

Canada's Super of the Year:

Thom Charters maps way for progress at home and away

By MARK LESLIE

Canada's 1992 Superintendent of the Year, Thom Charters, would refuse the pedestal. But he could be offered by superintendents on more than one continent as the model to which to aspire.

The manager of fashionable Weston Golf and Country Club in Toronto has fashioned a lifestyle that has him involved 1) locally (on a committee devoted to cleaning the Humber River); 2) provincially (as vice president of the high-powered Ontario Turfgrass Research Foundation); 3) nationally

(as a founding director of the pioneering Green Care Horticultural Association); and 4) internationally (playing on the Canadian Golf Superintendents Association's winning team at the International Greenkeepers Tournament in Yorkshire, England, in 1991).

As the course manager of Canada's 12th-ranked course, according to SCORE magazine's 1992 survey, Charter's first priority is the conditioning of Weston. In his six years at this position he has overseen the rebuilding of all the bunkers, rejuvenation of the trees, upgrading of the

maintenance facility, and installation of a new irrigation system.

All this hard work — and more — has earned Charters the honor as Superintendent of the Year.

A 1976 Penn State University alumnus, Charters may put his most indelible imprint on Green Care, formed in 1989 to pull together the green industry in the face of misinformation and those he calls "enviro-maniacs."

Borne out of the need to deal with regulations, Green Care is composed of 21 associations from a cross-section of the industry, from superintendents to sod growers, arborists to landscapers.

The goal: A stronger voice.

"Our message isn't to lobby for or against specific legislation, but to bring about keener awareness in the public and among legislators of just how important healthy green space is," Charters said, "and that responsible professionals care for it. The problem is with enviromaniacs getting front-page news. The common perception is that chemicals are not being used correctly."

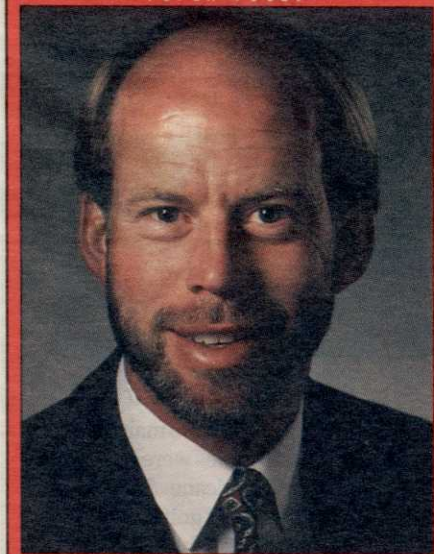
Charters also pointed the finger at extremists on the other side of the equation.

"Green Care is common-sense, middle-of-the-road," he said. "We're not pro-pesticides, but we are supportive of the use of those products as required to maintain a healthy green space. The benefits of healthy green space are many — oxygen production, soil stabilization, ground water recharging, esthetic impact, and on and on and on. It would be foolhardy to think we could nurture these things — especially in municipalities where we're asking nature to compete with men, asphalt and concrete, etc. — without intervention."

Formed by Charters and Kent Groves of Nutri-Lawn International Inc. in Toronto, Green Care has representatives from most all the provinces and is trying to network nationwide.

Charters said: "We're asking that people forward to us published information that isn't factual. We will respond, refute the disinformation and send factual information. We also provide a 40-page booklet, 'A Scientific Response to the Urban Anti-Pesticide Lobby,' a major undertaking

SUPER FOCUS



Canada's Super of the Year, Thom Charters

written by scientists.

Meanwhile, as a director since 1987 and vice president since 1990, Charters was instrumental in the Ontario Turfgrass Research Foundation's (OTRF) \$1.2-million fund-raiser to build the Guelph Turfgrass Institute, according to CGSA Executive Director Vince Gillis.

The facility will open next spring, housing a half dozen scientists as well as the OTRF and Ontario GSA headquarters.

Charters is high on the future of the institute, which he called "a world-class facility, a unique combination of the university, government and private sectors working together." The land was donated by the Provincial Government. The University of Guelph will manage it. And private industry raised the funds necessary to build it.

Charters and his colleagues look with expectation to new benefits of research to even rival those of the past that have greatly changed the way they do their job.

"The science supporting us has advanced in leaps and bounds," he said.

He pointed to great improvements in the last 15 years in course covers, lightweight mowing, clipping removal on fairways, aeration techniques and equipment, irrigation technology and personal computers.

"No question, the environmental concerns are a big change," he said. "Not that we were irresponsible then. We just get a lot more questions now. We posted [spraying] voluntarily. Now it's legislated."

"Our own members ask more questions now. That will only increase. I think people have become a lot more aware of the different factors course superintendents deal with. When I got into this business, I could count on the comments, 'Boy, you've got a great job.' Now I hear people say, 'Boy, I wouldn't want your job for the world.'"

Charters said the extra pressure on his members in today's society is so strong "they can't relax and enjoy things as much as they once did. There's more pressure on them and it trickles down to me. Life in the '90s is not comparable to life in the '70s. It would be silly to think that life for a superintendent would be any different."

But although greenkeeping has become a much different creature since he began his career, he wouldn't consider a new direction if he had a chance to do it again.

"I love my job," said the husband and father of sons 11 and 14. "And I love Weston," he said of the Willie Park Jr.-designed golf course that has hosted the Canadian Amateur and the Cadillac Skins Game, and was the site of Arnold Palmer's first professional victory, the 1955 Canadian Open. "It's a little bit of the country right in the city."

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