

# Drawing Lessons from a Life Well-Lived

*In my life, I've known a lot of experts in various fields; however, in the field of life, profession and character, few have exemplified expertise better than John Ebel. I started working for John as a turf student in 1989 because Greg Fuchs told me that he would be a great guy to work for. Shortly after my arrival, I realized that Greg was right. It didn't take long for me to get a feel for the perspective John had on his faith, his family and his profession. The artful way he wove these together, helped define who he was. In my own career as a superintendent, I am still drawing from the valuable mentoring I received while working with him.*

*John Ebel had the vision and the wisdom to know the importance of maintaining a focus on a higher good for the benefit of the profession and all those involved with it. The fact that John had a passion for his profession to the point where he prayed fervently for it and its members simply demonstrated his genuine concern and love for others.*

I contacted John around January 21 of this year and told him that I thought the MAGCS could still learn a lot from him. I wanted to ask him a whole series of questions related to what he thought was the key to his success. However, John lacked the strength to talk to me for more than ten minutes that afternoon. He said he would speak to me again when his strength returned. Sadly, I never had the opportunity to speak with him again. So I will draw from the short talk I had with John, my memory of what I believe is key to his character, and from a long conversation I had with John's wife, Juanita.

John was a true "jack of all trades" and a tremendous asset to any organization. After spending 22 years at Biltmore C.C., he spent another 22 years at Barrington Hills C.C. John's words to me on this were, "There is definitely something to be said for staying put." We talked about the time, effort and patience it takes to establish longstanding relationships with those around you. John understood the importance of skill and knowledge in his profession, but he didn't stop there. He invested in people along the way, and always treated people with tremendous respect.

There were many times I would talk to him and walk away thinking, "What is it about him that makes him so easy to talk to?" I think it was because of the light that shone within him. You see, John's faith and his use of Christ as a role model for his life had a "trickle-down" effect to the point where you could see it in everything that he did. John was a 24/7 walk-the-talk and talk-the-talk kind of Christian. This was something that John delighted in, and he didn't keep it a secret, either.

Juanita described John as being tenacious in the way he attacked every challenge. This was never more evident than in his efforts to organize the prayer breakfast. The purpose was to seek God's blessing on the GCSAA conference, our affairs, our nation, our members, our directors and our staff, and to share God's love.

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The same principles that made John a successful superintendent also made him a successful husband and father. John's marriage of 52 years to



Photo courtesy of Bob Williams



Juanita and John Ebel,  
December 2001.

Juanita is a monumental statement of his dedication to his wife and family. Juanita mentioned that John was always so patient at home. I am almost certain that John would say that this kind of patience did not come from his own accord. It came from a kind of inner transformation, and from that light that shone through him. The thing that kept that light burning was the fact that John was a man of prayer. He had a tremendous enthusiasm for the power of God. I remember a story he told me regarding a time in his life when he was an early believer. He admitted to being a little rough around the edges in those days, and he had trouble cleaning up his language. It was something he seemed to have no power over in his life. He explained

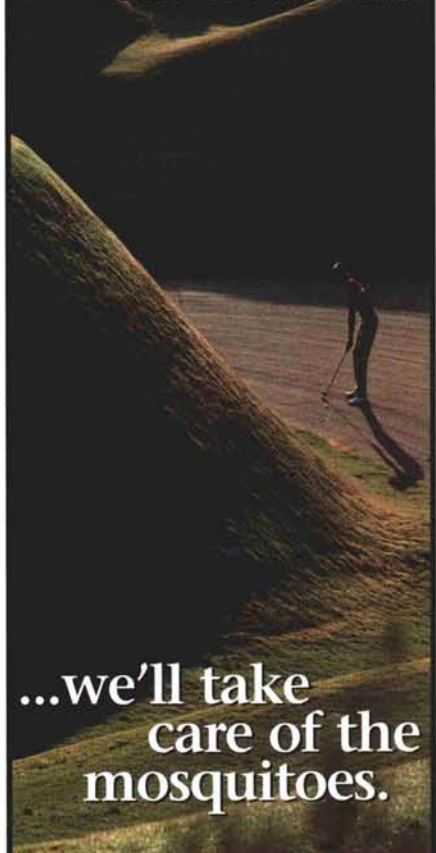
that as he grew more familiar with the power of prayer and submitting things to the Lord, he began to change. John looked me right in the eye and said, "As soon as I submitted that to the Lord, my mouth cleaned up overnight!"

John took the motto, "A family that prays together stays together," and he lived it. Juanita told me that she really missed John's nightly prayer. The other thing she missed was John's strong arm beside her. She said that everywhere they went, she could always reach up and pull on his arm for support, but now she has to get by on her own. How wonderful to be remembered as one who was always there for support. Juanita told me John was an expert at that.

In the end, I can only offer my opinion as to what I believe was the key to John's success. I believe it was honesty, integrity and faith that defined John's character. This character flowed from his faith in Christ as his Savior, and his willingness to be molded and transformed by Him. I think it was his successful combination of skill, knowledge, faith and character that made John Ebel a true expert in life!



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