

On The Cutting Edge with Bob Williams

"On Course" Into the 21st Century

By Dave Blomquist

Authors note: An important theme in this article was to be that Mr. Williams was being nominated for the prestigious USGA distinguished service award. At press time he was unaware of this honor and I didn't want to spoil the surprise. On December 12 however, it was announced that he will in fact receive the award at the GCSAA Conference in Orlando, thus joining a virtual list of "who's who" in the profession of golf turf maintenance.

Welcome to "On Course" - the official publication of the MAGCS. As the profession of "Greenkeeping" has evolved, so has our publication. For 50 years it was known as "The Bull Sheet", which had humble beginnings as a simple one or two page mimeographed sheet with limited advertising. In 1951, the cover became two tone with a photo of O.J. Noer - the guru of turf in those days. Since 1983 Fred Opperman has served as our Editor. He is the 11th person to hold that position and throughout the years each has added their own twist as "The Bull Sheet" had grown into a 30+ page forum for information dissemination ranging from the latest university research to news around town.

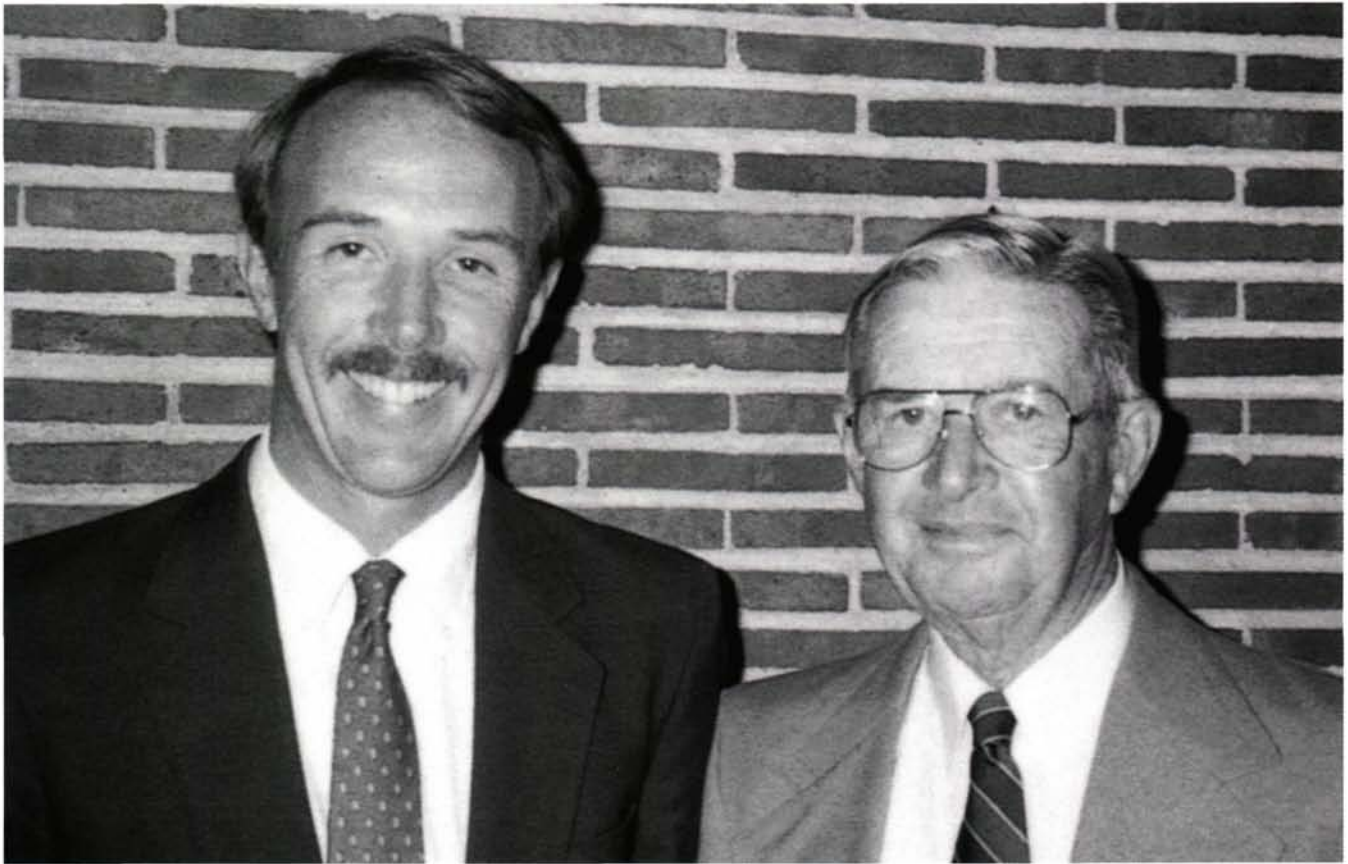
Mr. Robert "Bob" Williams is featured in this historic issue for several reasons. First, his contribution to our profession cannot be easily measured as he has been influential in forming the very fiber of what is now our National Association (more on this later). Closer to home, it was Bob along with Norm Johnson from LaGrange C.C., Ray Gerber from Glen Oak C.C. (both along with Bob would go on to serve as

