

## Legends in their own time



PENN STATE UNIVERSITY

**S**ome call them the co-fathers of the Penn State University's turfgrass maintenance program. Al Turgeon, professor of agronomy at the school, calls them a "father/son act."

"Those two did so much to put turfgrass management in general, and our program in particular, on the map," Turgeon says. "They propelled this program forward and put it out front, and [Burt] Musser passed it on to [Joe] Duich like an inheritance."

Musser, and later his protégé, Duich, turned Penn State into one of the most successful turfgrass programs in the country.

his mentor's work, commercializing Penncross cool-season turfgrasses that the two developed together to raise funds for the buildings that house Penn State's research facilities.

Duich, who retired in 1991, is also fondly remembered by the students who studied under him. Terry Laurent, superintendent at Saucon Valley CC in Bethlehem, Pa., still refers to Duich with a respectful "Doc." He says he still hears from his former professor from time to time.

"To this day, he could probably tell you where most of his students are," Laurent says. "When he calls you, he asks you how you are and if there's anything he can do to help."

# Burt Musser and Joe Duich

Stan Zontek, agronomist for the USGA's mid-Atlantic region, was a boy when Musser visited his father, a superintendent in West Virginia, to help him correct a turf problem. He only saw him from a distance, but the early visit made an impact.

"I remember being in awe of him," Zontek says. "He was the pre-eminent professor of turfgrass at the time and one of the first to do real research in the field. He was god-like to a lot of superintendents. When he talked, people listened."

Duich says Musser could be a stern man when he was teaching, but showed a remarkably human side outside of the classroom.

"I first got to know him well after he invited me on a raccoon hunting trip with him," Duich says. "He treated me like a son, and I learned so much from him."

Duich originally majored in landscape architecture, but when he saw some of Musser's turf research plots, he was hooked. After his advisor refused to help him transfer to the turf department, Duich met with Musser for two hours. Then he transferred his records to the turfgrass department and the rest, as they say, is history.

When Musser died in 1968, he left his work in the capable hands of Duich, who built upon



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That's just the kind of man he is.

"I'm grateful for everything he taught me, and I know I wouldn't be where I am today without his guidance," he adds. "He has helped a lot of people get ahead in this industry."

Duich says the most gratifying part of his teaching career is seeing his students succeed at courses around the country, whether the courses are big budget or limited budget. Despite his retirement, he remains active as a consultant and speaker in the industry, traveling for months at a time to visit golf courses and interact with superintendents.

"I can do my own thing now," Duich says. "When people call, I go. I don't want to sit around in a rocking chair and die."

— Frank H. Andorka Jr., Associate Editor