



Miles Still Mentors After Retirement

A Tribute to Oscar Miles

Congratulations to our own Oscar Miles on being awarded the GCSAA's Distinguished Service Award. The GCSAA Board of Directors selects Distinguished Service Award winners from nominations submitted by affiliated chapters and/or association members. First presented in 1932, the award is given to individuals who have made an outstanding, substantive, and enduring contribution to the advancement of the profession of golf course superintendent.

Those who know Oscar heartily concur that his distinguished service has made an enduring contribution to the profession. GCSAA released the following information:

Miles, a 45-year GCSAA member, is a retired superintendent who last worked at the Merit Club in Libertyville, Ill. He has served on various GCSAA committees and hosted

13 professional golf tournaments, including 12 Western Opens at Butler National Golf Club in Oak Brook, Ill., and Olympia Fields (Ill.) Country Club, as well as the 2000 U.S. Women's Open at the Merit Club. A past president of the Illinois Turfgrass Foundation, Miles also served on the board for GCSAA's Indiana chapter. An industry expert who has mentored more than 75 interns, Miles is renowned for decades of soil temperature research, and he was at the forefront of the lightweight fairway mowing concept, now considered standard practice.

For those of us at MAGCS, particularly those who have been mentored by Oscar, the man is much more than a summary of his career.

Oscar Miles has had a lasting influence on his profession through the people he trained. An influence not just on professional practice, but on work ethic, response to adversity, and all-around philosophy.

When asked if there were professional practices used by Oscar that they still use today, the following responses were received.

Tom Lively worked for Oscar at Butler National in 1981 and 1982-86.

He tells us, Oscar seemed to always be at the forefront of new ideas and technology and was always willing to try new things, but only if he thought it was something that was going to really work and make a difference. He was one of the first to implement light weight fairway mowing in the Chicago area. I remember others at that time thinking we were crazy for mowing fairways with triplex mowers at a time when triplex mowers were used mainly on greens and tees.

George Ott worked for Oscar at Butler National from 1984-1988.

I had very little experience when I went to work for Oscar. He started me off slowly and after I mastered picking up branches during spring clean-up, he personally taught me how to walker mow greens, change cups, hand water, hand spray greens and tees, and boom spray fairways. He not only taught me how to do



Oscar hired helicopters to dry out landing areas in fairways during the Western Open in 1987.

things but why things were done a certain way. I received constant feedback and knew that the job must be done correctly or I would be back out fixing my mistakes.

Sam MacKenzie spent two seasons as an intern at Butler National.

I still use the seeding method I was taught when we renovated fairways at Butler.

Dan Sterr began working for Oscar in 1986 at Butler National.

One of the biggest things you would learn from Oscar if you worked for him or even talked to him for any length of time was the importance of drainage. One thing Oscar used to say about drainage was that taking care of a golf course was two things, drainage and common sense. If you really sit back and think about that statement it is pretty true. I do not know if Oscar was the one who originally came up with that saying, but he is the one I heard it from.

Scott Witte, who worked for Oscar in the summer of 1990 at the Merit Club, said,

During new construction I still outline all newly seeded bent-grass areas with at least a 'one roll line' of Bluegrass sod. This always helps to clearly define all your grass lines.

Oscar's attention to detail struck many of his protégés.

From Scott Witte:

I have never worked for a more positively thorough, or analytical mind in my life. With Oscar, no stone was left unturned. Everything was thought through and organized. His records were impeccable.

From Tony Kalina, who worked with Oscar at Merit Club for two-and-a-half years:

Keep every piece of information your duties impact and file them away!
'Plan your work - work your plan.'

From Tom Lively:

Oscar was also one of the most dedicated record keepers I have ever met and one of the first Superintendents to move into the computer era. I thought that would make our record keeping jobs as assistants easier, but in fact it made it more demanding as he learned of everything he could now store electronically.

Oscar's thorough preparation for 12 Western Opens has remained with everyone who witnessed it, but none more than the challenges of the 1987 Open.

Tom Lively:

While working at Butler for Oscar I had the privilege of working at one of the best conditioned golf courses, and it showed each year during the PGA Tour Western Open Golf Tournament. Even when faced with adversity, Oscar always tried to make the best of the situation. I remember working during the 1987 Western Open when the floods came and soaked the course. As the water receded, Oscar brought in helicopters to help dry the water logged turf.

George Ott:

The catastrophic flooding prior to the 1987 Western Open and the tournament's eventual success will always stand as a testament to Oscar's leadership skills. I was his Assistant in 1987. I remember taking a ride around the golf course the week prior to the 1987 Western Open and Oscar telling me 'I think the course is in the best shape we have ever been in going into

Western open week.' Five days later Butler National had flooded and I showed up to work with a broken ankle! Oscar remained calm and put me in charge of communications and helping him coordinate all the volunteers, the WGA, PGA, vendors, Com Ed, equipment companies, and our crew. I'll always remember how devastated Oscar was and how he picked himself up and put together a detailed plan to save the tournament. 'Plan your work and work your plan.'