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President of the GCSAA), and Paul Burdett, father of Jim and a pioneer in the turf supply field, who came up with the idea of putting together a monthly newsletter for area Superintendents. They needed a name and while pondering this dilemma Bob referred to a news bulletin he worked on while serving in the armed forces in World War II. Bob reminisced, "When this thing came up in 1947 or '48, that name came back to me, and I threw it out on the table and the guys said - that's it!"

"The Bull Sheet" was born and it was an instant success. Through its proud history there has been sentiment to change that title, however it has endured. Although it was appropriate for the time, Bob never thought it would remain for 5 decades. He reflects, "as the industry progressed, I was one of the first to feel that "The Bull Sheet" was not altogether appropriate, and I was thinking that, well some day the boys will change it anyways".

Suggested Newsletter Name(s):
"ON COURSE"
"OF COURSE"
"MIDWEST GREENKEEPING"
"GREENS TECHNOLOGY"
"GOLF GREEN"
"GOLF SUPERINTENDING"
Other ideas or suggestions you would like implemented in the monthly newsletter:
"COURSE MANAGEMENT"
"GOLF AGRONOMICS"
"GREENKEEPING UPDATE"
"PBR FOR THE COURSE"
Print your name: Bob Williams
PLEASE RETURN THIS BY JULY 30!



"Like father, like son" Bob with son, Bruce, at a MAGCS meeting a few years ago.

This past summer the Editorial Committee met to discuss ways to arrive at a new name. After agreeing that the membership should have input, mailings were sent out and over 200 ideas came from 75 returned cards. The committee selected the best examples and performed a blind vote. Lo and behold, a suggestion by a retired Superintendent stood out - "*On Course*" was the unanimous choice by both the Editorial Committee and the Board of Directors. Ironically, Bob Williams provided that suggestion!

Bob and the MAGCS — A Lifelong Link

Bob Williams has enjoyed a career in golf turf management that has spanned six decades! From his first job on his parents' course in Wauconda, IL at age 12, through his 32 years at Beverly C.C. and Bob O'Link G.C., and on through 14 years as a consultant, he has consistently demonstrated the ability to

adapt to the challenges faced every day of his career.

If there is a theme to Bob's career, it would be "adaptation is the key to achievement". Sometime that is not so easy. If the daily weather fluctuations aren't enough, environmental regulations, golfer expectations, equipment limitations, and public perception have forced Bob to get creative with his management practices.

