

I arrived in Minneapolis looking forward to an interview with Scott Kinkead, executive vice president of Turfco. The company is celebrating its 50th year in the industry, and Scott and I were able to meet for a quick beer the evening before the interview.

He mentioned that he didn't expect his father, John Kinkead, to make it out for the interview. I told Scott that I understood.

But when I pulled up my rental car to the Turfco parking lot in Blaine, Minn., out hopped Mr. John Kinkead, 81 years young. What a pleasant surprise.

Turfco may be celebrating 50 years in the industry – see my feature on the company on page 32 for the full story – but the Kinkead family has been in the turf business for much, much longer. John's father, Robert Stanard Kinkead, created National Mower in 1919. National Mower created some of the first rough mowers for this industry.

Before the interview on Turfco started, John started telling me about the history of this great magazine that I recently inherited.

"You know, Herb Graffis was an interesting man," John told me, referring to the person responsible for creating *Golfdom* in 1927. "He was a smart man."

And my history lesson began. A lot of it was "off the record" — stories about the players in the industry 50 years ago. He started out in sales for National Mower, and was eyewitness to the growth of the golf maintenance industry over the last 60 years. John jokes that he was only two years old when he first got involved in the family business.

"You know, this industry, for a long time, was recession-proof," John told me. "It was always steady, until one day it became unsustainable. And then we all had to get back to work!"

John talked about the days when the GCSAA conference and show were in hotel ballrooms. He told me that there was a time when salespeople from competing companies used to ride together to make calls to golf courses.

The evolution of topdressing was interesting. The fact that topdressing originally was done by a laborer with a shovel made sense to me. But

A History Lesson from Turfco

BY SETH JONES



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the evolution of topdressing is quite the tale.

Initially, topdressing was something that superintendents did maybe twice a year after aeration, and only on greens. As time progressed and knowledge of the agronomic benefits of topdressing grew, the desire to do it more often and more effectively increased.

But when superintendents wanted to topdress as often as every 10 days, both light and frequent, the company knew they had to create an entirely new topdresser. The need for larger capacities that could topdress wider areas grew. What started with the greens progressed to the tees then to approaches and all the way to fairway topdressing.

Through innovation, the company combined spinning topdressing with electronic controls. A superintendent could topdress greens, tees and approaches on the fly at the touch of a button. The days of the laborer with the shovel were long forgotten.

Scott told me privately that his dad is sometimes too humble... that he won't take credit for many of the innovations he's responsible for in the industry. This humility was apparent, as there seemed to be a few times when John would suddenly downplay his own role in the story.

As my history lesson was wrapping up, I looked at John and Scott and thought to myself that in that one room, we had almost 100 years of experience in the golf industry. John accounted for 60 percent of those years, while I accounted for just a little over 10 percent.

It's times like these that I realize that my window to this industry is a small one. I'm fortunate that people like John pull back the blinds for me every once in a while.

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