

THE CONTENT OF CHARACTER

About 25 years ago, my friend Dave Heegard and I cooked up a crazy idea. A lot of you probably know Dave from his days with the Pursell/Polygon crew at FarmLinks and, more recently, his leadership of LebanonTurf. Back then, Heegs was running the old Scotts Professional business and I was overseeing the GCSAA Foundation (the forerunner to today's awkwardly named EIFG).

People forget what a powerhouse the Scotts Company was in the golf business in the second half of the 20th century. They were dominant players in the fertilizer, seed and chemical business thanks to a world-class network of tech reps who we're consulting agronomists as well as salespeople. And, under Heegard's watch, their support for GCSAA and the profession was boundless.

Dave and I got to talking one day about a nagging problem for golf at large...the lack of diversity. Not only was it an issue in the pre-Tiger days of the Tour but a surprising number of clubs still excluded blacks and women. Moreover both the GCSAA membership and the famed Scotts tech rep network were virtually 100-percent white guys. This was a perception problem for GCSAA and, to some extent, a business issue for a big public company like Scotts.

So we cooked up a scholarship/recruiting program with a goal of attracting "non-traditional" students to the golf/turf business. Scott's put a pile of money behind the idea and the foundation jumped into action to bring it to life in 1990. And voila! The new scholarships would help bring more African-Americans and women to our business.

The Scott's Scholars program was well-

conceived, well-intentioned, well-funded, well-promoted and, well...largely ineffective in achieving its original goal.

Why?

Well, for one thing, there are many scholarships and programs targeting the best and brightest young people of color. They can choose many paths and, to some I've spoken with over the years, this profession appeared to be awfully close to farming.

And, despite Tiger Woods, the First

Tee and dozens of other programs, far too few young African-Americans are exposed to or interested in a career in golf course management. There is very little here to attract people of color. Or women for that matter. We may think we're welcoming to all but, outside looking in, it must still appear to be pretty homogeneous.

I hope you'll read our

cover story on the long journey Ron McWhorter made from laborer to superintendent at The Landing in Georgia. He's black but it's not a story about overcoming racial bias. Yes, the fact that he is now one of only perhaps 25 black superintendents in the U.S. is cause for a small celebration. But the fact that he was a career assistant who persevered at the same facility for a quarter-century and, in a job market overflowing with good supers, was chosen to lead his operation is cause for a blowout bash.

In my mind, the color of the very humble Mr. McWhorter's skin had zero to do with his promotion. Instead, I believe he was chosen — as Dr. King said — on the content of his character. That's exactly the kind of story Dave Heegard and I hoped for way back in the day. GCI



Pat Jones
Editorial director and publisher

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GIE Media, Inc.

4020 Kinross Lakes Pkwy, 2nd floor

Richfield, OH 44286

Phone: 800-456-0707

Fax: 330-659-0823

EDITORIAL

Pat Jones

Publisher/Editorial director
pjones@gie.net

Mike Zawacki

Editor
mzawacki@gie.net

Kyle Brown

Associate Editor
kbrown@gie.net

Bill Brown

Contributing editor

Bruce Williams

Senior contributing editor

SALES

Russell Warner

National account manager
216-236-5802

Traci Mueller

Account Manager
216-236-5895

Ted Schuld

Account manager
216-236-5937

Dave Szy

Account Manager
216-236-5764

Bonnie Velikonya

Classified sales
330-523-5322

Maria Miller

Conferences manager
330-523-5373

ADVERTISING/PRODUCTION INQUIRIES

Jodi Shipley jshipley@gie.net, 216-236-5867

GRAPHICS / PRODUCTION

Jim Blayney, Art director

Justin Armbruger, Graphic designer

Helen Duerr, Production director

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