



Bob Dobson

*President of Middletown (N.J.) Sprinkler Co.,
and president of the Irrigation Association*



Who's your mentor? Phil DeMarco, who owned an irrigation distributorship in South Jersey. Phil and I have spoken daily for nearly 40 years. As a young contractor, Phil was my "go to" person. He is who I called when I had a question, when I needed to know how to do something. He was responsible for getting me involved in the Irrigation Association (IA). He was serving on the IA board of directors and suggested my name for appointment to the planning council. That was nearly 30 years ago.

What are the irrigation industry's biggest obstacles? One of our biggest challenges is all the regulations, codes and standards. Many of these seem to villainize turf, and, in doing so, irrigation. They do not recognize the benefits of well-maintained turfgrass; that turf reduces runoff and erosion, enhances ground water recharge, moderates air temperatures and sequesters atmospheric carbon, not to mention turfgrass beautifies and enhances the landscape. Efficient irrigation is an essential element necessary to maintaining healthy turf. The irrigation industry, the IA, wants a seat at the table to help develop these standards and to ensure they are developed based on sound science.

You've been involved in the irrigation industry for 45 years. What's changed the most for the better over the years? I started Middletown Sprinkler Co. with a partner in 1968. Without a doubt the product has improved dramatically. It's more reliable, flexible and, most importantly, it improves the uniformity of the irrigation we apply so we use less water.

Has anything changed for the worse? I think the part that's most challenging is the competitiveness of the market. There were maybe 10 irrigation contractors in the state of New Jersey in late 1960s. Now there are well over a thousand. The competitiveness is a challenge.

What excites you about being president of the IA? My opportunity to work with many of the other Green Industry associations. We may represent different segments of the industry, but we share mutual challenges and opportunities. I've met the leadership of many of the associations and look forward to collaborative efforts for the benefit of the industry. I am also excited about our upcoming irrigation show in November. We're going to a new venue, Austin, Texas. I am really looking forward to the show, to working with the state and local Texas associations in promoting and delivering a great show. My youngest daughter, Colleen, tells me Austin rocks.



OFF THE CLOCK

WHO MAKES UP YOUR FAMILY?

My wife of 39 years, Judy, and my three children, Kelly, Colleen and Robert, who is vice president of Middletown Sprinkler Co., and my two grandsons, Henry and Jack.

WHAT DO YOU DO TO RELAX?

Fly fish when I can.

CAT PERSON OR DOG PERSON?

Dog person. We have Molly, a 1 1/2-year-old chocolate lab.

WHEN DID YOU FIRST GET INVOLVED WITH THE IA?

My first experience with IA was through taking a regional education session, probably in the mid-1970s. It piqued my interest and a short time later I became a member. I became a certified irrigation designer and obtained all three landscape designer certifications. In the 1980s I was appointed to the planning council, next I was asked to join the certification board where I served for six years and was chairman for a year. It was a phenomenal experience, likewise with the IA board of directors and executive committee. I have met, got to know and learned from some amazing people.

