

## Not Even a Gold Watch

*Current evidence indicates that there is a wide spread lack of pension plans for superintendents. Many superintendents, upon retirement, are finding themselves with nothing to show for their years of loyal service.*

**By Fred V. Grau**

Having concentrated on helping people grow turf for so many years, I must confess that I have not given adequate attention to the very important consideration of pensions and retirement benefits for golf course superintendents. Only recently have I become painfully aware of serious deficiencies in the "system". I now ask the rhetorical question, "Is there a problem?" just for openers.

In developing a background for an honest answer to the question, I have contacted leaders in Pennsylvania and across the nation by letter, by telephone and in face-to-face conversations. My real contact with golf course superintendents started in 1935 when I began my 10-year travels in Pennsylvania helping the "greenkeepers" to understand the basics of producing better turf. I've made a lot of friends, many of whom now are about to retire or have retired. Some, of course, have preceded us into eternity with little or no recognition. Those whom I first knew have now been in the business for 40 years or longer.

Most of us recall a man who was a loyal employee of a railroad or some industrial firm. At retirement time, he was given a testimonial dinner, an engraved gold watch and many admonitions to "stay healthy". At that point he was considered unemployable and, in many cases, when forced into unaccustomed idleness, he just "dried up and blew away". I knew one who died the day before his "retirement party". As I receive reports from friends in turf, I gain the distinct impression that many long-time superintendents have been summarily retired or released, often without the customary dinner, watch and admonitions. What a pity!

At this point, I will answer my own question unequivocally and without hesitation or fear of contradiction. *Yes, there is a problem.* The problem is not just in Pennsylvania or in Kansas or in California. It is very nearly universal. Details are not a part of this editorial. They will be documented in a later article for GOLFDOM. In the meantime, it is my hope that club officials will have read this piece and will make a meaningful start toward establishing an adequate pension retirement program for the golf course superintendent. It is later than you think! **WHAT? NO PENSION?**

A good friend of long standing, a retired golf course superintendent now living in Florida, wrote to me recently. After 26 years of devoted service to his club (and he had many good years of service left) he was 'retired', actually dismissed, without a pension of any kind. I know the man and I know the club. He introduced innovations in equipment, fertilizers, ground covers and many other things. What I don't understand is how the businessmen for whom he worked could so callously turn him out to pasture without the thank you and the courtesy of some sort of pension or endowment. It is a bit like unharnessing the horse, opening the pasture gate and giving him a slap on the rump.

This friend is understandably bitter, soft-spoken as he is. It is too late to turn back the clock for him, but his experience,

(cont'd. page 6)



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(Not Even a Gold Watch cont'd.)

which is shared by many, should guide present and future negotiations between club and superintendent. Surely there must be some guidelines that can help the new or old superintendent achieve a just and honorable contract, which will help to sustain him when he retires. Club officials should bow their heads in shame if they do not insist upon some such stipulation in the contract. One may safely assume that nine out of 10 businessmen in the club have made sure that they will have a retirement income. Shouldn't they also do the same for one of their most devoted employees?

I have just talked with another good friend who has been at his club since it was built in about 1952. He has tried to negotiate a retirement benefit for several years, but each time he is told that he is being selfish in wanting something just for himself. These short-sighted officials one day will wonder, "Why can't we attract good men?" The horse is not likely to be drawn to an empty feedbag.

You can help Dr. Grau by writing him directly at Drawer AA, College Park, MD 20740. Tell him what kind of pension plan you have, or if you presently have no plan, let him hear about it. Individual letters will be kept in the strictest confidence.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Well done, Fred. This is only part of the problem. Another relates simply to 'job security'. Due to the Committee structure and frequent turnover within most clubs, apathy and neglect on the part of these Committees may be the fundamental problem.

**Credit: Northwest Turfgrass Topics 9/84**

Dear Fred,

The GCS Prayer Breakfast committee has been hard at work making preparations for the Washington D.C. conferences. We are happy to report that we have procured an exciting speaker this year, Mr. Cal Thomas.

Enclosed is a copy of his picture (hope it will reproduce) (it didn't) and his resume. Could you please give this announcement a prominent place in the coming issues of **The Bull Sheet**?

We will also have what we think will be some good music under the leadership of Mr. Frank Cochran and friends from Manassas, Virginia.

**Please remember the Conference schedule is changed this year. The Prayer Breakfast will be held Saturday, February 9, 1985. Coffee and rolls at 6:30 a.m. Programs starts at 7:00 a.m. Location, the Sheraton Washington Hotel in the Maryland suite.**

Everyone is welcome and we encourage all GCSAA members to come and start out the conference week on this uplifting note.

**John C. Ebel**

### Cal Thomas

Cal Thomas is a native of Washington, D.C. and a veteran of 21 years in the field of broadcast journalism.

Starting out at the age of 16, while still in high school, he moved to NBC News in Washington as a copy boy in the network news department. He quickly advanced to greater responsibilities in production, editing, and writing. Later, as a reporter for the NBC-owned radio and television station in Washington,

(cont'd. pg. 7)

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