

# OUR PROFESSION: Where We've Been, Where We Are, and Where We're Going

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Back in 1926, a small group of "greenkeepers," led by Col. John Morley, met for the purpose of forming a fraternal organization known as the National Association of Greenkeepers of America. Their objectives were:

1. The union of worthy green keepers, carefully selected and strictly obligated, without reference to the accident of rank, fortune, or social position.
2. To work together in harmony with voices raised in the interest of Peace, whose words are kindly spoken and whose charity is real.
3. To build character into the foundation of this association, and may our motto always be —

JUSTICE,  
FAITHFUL BROTHERHOOD,  
AND GENEROUS BENEVOLENCE.

These words are taken from an editorial published in March of 1927 and written by Col. Morley, the founder and first president of our (national) Association. Time has proved the wisdom of his action and today our objectives parallel those started in 1926.

We have grown in number and purpose since that first group met with the understanding that you only get out of anything what you put into it. Our profession prospered because these men had the courage to seek new methods, test the unknown, developed the ability to respect and work with nature, and left us a legacy to persist in spite of failures.

For the first quarter century of its existence, the Association was primarily a fraternal group dedicated to helping one another learn to deal with the complexities of providing fine turf for the game. Encouraged by turf-industry people, the landgrant colleges (such as the University of Massachusetts), began to offer turf-related programs. This is when grass-growing emerged as a science.

Following World War II, we began to apply scientific methods to the art of greenkeeping. Better grasses, nutrients, and chemicals resulted in better playing surfaces. With all this new-found sophistication came problems with labor, escalating costs, and demands for more and better playing conditions. Enter the age of mechanization and the USGA specifications for greens construction.

As superintendents, we were caught up in a dilemma; the survival of the "old breed" and the arrival of the "college kid." Students from the turf schools were entering the profession and threatening the status of the superintendent who learned his profession through trial and error. They were low-keyed, low-paid and somewhat introverted. However, the wisdom of Col. Morley once again proved itself as the Association blended these two

groups through education, research, and the annual conference. We younger fellows soon discovered that those older fellows knew what they were talking about and our research only proved the validity of techniques such as aerating, top-dressing, composting, and the selection of turf cultivars.

We knew we had something going here; an organization of true professionals. The rest of the golfing community, however, still thought of the superintendent as "the guy who cuts the grass." We had sold each other on our importance but couldn't sell our members! It was time for the profession to raise its image outside the sphere of our group. This would have to be an individual, as well as a collective, effort. We had to educate the struggling superintendent (local and regional educational sessions and seminars), improve the serious-minded (certification), and sell the memberships on the necessity of having and accepting (individual commitment) the qualified professional superintendent. Today, it is safe to say that we have, with the help and guidance of fellow superintendents, reached the goals intended by that group some 60 years ago.

Fortunately, we have the advantage of better grasses, improved construction methods, and the mechanization that allows us to meet the increasing demands of the golfer. The biggest challenge facing our profession today is not how to do more with less but how to justify and sell the high cost of turf management. Industry passes the costs on to the consumer, an accepted fact of life. We must learn to teach the golfer to recognize this economic fact. Without an adequate budget, the best-intentioned superintendent will look like a "grass-cutter." The successful superintendent is the one who recognizes the need for good PR, budgeting and management. Gone are the days when the "greenkeeper" stayed down at the "barn" and let the Pro take care of the member's complaints.

We must recognize that the future of our profession of golf course superintendency lies with the growing crop of youngsters coming out of our turf schools. No longer is the superintendent a "good ole farm boy" who understood something about growing crops, running a tractor, and spreading manure. Tomorrow's superintendent must have a solid foundation in agronomics, plant physiology, agricultural engineering, and management techniques. It behooves the seasoned superintendent to bring these young fellows along and give them the opportunity to learn the skills needed to carry on in the tradition of that small group led by Col. Morley. To quote him — "Time only will tell whether I have acted wisely in bringing into existence the National Association of Greenkeepers of America." ■

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