Keeper of the Green, Maples leaves lasting legacy

By MARK LESLIE

LAWRENCEVILLE, Ga. — Some know him for his SOS, or his SPOs with the GCSAA or USGA. But, the acronyms aside, Palmer Maples Jr. wears the mantle "Keeper of the Green" above all others.

The former president of the Golf Course Superintendents Association (GCSAA) and Carolinas GCSA, and director of education for the GCSAA from 1976-80, Maples retired on his birthday, June 22. The members at Summit Chase Country Club here, where he served as head superintendent for 16 years, honored him that day with a special celebration. They also planted a red sunset maple tree off the 6th fairway and unveiled a plaque on a 2- by 3-foot granite block declaring: "Palmer Maples Jr., Keeper of the Green, 1981-97."

"I wear that label proudly," Maples said. "I apprenticed with my father, who apprenticed with Donald Ross, who apprenticed with Old Tom Morris. And at St. Andrews, Old Tom was known as 'Keeper of the Green.'"

In his semi-retirement (he will still consult), Maples said he will be known for his status as an SOS: Second Opinion Specialist. "I haven't been bashful about giving an opinion," he said. Indeed, his new business card gives him the SOS moniker.

As for his SPOs (Standard Operating Procedures), superintendents will recall how he brought order to GCSAA headquarters while president in 1975, with a number of SPOs covering such areas as education, personnel, conferences and personnel matters.

But when that memorial maple tree grows and starts blocking shots into the green, Maples laughs, "people will start remembering me and it won't be because of that plaque."

His true legacy, Maples feels, is that: "I tried to share whatever I knew. I haven't been bashful about giving an opinion. Since age 12 working for my father, I've learned. When you learn something, make application of it and pass it on."

Indeed, communication has been the key ingredient in the industry, he said.

"A lot more information is now available and being generated," he said, "and that information has been communicated by the different associations to their members and from member to member. There is a tremendous opening in communications: e-mail, the Internet, print media, pictures, videos, field days ..."

Maples and other superintendents today are making "a better presentation now."