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“TOP SHOPS” AWARDS

Visiting golf course maintenance facilities around my state is one of the pleasures of my part-time job as the Wisconsin Turfgrass Association’s ambassador. I’d seen many as a superintendent, but I missed far more than I visited. While many have since been remodeled or rebuilt, they are as interesting and varied as the superintendents who work out of them.

Regardless of what these wonderful buildings are called – turf care centers maintenance facilities and green section HQ, for example – they will always be golf course shops to me. That name fits best. CPAs, law firms and doctors have offices. We have shops.

One of my favorite places during my career was the golf course shop. It was always a hub of activity, especially in the summer. Shops are happy places where summer crews get to know each other, work together and even form lifelong friendships. On rare occasions, couples who marry first met in a golf course shop.

Superintendents find golf course shops appealing because they are full of things we like, such as hand tools, machinery, power tools, work benches and other things people outside our profession envy us for. Handy men drool when they walk through a typical golf course shop.

Golf course shops even smell good – the distinctive aromas of gasoline, diesel fuel, soil, wood and grass clippings. My three daughters, when they were young, enjoyed the shop smell. Now it’s grandkids who like it.

Shops take on the personality, oftentimes, of their superintendents. The building’s neatness (or lack thereof) reflects how tidy the superintendent is in all he does. Lunchrooms, locker rooms, the parts room and everything else will be as clean and organized as the boss demands.

And the little extras reflect shop

personality. In my case, we cleaned the lunchroom and restrooms every day, just like the Army demanded when I was a soldier. We cobbled up – at no cost – a stereo system, which led to enjoyable arguments about what music we were going to listen to each day – polka, country, classical, oldies, Rush, Mathews, even on occasion Omar’s Spanish-speaking station.

One of the nicest things I received when I retired was a key my successor gave me to the shop I’d designed, built and worked in for so many years. My little corner of the world stayed with me and I still love having access to it.

Regardless of what these wonderful buildings are called – turf care centers, maintenance facilities and green section HQ, for example – they will always be **golf course shops** to me.

It occurred to me recently that somebody – maybe GCI – should initiate annual golf course “Top Shop” awards to honor the best and most unique of these buildings. I see a contest arranged by obvious geography; the shop in Wisconsin will have different requirements than one in Florida. The competition could be graded on points accumulated for the workshop area, the lunchroom and locker rooms and other employee areas. We could judge the superintendent’s office, the equipment storage areas, and the repair parts storage organization. Carpentry work sections, irrigation control rooms, fuel storage and pesticide storage would receive attention. Neatness, organization, ambience and many other variables could be part of the judging criteria.

I would make past winners ineligible for the contest for at least five years; I would divide the contest into categories based on the golf course

budget; obviously a shop at a course with a million dollar budget will be likely to have a better chance at a great shop than a course with a budget one-fourth of that.

I would also create a category based on age. One of my favorite shops in Wisconsin is an older one built with wooden construction, but it is so unique and neat and well organized and functional that it would have to receive a high score. Innovation on the part of the golf course staff would also receive high consideration.

Our collective imaginations could determine other judging issues if we

wanted. Our judges could be drawn from manufacturers, service managers from distributors, golf course mechanics and equipment managers, and superintendents. Winners would receive the Golden Wrench Award and runners-up would be given the Silver Wrench Award. I know the wrench is an old-time symbol; I am open to suggestions here! Winners would be also be given a free trip for staff people to service school, and the course would be given a complete new set of Snap-On tools.

I have seen lots of changes in my 40 years in the industry, and one of the biggest changes has been a move from old barns and metal buildings and outdoor privies to well-designed golf course shops. Honoring those who have done an especially nice job deserve recognition.

Maybe Pat Jones will agree! **GCI**