

Mt. San Antonio College dedicates field to Dr. Kent “Doc” Kurtz

MT. SAN ANTONIO COLLEGE, Walnut, CA hosted a field dedication ceremony March 24 in honor of the late Dr. Kent W. Kurtz. The beautiful, sunny day was fitting for honoring a legend in the sports turf and golf industries.

Over the past few months the students of Mt. SAC worked hard to build a learning laboratory that is comprised of a small stadium, now known as Dr. Kent W. Kurtz Memorial Stadium, with regular field features that can and will be used for training young men and women on baseball field construction and maintenance. How fitting that such a living laboratory should be named after Dr. Kurtz.

Kent Kurtz was a major influence in sports turf and golf turf for many decades. His influence extended way beyond southern California and he was sought after for many consultations on soccer fields, horse racing tracks, baseball diamonds, and football fields around the world.

During his time at Cal Poly Pomona, Dr. Kurtz trained many young men and women that are now managers of major sports venues all over America. His students included Brian Scott, professor of horticulture and Agricultural Sciences Department chairman at Mt. SAC and the genesis of the field construction and dedication. Brian has always considered Dr. Kurtz his major mentor. Many of the students from Mt. SAC matriculated to the program at Cal Poly Pomona to eventually study under Dr. Kurtz.

The day of the dedication began with a won-

derful family style barbeque that was enjoyed by all the attendees. Many stories about Dr. Kurtz prevailed during the warm-up to the main event. Dr. Kurtz's family and friends came from near and far to share their many remembrances of a great man.

In his role as Master of Ceremonies for the day, Brian spoke of the many contributions that “Doc” had made to the industry over a long career. He added some personal anecdotes which included a bit of a stubborn streak that “Doc” had and his methodology for getting everyone to chip in and get the job and projects done whether they liked it or not! Brian also shared a story about “Doc” having to make a presentation away from campus and sending his lecture in on a tape recorder so the students would not miss a beat. Brian indicated that Dr. Kurtz was well networked and always found jobs for his many students in a variety of venues in golf and sports turf. “Dr. Kurtz was a giver that influenced many lives and all in a positive way!” he said.

Dr. Kurtz's brother and son also addressed the crowd of 40+ with anecdotes of a lifelong Chicago Cubs fan. Dr. Kurtz had a wonderful 35 years at Cal Poly Pomona and many years in the industry before that working in the seed and chemical business dating back to days with Upjohn back in Illinois and Michigan. While Dr. Kurtz was an unassuming gentleman he will be remembered as a legend and icon in the industry.

Steve Wightman, turf manager for San Diego's Qualcomm Stadium, remarked on the years when Dr. Kurtz was the first Executive Director of STMA. Steve said “STMA would not have survived without Dr. Kurtz, who kept it afloat in the early years.”

Emails were read from dear friend John Souter in England with his many memories of work and travels with Dr. Kurtz. Paul Cushing also sent his regards and gave praise for the many golf turf guys that learned from “Doc” over the years. A couple of those former golf students were in attendance, including Richard Ray and Dave Zahrte.

Richard said, “The dedication was a moment for reflection. As I reflected on the past, Dr. Kurtz, a friend, mentor, and educator had a huge influence on my success not only professionally but also personally. It was not what he taught, but how to implement the knowledge gained to be successful. Dr. Kurtz had a passion for the turf industry and passed that on to his students.”

While some could not attend the ceremony they shared their thoughts. Mike Schiller told me that “Doc” was the #1 Cubs fan in the world. “He was a one in a million individual who loved the industry and trained many great people,” Mike said. “I was blessed to have him in our home many times and I was lucky enough to be his flunky and work on many STMA projects together. I miss the old guy!”

That seemed to be a common theme from many who were “coerced” into working on committees and projects with Dr. Kurtz. Good leaders certainly know how to get others involved and bring out their unknown skills. Dr. Kurtz apparently was an expert at that!

One of the finest speeches of the day came from Dr. Kurtz's daughter, Heather (see below). The crowd was moved by all the speakers but especially by Heather's comments.

As the ceremony drew to a close there was the ceremonial first pitch of dozens of wiffle balls to open this field officially. Dr. Kurtz's grandson announced to all “PLAY BALL!”

While Dr. Kurtz left us in 2006 he will live forever in the memories of many. The dedication of the field and stadium is a monument to his energy and drive in the world of golf and sports turf. The gathering of family and friends was just as “Doc” would have liked it. He would have loved the CUBS logo in centerfield and a bit of the fanfare regarding his background. Quite a nice tribute to a wonderful man that is gone but not forgotten. ■

Bruce Williams, CGCS, consults in the golf industry and is executive director of the California Turf and Landscape Foundation. He is a Past President of the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America.

