered by superintendents on more than one continent as the model to which to aspire.

The manager of fashionable Weston Golf and Country Club in Toronto has fashioned a lifestyle that has him involved 1) locally (on a committee devoted to cleaning the Humber River); 2) provincially (as vice president of the high-powered Ontario Turfgrass Research Foundation); 3) nationally (as a founding director of the pioneering Green Care Horticultural Association); and 4) internationally (playing on the Canadian Golf Superintendents Association’s winning team at the International Greenskeepers Tournament in Yorkshire, England, in 1991).

As the course manager of Canada’s 12th-ranked course, according to SCORE magazine’s 1992 survey, Charters’ first priority is the conditioning of Weston. In his six years at this position he has overseen the rebuilding of all the bunkers, rejuvenation of the trees, upgrading of the maintenance facility, and installation of a new irrigation system.

This hard work—and more—has earned Charters the honor as Superintendent of the Year.

Charters may put his most indelible impression on national and international golfers as the driving force behind the unprecedented-undertaking of the 1996 Canadian Open. For the first time ever, the prestigious Canadian Open will be played on a public course. A committee devoted to cleaning the Humber River has fashioned the Humber River; 2) provincially (as vice president since 1990, Charters was instrumental in the Ontario Turfgrass Research Foundation’s (OTRF) $1.2-million fund-raiser to build the Guelph Turfgrass Institute, according to CGSA Executive Director Vic Giles.

The facility will open next spring, housing a half dozen scientists as well as the OTRF and Ontario GSA headquarters.

Charters is high on the future of the institute, which he called “a world-class facility, a unique combination of the university, government and private sectors working together.” The land was donated by the Provincial Government. The University of Guelph will manage it. And private industry raised the funds necessary to build it.

Charters and his colleagues look with expectation to new benefits of research to even rival those of the past that have greatly changed the way they do their job.

“The science supporting us has advanced in leaps and bounds,” he said.

He pointed to great improvements in the last 15 years in course covers, lightweight mowing, clipping removal on fairways, certification techniques and equipment. Irrigation technology and personal computers.

“I didn’t have to lobby. The environmental concerns are a big change,” he said. “Not that we were irresponsible then. We just get a lot more questions now. We posted [spraying] voluntarily. Now it’s legislated.

“Our own members ask more questions now. That will only increase. I think people have become a lot more aware of the different factors course superintendents deal with. When I got into this business, I could count on the comments, ‘Boy, you’ve got a great job.’ Now I hear people say, ‘Boy, I wouldn’t want your job for the world.’”

Charters said the extra pressure on his members in today’s society is so strong “they can’t relax and enjoy things as much as they once did. There’s more pressure on them and it trickles down to me. Life in the ‘70s is not comparable to life in the ‘70s. It would be silly to think that life for a superintendent would be any different.”

But although greenkeeping has become a much different job since he began his career, he wouldn’t consider a new direction if he had a chance to do it again.

“I love my job,” said the husband and father of sons 11 and 14. “And I love Weston.”

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“Seven to 10 years, it’s a little bit of the country right in the city.”

November 1992

Canada’s Super of the Year, Thorn Charters

By Mark Leslie

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