

He's Always Extending a Helping Hand

BY LARRY AYLWARD, Editor

They like Mike. The general manager, the director of golf, the greens committee chairman and just about everybody else at Cedar Ridge CC in Broken Arrow, Okla., have nothing but respect for Mike Wooten, who has been the superintendent of the golf course for 17 years. They're especially impressed with Wooten's ability to mentor.

"He's a real team player," says Buddy Phillips, director of golf at Cedar Ridge.

"Mike is always extending a helping hand, not only on the golf course but at the club as a whole," says Cleve Stubblefield, general manager at Cedar Ridge.

"In addition to the excellent job Mike has done for our club, he commands the respect of his peers in Oklahoma," says Weister O. Smith, the course's green committee chairman.

The 49-year-old Wooten, who graduated from Oklahoma State University with an agronomy degree in turf management in 1978, is a recipient of *Golfdom's* Keeper of the Green Award, sponsored by Floratine Products, for being one of the nation's best superintendent/mentors.

"You lead from the front, not the rear," says Wooten, describing his management style. "It's like when a general goes into battle with you. You want that general right out there in the battle with you."

David Nowland, who started True Turf, a Floratine distributorship in 1998 in Tulsa, Okla., nominated Wooten for the award. Nowland says he began True Turf without any background in turf management, and Wooten helped him learn the business.

"Mike was very generous with his time to answer my questions over that first year," Nowland says. "Now five years later, Mike is not only a great customer, but also a friend and mentor of sorts, even though I sit on the other side of the desk from him as a vendor."

Wooten, who has been a superinten-

dent for about 21 years, is also the mentor to 19 former assistant superintendents (and counting) who've gone on to become superintendents.

"It's nice to see some success out of those guys," Wooten says. "We talk often, and we remain good friends."

Will Clark, superintendent of Elks CC in Salina, Kan., worked as Wooten's assistant from 1987 to 1992.

"I have the highest respect for Mike, and I value his expertise," Clark says. "Mike's knowledge and guidance has helped me become the best superintendent I can be."

When Wooten hires an employee out of college, the first thing he says he teaches the employee is a strong work ethic.

"Working hard is a large part of this job," says Wooten, who has twice been the president of the Oklahoma GCSA.

Wooten is also a big believer in hands-on experience. New employees are involved in almost every aspect of the job, from spraying pesticides and renovation projects to record-keeping and budgeting. "I want them to get a feel for things and make decisions on their own so they can build their confidence," Wooten says.

One of Wooten's assistants is his son, Jared, who grew up working at Cedar Ridge and elected to follow in his father's footsteps. He says his dad is his mentor.

"I had always dreamed of being an assistant for my father," Jared says. "Like so many who came before me, I wanted to work and learn from the best, and strive to make my dad proud." ■

Mike Wooten

Certified superintendent of Cedar Ridge CC in Broken Arrow, Okla.

