

Robert M. Williams

The world of golf has lost a true legend with the passing of Bob Williams on March 7th at the age of 93. Much can (and will) be said of Mr. Williams' contributions to our profession on the national and international level—these are the things for which he will be remembered most, I suspect. But around here, he'll be remembered as the most renowned golf course superintendents in the Chicagoland area - ever. Bob served as president of MAGCS in 1956, and went on to become president of GCSAA in 1958. He served as president of the CAGCS in 1979. He was the man who gave this publication both of its names; first in 1948 when he volunteered the name "Bull Sheet" for the association's new newsletter, recalling the name from his Fort Campbell, Kentucky Army camp newsletter. Then, in 1995 a contest was held to rename the magazine, and Bob's submission of "On Course" was the winner. Bob was an innovator in the world of golf course maintenance, and changed the way people went about the profession of golf course superintendent. The awards and honors bestowed on Bob over his career could fill an arena, but I imagine they weren't the things he prized most. Having known Bob Williams and having benefited from my chats with him, I believe the things he held most dear were the friends—and there were MANY—that he made and the young men whose careers he started and nurtured. Bob's passing is truly the end of an era, and we will all miss his character, his wisdom, and his class.

– John Gurke, CGCS, Aurora Country Club

He took a chance on me. I was not a turf student nor was I headed in a good direction. Bob saw something in me and helped guide my career, as well as many, many others. Bob was my first boss and with his capable young assistant Bruce, helped show me the turf business. He was a direct, no-nonsense man to work for who was detail oriented, humble and compassionate. When I worked for him, I never knew he was a GCSAA president but I did know he cared about our work. That caring never ceased. I attended my first National Conference in 1978, in St. Louis, by riding down there with Bob Williams and Ray Gerber. The turf chatter never stopped that day. I am forever grateful for all that he did for the turf industry and for mentoring myself through the college years.

–R. Brian Green, CGCS, Sunset Valley Golf Course

I was first introduced to Mr. Williams back in the mid 1970s as a young starry eyed assistant superintendent by my then boss, Harold Frederickson. We met at a Midwest meeting at the late Anthony Meyer's course which is now where Seven Bridges sits. I remember sitting down with Tony Meyer, Ray Gerber and Bob Williams after business was taken care of and being in awe of these great Superintendents. I just sat and listened and knew that I might never get the chance as a youngster in

the business to listen to these men discuss at a personal level like this. So I sat and said nothing and absorbed.

I took advantage of Bob's intellect and knowledge while working my way through college and grew very respectful of everything that he had to say relating to our industry. He was very advanced in his ideas and ideals of how it should be done and why. He helped me very much with my research in school and I appreciated all the time that he allowed me to speak with him. Bob Williams along with many others throughout my career have been instrumental in doing what I love to do today. Thanks Bob for all of your help and caring and I will miss you.

– Harry Lovero, Orchard Valley Golf Course

Bob, at all times, represented a level of true CLASS. He will always be remembered as being the very BEST and when he spoke, people listened. – Carl Hopphan, MAGCS Life Member

Bob Williams may not have been the best grass grower in the industry, but he was the best communicator. He was the pioneer in raising the status of the golf course superintendent. He taught all of us that the appearance and communication skills of the golf course superintendent were our keys to a successful career.

– Randy Wahler, CGCS, Knollwood Club

(continued on next page)

The news the passing of Robert Williams took me back to 1979 when I showed up at his office door looking for a job. I had knocked around in a couple of dead-end jobs since graduating college five years earlier, and while driving a bus on a beautiful day it occurred to me that being involved in the care and feeding of a golf course might be a lot better than what I was currently doing.

In 1979 there wasn't a lot of information out there about golf course management, but I somehow unearthed Ray Gerber's name and gave him a call. I pretended to be a reporter looking for information about the people responsible for conditioning golf courses. Mr. Gerber gave me Robert Williams' number saying that Bob would be the best spokesman for the profession. Using the same pretext I called Mr. Williams and he agreed to see me and answer my questions.

I put on my best polyester sport coat and showed up at the Bob'O'Link Golf Club maintenance facility and proceeded to "interview" Mr. Williams about the nature of the work he and his staff did. About five minutes into it he sniffed out my deception, but continued to weave a glamorous picture of honoring the game and its traditions, consorting with rich and powerful gentlemen, (Bob'O'Link was and still is a gentlemen only club), and practicing applied science in the pursuit of impeccable playing conditions. He had me hooked, and seeing that, asked if I might be interested in working for him. I accepted immediately, gave notice to the bus company and began working for him shortly thereafter.

With Mr. Williams you started at the bottom, (or at least I did), and he watched me shoveling divot mix for minute before taking the shovel from my hands and instructing me on the "Bob Williams" method of shoveling. There was a "Bob

Williams" way of doing everything, and it usually was the most efficient way. He was a patient teacher, but did not suffer fools gladly, and excellence was expected.

I soon came to learn that "honoring the game and its traditions" really meant straight flagsticks and a tidy tee box accomplished without loitering.

"Consorting with rich and powerful gentlemen" really meant getting your butt behind a tree and keeping quiet until the golfers has passed.

"Practicing applied science in the pursuit of impeccable playing conditions" really meant spraying greens with a Bean sprayer with a handgun set at 275 PSI with a "flick of the wrist" at the end of each swath to insure the even application of the spray material."

It was a wonderful time. Thank you Mr. Williams, God Bless and rest in peace.

- Fred Behnke, CGCS, Mount Prospect Golf Course

If you wish to honor the memory of Mr. Williams, donations can be made to the [Williams Leadership Endowment, c/o The Environmental Institute For Golf](#), 1421 Research Park Drive, Lawrence, KS 66049-3859. The endowment recognizes Bob and his son Bruce for their contributions and commitment to mentoring golf course superintendents to become leaders in the golf course management profession and instilling these qualities in superintendents. Presently, this endowment funds the chapter leadership conference held each year at GCSAA headquarters in Lawrence of which MAGCS has been and continues to be a direct beneficiary. -OC

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