Dan Sterr:

Aside from the 1987 Western Open, we always had fun during the tournament, and looking back

now on 1987, I think

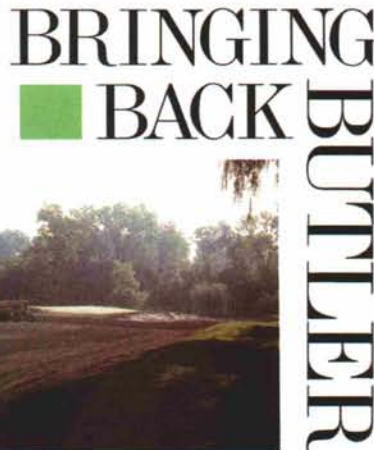
I could say it was fun but in a different way, not only during the tournament, but what we went through after the tournament in restoring and repairing the golf course. The things we learned during the reconstruction, whether what we did was right or wrong certainly has helped all of us who were involved.

Attention to detail, sound practice, thorough planning have stayed with everyone. Ultimately, though, Oscar Miles' greatest impact on others seems to be in the realm of intangibles.

Dan Sterr:

One of the first things I noticed when I started working with Oscar, was his passion for the business. Oscar was always the first one to be at work and the last one to leave. I think the

Butler's battle with Mother Nature was still in process when Greens Superintendent Oscar Miles began to plan for the future. To the untrained eye, the damage of the flood could be repaired with a few weeks of good weather and the healthy efforts of the grounds crew. But Miles knew that the restoration of Butler National would be a major project, one that would require rebuilding most of the



Under the reigns of Oscar, Butler CC was the topic of many articles and stories.

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only time that we beat him to work was when we used to start around midnight to spray fairways, I know he was up thinking about it though, because he called a couple of times when we were getting ready to spray, to make sure everything was going okay or to change some of the mixtures we were using. Seems like he was always thinking about what would be best for the golf course. His passion for the business also showed when he would be talking to a member of the club, a member of the clubhouse staff, or a member of the media.

Tony Kalina:

Oscar is a great, logical thinker. His mind was churning every waking moment about his true passion, being a golf course superintendent.

He had a response to every possible scenario, every question and every thought, with regard to the profession and the science of golf turf care.

Scott Witte:

You could tell that he just loved his job. As Oscar dove headlong into restoring the prairie areas at Merit Club, you could tell he just absolutely loved it. There was passion in his eyes when it came to ALL things green and growing. That was inspiring to me.

Sam MacKenzie:

I worked for many different people before becoming a Superintendent myself and of the all the Superintendents I worked for, he had the most impact. His work ethic and stern managerial manner are still with me today. Much of what I saw and experienced in my two seasons at Butler National is irreplaceable. I was very fortunate to experience all of the different facets required to prepare a world-class facility not only for daily play but also for a PGA tournament

Tom Lively:

As a person many thought Oscar was extremely demanding, and he was, but only because he truly loved what he was doing. Oscar would help anyone. Over the years there have been many of us who have worked for Oscar. I owe Oscar many thanks for teaching me the necessary skills to become successful.

I have been very fortunate in my career to have been able to meet the professional goals I set for myself. None of it would have happened had I not met and worked for Oscar Miles. Many of us owe him thanks, and I'm glad to have been a small part of his career. Congratulations Oscar, you deserve it.

George Ott:

Every day was an education with Oscar. He had such a wealth of knowledge of golf course maintenance and the game of golf, but his greatest skill was his ability to inspire and motivate the people around him.

Oscar's work ethic and pursuit of perfection brought out the best in the people who worked with him. People who worked for him developed a deep respect and sense of loyalty for Oscar. The respect and loyalty went both ways. After leaving Butler National, he was always willing to advise us and help us in any way he could. I was always impressed with the support Oscar had from his wife Mardelle and his family.

Family was very important to him, not only his family but the families of the people who worked with him. Thank you Oscar, for all that you have done for me and for our industry. Congratulations, you are most deserving!

MAGCS:

Returning to Quincy upon retirement from the Merit Club, Oscar still contributes to the profession and our Association. He oversees and directs funds from the Illinois PGA Foundation – Miles Awards and has chosen the MAGCS Scholarship fund to be a recipient in 2008. Oscar continues to empower

people through education. The Midwest Association of Golf Course Superintendent's is honored by your membership and congratulates you. **-OC**



Oscar even got the caddies involved to help move mud and water off the fairways at Butler.



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