These are but a few examples of his ingenuity and pioneer spirit:

- When experimenting with a Bentgrass nursery for crabgrass control at Beverly C.C., he discovered that Phenyl Mercury also controlled Dollar Spot. This discovery heralded a new beginning for fairway maintenance that was unheard of at that time. Previous to that point, Dollar Spot was left untreated in fairways and Bob was one of the first to control the fun-

gus. He had already developed what became known as "the Bob Williams boom" which he used for applying a new product which had just come to market - 2,4-D. Bob was able to spray the rough, particularly around trees for dandelions, and upon discovering a control for dollar spot, he was anxious to try it on the fairways. "I got this idea that if I put this thing on the fairways," he reflects, "well you'd only have to make about 4 passes and you could get the whole fairway covered."

The control of Dollar Spot on fairways was a significant advancement which proved so during the 1960 season. "All the courses were much like they were this past season; they were devastated," he says, "I was probably the only course in the Chicago area that sprayed fairways and I was probably the only course in Chicago that had any fairways left!" Another irony comes to

light as one of today's Superintendents' nemesis was influential in gaining national notoriety for Bob - Paul Harvey was boastful of Bob's Fairways, so much so that he devoted a radio segment to Bob O'Link's great fairways. As far as Bob remembers, he said nothing about the avian population.

Some other achievements

- Bob Designed and published plans for customized tee benches made of Redwood.
- Co-designed and installed one of the early classic examples of a customized automatic irrigation system for Bob O'Link.
- Originated and published the first contract form for Superintendents titled "A Letter of Agreement". It is currently used in GCSAA and USGA educational publications.

Bringing the GCSAA to the Forefront

Bob was elected to the Board of the GCSAA in 1953 and at the 1958 meeting in Washington D.C., he was elected President. The National Association would not be what it is today if it wasn't for Bob's foresight. He spearheaded a movement to reorganize the headquarters' operations. Dr. Gene Nutter was employed as the Executive Director and the office was moved to Jacksonville Beach, Florida. As part of the reorganization, Bob developed their first "Table of Organization", along with the first written "Standard Operating Procedure", for Committees and Committee Chairmen.

In 1959, through his personal contact with Herb Graffis, then Vice President of The National golf Fund, the GCSAA received its first grant of funds from that group, and

has continued to receive funds (over \$500,000 to date) which have been channeled into student scholarships and turf research.

The GCSAA is better today because of his hard work and dedication. The Williams legacy continues in the person of his son Bruce, who followed his fathers footsteps at Bob O'Link, and is about to assume the role of President of our National Association.

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Fighting Indifferent attitudes

Clearly, Bob Williams typified the attitude of striving to better oneself and he wasn't afraid to step out to do so. Over 60 students and apprentice Superintendents have worked under Bob's tutelage. There was a time when an aspiring college educated individual had a hard time finding work as many Superintendents were reluctant to take these qualified men. Bob went against the flow, in fact he felt it was a win win situation for all involved, "it was a tremendous opportunity to help the students, to help the Superintendent, to help the club and to help me as a Superintendent."

Its Us versus the World

Sometimes a Golf Course Superintendent has the feeling that it's him or her against the world. Bob has tirelessly led the drive to elevate the position of Golf Course Superintendent to the status of "Clubhouse" Manager or Golf Pro. He debated the General Manager concept with the then past president of the CMAA at an open forum being conducted at the New Orleans conference while he was the immediate past president of the GCSAA. "The Superintendent is the only staff member who daily makes decisions that will affect each player... he is the one who makes the important decisions about your club, therefore he should be paid accordingly," he stated.

Rest assured, if Bob Williams as well as many other Superintendents hadn't fought the good fight 30 years ago, our current salary structure would not be what it is today. In his consulting with clubs, he extols the virtue of hiring the right man for the job and paying him appropriately. "...you can't afford not to hire the best man available," Today, we are enjoying the fruits of Bob's labors as many Chicago area clubs have revised their compensation structure to attract quality Superintendents and more importantly, we are finally being considered as the top management professional on staff.

When it comes to leading the way, Bob Williams wrote the book. "Its important to remember that any time you're a little progressive and stick your head over the multitude, there are going to be people throwing stones at you - expect that." Each member of the MAGCS would be a better person both personally and professionally should they remember these words of wisdom coming from a man who has, even in retirement been "on the cutting edge."