



Monroe Miller retired after 36 years as superintendent at Blackhawk CC in Madison, Wis. He is a recipient of the 2004 USGA Green Section Award, the 2009 GCSAA Col. John Morley DSA Award, and is the only superintendent in the Wisconsin Golf Hall of Fame. Reach him at groots@charter.net.

ABOUT STAN

“An event has happened, upon which it is difficult to speak, and impossible to be silent.” — Edmund Burke

I was mowing the lawn when Cheryl told me Stan Zontek had died. I was so surprised and stunned I had to stop and sit down. The profound sadness that swept over me was an emotion usually only felt when a close relative dies. Today, I’m still thinking about Stanley. He was an exceptional influence on my career and my indebtedness remains with me even though I’ve been retired for years.

Many people have noted they never heard anyone say anything negative about Stan. The reason is there are likely thousands of superintendents, like me, who benefited from his experience and intelligence. His advice ranged from how to grow *Poa annua* to preparations necessary for a major tournament. I knew a colleague who was sound and capable in his ability to manage a golf course but had gotten into some trouble with course conditions. The green committee met with Stan on a Saturday morning; his advice was unequivocal and blunt for all involved. They took it, almost to the letter, and the results were positive and obvious, a job was saved, and a course returned to normal.

In my case, I talked for a year about a new irrigation system and a new shop, but it fell on deaf ears. I asked Stan for some suggestions. During the next TAS visit, he merely noted, “This club really needs to replace this inadequate shop facility.” It happened the next year. A couple of years passed, and he repeated the same admonition about our irrigation system, with the same results. Stanley brought credibility and trust to these TAS visits with club officials, and used them to move the club to make important investments. And in the instance of

our green committee members, they really liked him.

Stanley possessed great quantities of common sense. His course visits were practical and down-to-earth. He didn’t make recommendations that were obviously not within the financial reality of our club. This came from the fact that his father was a superintendent. That also endeared him to us. He knew the life we lived and the profession we worked.

More than a few times I had told Stanley how grateful I was for his **positive influence**. I feel relieved, also, putting these reflections into words for others to read.

Many of us who met “Stan the Man” through the USGA Green Section developed a personal relationship with him as well. Back in the 1980s the Wisconsin Turfgrass Association was raising money to build a turfgrass research station for our land grant university. Stan came to our Wisconsin Hospitality Room held during the GCSAA Conference and, like the good sport he was, bought a raffle ticket for a drawing we were having. He won! He immediately stood on a chair and auctioned his winning prize. Then he auctioned his necktie and went on to anything else he could lay his hands on. People went crazy and he left with that famous impish smile on his face. He fattened our building fund considerably that night.

Not too many years ago we drove to the GCSAA Conference and when we got within 10 miles of Merion we called Stan’s office. This was a

time when cell phones were new. We struggled with dropped calls, wrong turns and some marginal directions, but Stan talked us there. We called when we left to thank him, and he talked us into quickly driving to Washington, D.C. to see the brand new WWII Memorial. His directions were great, but he didn’t mention anything about parking. When we saw him at the conference and told him our tale of a towed car in D.C. at night, he couldn’t quit laughing. He referred to us as “Cheesehead Hicks!”

And there was no one more adept at telling jokes on himself, especially

those making reference to his ethnicity. His sense of humor was as big as he was. I’ve also heard tales of his trips to Scotland for golf and fun.

Stan was in demand as a speaker, and although I probably had heard him 100 times I always wanted to hear him again. The articles he wrote throughout his career make me wish he had written a turf book. It would have been a best-seller. The respect he earned over his long career with the Green Section led to his selection as a GCSAA DSA recipient. I sat in the front row when it was presented, clapping loudly and grinning ear to ear.

It is not fair that he died so young, but it never is. He didn’t have enough time on earth to enjoy the retirement he had certainly earned and was close to taking. But it is fair to say his was a life well lived.

Stan will be sorely missed, but never forgotten. **GCI**