

# Shades Of Green

■ OPINION

**I**f you know anything about golf lore, then you know Old Tom Morris has been heralded as the progenitor of the modern golf course superintendent. He was a man of many talents and responsibilities: greenkeeper, golf professional, club maker and winner of the British Open. He was a true Renaissance man in his time.

Today's superintendents are no less versatile, but the hats they wear are not as romantic as Old Tom's. Today's greenkeepers in America are superintendents, whatever that means. Some superintendents might construct a golf club from a Golfsmith kit, but they most likely are constructing budgets as businessmen.

There are only a few golf professional/superintendents, and I'm not sure which hat they wore first, but we do have a fair number of superintendents who play a respectable game of golf. In fact, many played on college golf teams, but they astutely realized they would be more successful "going low" as a pro with height of cut instead of strokes under par. Capturing the national association's golf championship is their British Open, but they are just as versatile as ever.

Today's superintendent is most often the go-to person at a facility. The good ones have a knack for solving problems, and their world is one of constant change that includes club leadership, the labor force, laws, regulations and fickle economies.

This juggling act is no less impressive than Old Tom's, even if today's duties smack of MBA lexicon, like leader, motivator, communicator, trainer or coach. There are the core disciplines that go without saying: agronomy, business and environmental stewardship. If Old Tom was a jack-of-all-trades, his modern counterpart is master of his many domains.

Old Tom was a pioneer of golf course maintenance. He began a methodical, reasoned approach to managing the golf course, however crude it might seem by modern standards. Today, the products, equipment and methods are the result of high-tech research and development, but the basic concepts remain rooted in sound nutrition and cultural practices — we just have more choices of how to get there.

Modern superintendents have traded in

## A Legacy of Respect, Esteem

BY JOEL JACKSON



OLD TOM'S  
PROFESSIONALISM  
AND DEDICATION  
FLOURISHES WITH  
HIS SUCCESSORS

Old Tom's tweed coat for cotton pique polo shirts. Old Tom seemed so formal compared to our casual approach to the work environment. We hold to vestiges of the formality by requiring sport coats at some of our meetings and conferences. Some scoff or deride this nod to formality, but nothing says that we are serious and honor golf's traditions more clearly than a room full of people dressed for the part. Today we call it image. Old Tom called it the uniform of the day.

For all of his accomplishments, Old Tom was still a victim of the social class system dominant in his day. Thanks to the dedicated association service of many golf course superintendents and the growth and development of the GCSAA, those barriers have been removed. Today, it's pretty common to see superintendents revered for their skills, professionalism and dedication to the art and science of golf course management.

The sense of urgency in today's world makes the romance of Old Tom's era hard to digest, and longing for the good old days doesn't seem to have much relevance, except for perhaps modeling Old Tom's dedication to the game of golf. If superintendents consider their positions only as a means to an end or just a paycheck, then they are sadly mistaken and in the wrong profession.

Maverick personalities and career challenges can be found in every profession. Your road might have many detours before you reach your destination. Rejoice, do not despair. You come from good stock. You are all sons and daughters of Old Tom.

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