



TURF PROFESSIONALS MEETING — 1986

A singular event. Once in a lifetime opportunity. Unbelievable. Fantastic! A happening.

Worn out and trite phrases, these are. But all fall short in describing the three and one-half days I spent in Minneapolis as a guest of the Toro Company attending their first ever Turf Professionals Meeting. I'm up to my knees in superlatives trying to explain what a wonderful and educational time it was. It will be a tough act for them, or anyone else, to follow. It approached perfection in its organization and content, and I'm grateful to Ed Devinger for inviting me to participate.

The Toro Turf Professionals Club got off to an inauspicious beginning. It was scheduled for February 1985 and I was ready to go. The weather forecast wasn't real good for the departure day, but it never is for Wisconsin, Minnesota and the rest of the upper midwest in the dead of winter. When I left home for the Dane County airport the snow was just beginning to fall. By the time I got there you could barely see beyond the hood of the car. Flights to and from Minneapolis were cancelled and not long after I arrived, the airport in Madison was also closed. It took me over two hours to make the 15 minute trip back home. By the end of the storm the Twin Cities had received over 20 inches of snow and guys going there for the Toro program were stranded in airports all over the country. For the poor souls who had gotten to Minneapolis it was another two days getting out and back home. The event was cancelled and rescheduled for the first week of **May** 1986. I'm sure the Toro staff was frustrated, but they must have spent the extra time planning for this year's meeting.

What made this such a special occasion? I guess, when I look back in retrospect, it was the

chance to get to know everything and nearly everyone connected with Toro's commercial business. It may have been a greater revelation to me than others because I hadn't been in their facilities in about ten years and had these previous visits as references. In 1973 I was there for a week-long service school. Then, in 1976 while attending the GCSAA Conference in Minneapolis, I took advantage of an offer to tour the plant again. Boy, have things changed! No longer is the Lyndale Avenue plant what we think of as a typical American factory — noisy, dirty and congested. The plant, right in the middle of a residential area, could almost be missed unless you were looking for it. The neat, clean and well-landscaped exterior gives a hint of what to expect on the inside. A lot of the actual manufacturing and assembly that I recall from previous visits is gone. Offices have expanded. Testing, research and development, and engineering are there. Some stamping, boring, welding, reel manufacture and individual piece-making remain. It is a quieter, cleaner and better organized place than the one I recall. The attitude within the walls is upbeat. People are smiling.

We also visited two other Toro facilities during our stay. The trip to Tomah inspired the "Made In Wisconsin" feature for this issue. The other operation we spent time in was their parts warehouse. I'm incapable of describing the scope and size of this aspect of the company — physical size, inventory and commitment. You really have to see it to believe it — words would lead you to accuse me of exaggeration. What Dick Hartgarten, Dayle Mason and Dan Sabie have set up in this enormous, cavernous parts depot is impressive. They took time to explain goals and accomplishments of their parts

business — audit procedures, fill rates, ship times and back order response time. They also have developed a direct ship and emergency order program that will please any Golf Course Superintendent depending on Toro for parts. Distributor participation options are available and they have indeed responded to the rise of the "will fit" businesses. Pricing policy, I'm convinced, is a concern they have recognized and responded to.

The agenda included opportunities to meet and mix with Toro executives, including Ken Melrose, their very young (mid-forties) president. John Szafranski, vice-president of the commercial division (formerly the turf division) and his boss, Ken Larson, led the way with Melrose in bringing Toro back from their bad years in the 1980 — 1982 period. Henry Tetzlaff, an engineer and the director of new commercial products, told of his staff of 38 engineers and designers, 30 technical and mechanical draftsmen, and spent time explaining Dana Lonn's operation of the CAE, CAD and CAM computers (computer aided engineering, design and manufacturing). Dana is out front in the use of computers in developing better products for turf maintenance — a real whiz kid!

Dr. Jim Watson was with us on a couple of occasions. He is a key person for Toro, I think, because of the depth of his understanding of the needs of the golf turf industry. Pleasant, easy-to-talk-to and very much down to earth, the good professor is. We all enjoyed time for some one-on-one conversation with him. And an old friend of Wisconsin Golf Course Superintendents, Bob Emmerich, who has been moved into a top management position, was there. He's commuting from his home in Milwaukee.

Maybe I'm saving the best until last. Rich Dillon, Toro's director of sales for the commercial division, was a most gracious host and made all of us feel comfortable and welcome. More than anyone else, he made this meeting something special. I also got to meet and know Lee Holtz and Tom Dooley, gentlemen who work with

the Wisconsin golf course marketplace.

The group was not a large one — I think there were 31 Golf Course Superintendents in attendance. But every part of America was represented and I met some very interesting guys. In fact, I've no doubt ten years from now a couple of us will still be corresponding.

This is going to sound so hokey and corny you'll doubt its impact. I did, until I sensed it was a real attitude and feeling pervasive throughout the company. Ken Melrose brought it with his promotion to president and calls it "Pride In Excellence." You see the acronym everywhere. Outstanding work by an employee may get him, literally, a pie served up by the company president! But the attitude is what matters, and I saw this sincere pride everywhere, from the tidiness of the facilities to the smile on the faces of many hourly employees in the factories. It gave me a good feeling and I know they have a good thing going as a result of the PIE program.

Late in the afternoon of the last day we had a chance to listen to Dr. Don White, turfgrass specialist at the University of Minnesota. Don, who is an honorary member of the WGCSA and scheduled to address our meeting in Waupaca this summer, presented a lecture on his *Poa annua* breeding program, a research project that makes him the Don Quixote of the turfgrass academic community! It is very interesting work he's involved with and his slides showed some clear progress in his project.

I'm leaving out too much of what transpired — space limitations imposed by a stern editor! The meeting was memorable and so worthwhile for the reasons noted here, and many more besides. But I would be remiss if I did not mention the wonderfully lavish treatment we received — something few of us seldom had experienced. The rooms at the Bloomington Marriott were spacious and comfortable. The food was too good and there was too much of it. The camaraderie was evident almost immediately. And we travelled to Tomah on Amtrak — the first time in nearly thirty years I'd ridden on a train. The schedule was always on time, audio and visual materials were excellent, and the Toro logo

golf shirt fit! These people did everything right.

I envy the Wisconsin Golf Course Superintendent Ed Dev-

inger selects for next year's meeting. He's going to be one lucky guy!

Monroe S. Miller

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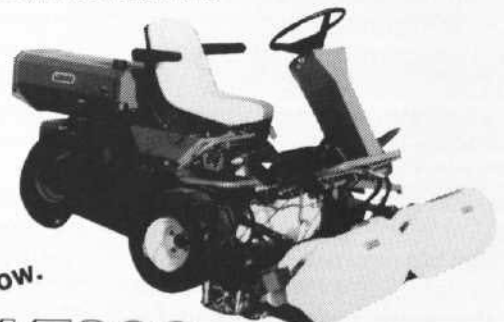
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