

# Making a Difference—Clifford Wagoner, CGCS

BY **GARY K CARLS, CGCS**

As 2012 winds to a close it is time to start looking ahead to 2013 and a couple of significant events that will occur next year. In February of 2013 GCSANC member Pat Finlen, CGCS, is positioned to assume the role of GCSAA President. Pat will become the fourth GCSANC member to assume the position of GCSAA President. Other GCSANC members who've served in this leadership position include Elmer G. Border (1959), Walter R. Boysen (1967) and Clifford A. Wagoner, CGCS (1973).

As part of the "older" generation (and someone who has had the privilege to know and work with Cliff Wagoner over the years) I would like to share just a small part of his respected tenure with the many GCSANC members who may know the name but not the man.

It's hard to believe that 2013 will mark 40 years since Mr. Wagoner served as GCSAA President. Cliff worked in the Modesto area and spent most of his career at Del Rio CC before retiring in 1985 after 35 years at the club. Cliff first joined GCSANC in 1951 and by 1952 was already involved as the Bylaws Committee Chairman. A few years later Cliff was serving on the Board of Directors. Later, he served three terms as GCSANC President ('59, '65, '67). As if doing all this wasn't enough to keep him busy, Cliff also was very involved in the formation of the California Federation of Golf Course Superintendents (known today, as the California Chapter of the Golf Course Superintendents Association) and served as the second president of

that group in 1965.

Having a strong focus on the importance of research and education was very important to Cliff and he made sure the chapter did everything it could to support efforts for those initiatives. Besides providing a great deal of funding to support research (being conducted at UC Davis by Dr. Bill Davis), Cliff also recognized the importance of sharing that information with the membership. Working with University of California and the NCGA an educational program was developed in 1967 as a vehicle to share this information with the membership. The program was called the Turfgrass Adaptive Research Program (TARP for short) and was the forerunner for programs like the GCSANC Institute and the USGA/NCGA Regional Meeting which the chapter still assists with hosting today.

While serving on the GCSAA Board of Directors Cliff continued to focus on the importance of professional development and expanded education for superintendents. For three years, working with fellow GCSANC member Walter Boysen, he co-chaired the committee that created the GCSAA Certification program and was among the first class of 20 Certified Golf Course Superintendents recognized by GCSAA in 1971. The voluntary program was among the first-ever such programs developed by a profession in which members set standards and committed to continuing education as a means to remain at the top of their profession. Today, over 1600 GCSAA members retain the designation of CGCS.

**Clifford Wagoner, CGCS (green blazer) and GCSANC Past Presidents**



In 1973 Cliff Wagoner, CGCS, was elected President of GCSAA where he continued to focus his attention on the following priorities:

1. Formulating and promoting sound educational programs.
2. Raising professional standards.
3. Developing more membership services that will be of value to an expanding membership.
4. Expanding the membership and getting it more involved for broader representation.
5. Improving communications.

It's amazing how many of the same things we hear today were common themes some 40 years ago.

Among a few of the honors Cliff has received throughout his career are: GCSAA Distinguished Service Award (1985), GCSANC Honorary Membership (1985), GCSANC George Santana Distinguished Service Award (1996) and the first GCSANC Superintendent of the Year Award (1974).

On a personal side, no discussion about Cliff is complete without including at least a brief yet very warm mention of his lovely wife Myrtle. This year Cliff and Myrtle celebrate 71 years of marriage. They have two children, Shirley and Darryl as well as a strong extended group of family and friends. Many of their extended network of friends comes through their years of work with GCSAA and GCSANC.

From day-one, Myrtle has been helping Cliff with all his various roles and dedicated volunteerism to our association. Yes, Myrtle always been his strongest supporter and a resource to the GCSANC that will be long appreciated. As Cliff describes it, they are a great team and a good example of a "complimentary relationship." Cliff and Myrtle both remained involved with GCSANC up through the 75th Anniversary Meeting just a few years ago by participating on the planning committee for the event.

Cliff keeps in touch with chapter members through e-mail and occasionally GCSANC members will stop by the Wagoner home in Modesto which is always open to visitors.

It is impossible to really share all the contributions Cliff Wagoner and his wife Myrtle have made for the betterment of our profession in their 60-plus years with the association. It was just a few years ago the GCSANC renamed their scholarship and research event the Cliff and Myrtle Wagoner Scholarship and Research Tournament in great respect and tribute to this consummate couple. I couldn't think of anyone more deserving of such an honor.

It's probably way too simplified but it can be said that Cliff has helped make the profession of golf course superintendent better for everyone who has been fortunate to follow in his footsteps. There's an expression we often hear, "Go make a difference in the world." I think Cliff Wagoner definitely has done that, and then some!

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