

Shades Of Green

OPINION

Thirty-two years ago, I pulled onto the Turfgrass Turnpike and started a journey that has taken me from Miami to Disney World to the D.E.P. offices in Tallahassee, Fla.

I've chased more mole crickets, attended more board and committee meetings, and written more words about superintendent life than I care to count, but I wouldn't take back one minute.

I turned 60 on Nov. 19 and while that may seem ancient to the under-40 crowd, it seems to me to be a good age (speed) on this stretch of the road. Traveling at a mile a minute is plenty fast considering gas was 16 cents per gallon when I started out. But the wise traveler knows when to speed up or slow down depending on the conditions. It saddens me to see some of my fellow travelers forced to take the exit ramp before they've completed their journeys.

When I was born, the GCSAA was 16 years old, and 16 years later I set foot on a Robert Trent Jones golf course under construction on an old tomato field near Tampa, Fla. My first job was following a dump truck down the rough-shaped fairway heaving chunks of limestone into the back of the truck.

Twenty of us, shoulder to shoulder, shook out the shredded and bagged sprigs by hand to plant the course wall to wall. Once the course opened, a four-man crew walked the holes handraking the bunkers, not because it was chic, but because there were no mechanical rakes or utility vehicles at the time. The two guys who hand-mowed greens hauled the mowers around in a pick-up truck and walked them down a plank off the tailgate.

The fairways and roughs were mowed with tractor-pulled five-gang units and only the most mature adults drove the tractors (although one adult, J.B. managed to run over an artesian wellhead). I got a chance to move the sprinklers from quick coupler to quick coupler during grow-in on several greens and fairways because of the state-of-the-art manual irrigation system.

I took a 10-year detour after that early introduction to golf and majored in geology,

Driving 60 on the Turfgrass Turnpike

BY JOEL JACKSON



I'VE CHASED MORE
MOLE CRICKETS
AND WRITTEN
MORE WORDS THAN
I'D CARE TO COUNT,
BUT I WOULDN'T
TAKE BACK ONE
MINUTE

served in the Coast Guard, pursued a masters degree and taught eighth grade science.

I'm glad I knew those early days, so that I could appreciate the changes in course management operations when I got back into the business full time in 1971. Now I wonder how far the younger guys will take computers, global positioning systems, infrared cameras and lasers. I'm sure everybody was happy to trade in those 2-pound walkie-talkies for 6-ounce cell phones. Isn't technology something?

But before we fall all over our DVDs and Internet Web sites, just remember that some things never change. It still takes a good work ethic and basic agronomy to make a healthy turfgrass plant, and a pound of manure still smells the same whether you spread it or say it.

My journey to 60 has had some bumpy roads, and usually shortcuts didn't really save time in the long run. If I learned any lessons along the way, it's for the older members of our profession to stay current and to embrace change. For the younger folks waiting in the merge lanes, I recommend learning patience, and developing an ability to appreciate the history and progress of the industry.

The surest way to accomplish both of those goals is to actively participate in your local and national associations. The rewards in knowledge and friendships are enormous. Young or old, age should not be a barrier to service or success. I see the speed limit is up to 65. See you down the road, and drive carefully.

Joel Jackson, CGCS, retired from Disney's golf division in 1997 and is director of communications for the Florida GCSA. He was recently named one of GCSAA's 2002 Distinguished Service Award Winners.