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## THE FIRST GREEN SECTION AGRONOMIST

Like so many golf course superintendents, the USGA Green Section was an invaluable resource and positive influence throughout my career.

The Green Section agronomists have always been willing speakers at chapter meetings and state turf conferences. They often have a presence at regional meetings. We could see and visit with them at meetings where players gathered, a group who recognized their expertise and credibility, and respected them for that. Those lucky enough to attend the GIS could also attend their annual Green Section conference.

They all have written extensively and well on the full spectrum of golf turf issues. The Green Section research program has answered some of golf turf's most difficult questions. And if your course subscribed to the Turf Advisory Service, you could talk to an agronomist one-on-one at your course for half a day and get advice and help troubleshooting your toughest problems.

We almost always had Green Committee members with us, and I always was anxious to get the report. Our Club figured it was one of the best bargains of any given year.

It was only natural that I was thinking about the Green Section last fall at

Charlie Wilson with the first USGA Green Section vehicle. Presenting him the keys is Ed Lowery, the youngster who caddied for Francis Ouimet in the 1913 U.S. Open. Lowery went on to become a successful car dealer.



Symposium was Charles G. Wilson, a colleague of O.J.'s and his successor at Milorganite. O.J. also hired Charlie. When O.J. made him an offer to join the Milorganite staff in 1955, Charlie was working as a USGA Green Section agronomist in California. He was, in fact, the USGA's first visiting agronomist.

The story of Charlie's trip to that USGA post is an interesting one.

Charlie Wilson is a member of the "greatest generation." World War II

Charlie returned home and enrolled in the University of Maryland. Despite an urban upbringing, he chose agriculture as his major and area of study.

Trips through Washington's nicer neighborhoods got him to wondering if some of the residents might need help with their yard work. Cold calls led to a lawn business, a nice supplement to his GI Bill. He soon figured out he needed to know more about grass and turf, a conclusion that led him to the USDA Plant Industry Section in Beltsville, Md., just a short distance away.

At that time the USGA Green Section had an office there. The resources on turf science and practices were extensive, but rules wouldn't allow reading material to leave the building. So Charlie was there for many hours, reading past Green Section Records, other journals and books. He was fascinated by the literature and the science of turf.

Dr. Fred Grau, The Green Section Director, couldn't help but take an interest in Charlie, going so far as to offer him a summer job. To do so, Charlie hired college kids to keep his lawn care business going and stuck with the USGA job, too, until he graduated in 1950 with a B.S. degree in agronomy.

It was at this time that Dr. Grau and the USGA offered him a job as a full-time agronomist.

Charlie is 91 years old now, but you would never know it by seeing him – with his ramrod straight posture – or by talking to him. I swear his memory is like a steel trap.

our Wisconsin Golf Turf Symposium. The Green Section's Bob Vavrek is key in helping plan and present the program, which was started 46 years ago as a way to honor the career of O.J. Noer. The man who started the

broke out while his family was living in Washington, D.C. He enlisted in the Navy, served 37 months in the Pacific and at one point served under a guy who later became U.S. President – John F. Kennedy. The war ended and



Charlie Wilson has a pioneering place in our industry's turfgrass profession. And in a sense, all of the Green Section agronomists since him are his descendents.

He stayed in Maryland for about a year before he was re-assigned to California to gauge interest out there in a visiting agronomist service for USGA member clubs. There indeed was, and Charlie opened the first office of the Turf Advisory Service in Davis. From there he covered California as well as all of the states east to Colorado.

Three years after Charlie had opened the Davis office, the well-traveled O.J. Noer

hired him and Charlie moved to Wisconsin. And as they say, the rest is history. Charlie spent the next quarter century with Milorganite and retired in 1979.

While attending the Symposium last fall, I mentioned to Tisa Overman, Milorganite's marketing and sales manager, that it would be great to see Charlie again. In no time, it seemed, she had arranged for a small luncheon with Charlie at a Milwaukee restaurant.

I hadn't seen Charlie in probably 25 years, yet he looked almost the same when he walked through the restaurant door.

Charlie is 91 years old now, but you would never know it by seeing him – with his ramrod straight posture – or by talking to him. I swear his memory is like a steel trap. It seemed impossible he retired 32 years ago.

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Likewise, agronomists who have helped me in person on the golf course – Lee Record, Carl Schwarzkopf, Stan Zontek, Jim Latham and Bob Vavrek – have him as a common ancestor. Others I have hosted at my course – Kim Erusha, Tim Moraghan and Jim Snow – can all look to Charlie Wilson as their forefather in the USGA.

Adam Moeller, an agronomist who interned at our golf course when he was a Wisconsin undergrad, probably didn't realize Charlie Wilson's place in the TAS family tree. Now he will. Charlie hasn't changed much, but the cars the agronomists drive sure have over the years.

One side note, I hope you enjoy the accompanying photos of Charlie and Ed Lowery that Stan Zontek tracked down for me before he passed away in September. GCI

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