

George Hamilton:

I Learned the Importance of Education From My Dad

BY FRANK H. ANDORKA JR.

Joy, pride and pain intermingle in the silence on the other end of the phone. George Hamilton Jr. is trying to compose himself. He starts discussing that he thought his father, George Sr., would love his work as an assistant professor of turfgrass at Penn State University when he stops suddenly. A deep breath echoes, a voice catches and sobs resonate over the phone. Slowly, George Jr.'s voice returns.

"I'm sorry," he says, wiping tears away. "I miss him a lot, and hardly a day goes by when I don't think of him."

Hamilton exhales again and picks up the thread of the story where he'd left off. He says he wished his father had lived to see him get his doctorate and teach at Penn State, the school that overshadowed everything his father, a pro and superintendent at various golf courses throughout Delaware and Pennsylvania, did.

"He was above all a teacher," Hamilton says. "He took people under his wing and helped them learn the business. That's one of the reasons I became a teacher instead of a superintendent — to carry on that legacy. I hope the work I do is a testament to him."

Hamilton started hanging around the dirt-floored barn where his father worked after turning 6 years old. His father, talked turf to him in calm, quiet and unassuming tones. Those whispers snared Hamilton's heart for the industry by the time he turned 15.

In his own silent way, Hamilton's father also taught him valuable lessons about how to treat people. Whether it was an employee, a golfer or a fellow superintendent, George Sr. always treated people with respect and dignity.

"He always strove to be the consummate gentleman," Hamilton says. "He tipped his hat to everyone and said, 'Good morning,' cheerfully to everyone he met. He taught me to be kind to people and to help others. [Those were] his greatest gifts."

Though George Sr. never worked at what most people would consider a high-end club, Hamilton never heard him complain about lacking resources. When he needed a tool, he built it himself or adapted existing technology by adding his own innovations to accomplish his goal.

"That same philosophy drives my research," Hamilton says. "I build on the work of those who came before me,



George Jr. and George Hamilton Sr.

and I hope to leave something others can build on."

This year, Penn State honored father and son by establishing a scholarship and endowment fund in their names. The George W. Hamilton Sr. scholarship fund, established by George Jr. and his wife Becky with an initial endowment of \$25,000, will fund scholarships for undergraduate and certificate program students enrolled in the turfgrass science program. The George W. Hamilton Jr. fellowship, initially endowed at \$150,000 by an anonymous donor, will further the educations of a master's of science or doctoral student in turfgrass science.

"I learned the value of teaching young people from him, and it felt so good to give some of that back by naming the endowment after him," Hamilton says, his voice catching once again. "I take my job so seriously because of the commitment I learned from my dad — and I will be forever grateful for his guidance." ■