



A Local Hero

By Monroe S. Miller

I'm really happy for Gayle Worf. He's very deserving of our Distinguished Service Award. And I'm really proud that our professional association presented it to him. Friends as good as Gayle don't come along very often and it gives me a good feeling to see friends like him given the thanks they deserve.

It will probably embarrass him to read this, but for myself and a lot of other people I know, Gayle is a hero. He maybe could be best described as a "local hero", a phrase I've borrowed from the *New England Monthly* magazine. The NEM has a feature each September that honors people from their little corner of the world who "care passionately about what they do, who are accomplishing their goals with skill, perseverance, imagination and courage, and who are enriching their communities." That's Gayle Worf, all right.

This time in our history is a tough time for those of us who need heroes in our lives. We've gone from the times of my youth and "Profiles in Courage" to today when "A Hero Ain't Nothin' But A Sandwich", and these changes are troublesome. Our baseball idols are forced to leave the ball diamonds of America for months in drug treatment centers because they are spending much of their exorbitant salaries on nose candy. Our beloved Green Bay Packer heroes of yesteryear are gone and have been replaced by players who are spending time in court and jail for crimes from traffic violations to rape. The public perception of the Packers has never been lower. Where, oh where, are Bart and Vince and Ray and Jerry? We miss them much, not for the victories they gave us, but for the examples they set.

People and professions that used to inspire us have turned sour. Lawyers no longer are guardians of the law, but rather courtroom players who are using the judicial system in selfish, unfair and even insidious ways to serve their sometimes questionable purposes.

Doctors too often are viewed as money grubbers who are unfeeling and uncaring about their patients. The men of Wall Street no longer play by rules or observe laws, so we think, and instead we assume they are all "inside traders" who are cheating investors for personal riches.

Scott Fitzgerald wrote, "Show me a hero and I'll write a tragedy." Doesn't that bring to mind the rapid and total fall of Gary Hart? Politicians are distrusted almost completely. Look at the Iran-Contra hearings of recent months; seemingly good people resort to breaking the law. A Vietnam war hero, Oliver North, ends up being nothing more than an extortionist in the eyes of some Americans. And yet, others in our country are so desperate for a hero that North is faring very well in public opinion polls. General Secord was more interested in a huge profit than anything else. Former National Security Advisor Bud McFarlane was so busy trying to imitate Henry Kissinger that he missed the big picture completely.

Maybe the worst of all this sleaze has been the "Holy War" started by the filthy greed of Jim and Tammy Bakker. This morally bankrupt pair still sees nothing wrong about their life of excess at the expense of so many sincere and innocent believers who gave generously to them in the name of religion.

I asked my two oldest daughters, one a college freshman and the other a high school sophomore, who their heroes were. No reply. William Bennett, the Secretary of Education, reports that a recent survey of 1200 junior high school kids which asked the question, "Who is your hero?" had the most popular response of "None" or "Nobody". This is the age in life when heroes are the most important. At least it was for me.

It's all really very sad. I still feel that, fundamentally, we do need heroes. There is such a paucity of them in our society right now that too many people have taken to the paths of greed and

hypocrisy. Betrayal, deceit and avarice come too easily for too many too much of the time.

But then, in the midst of all of this, you remind yourself of those around you, people like Dr. Worf. He's given so much to us over the last twenty years that we nearly take him for granted. That's his humility speaking, loud and clear. He has made a singular commitment to our profession, I think, and then I find out the Wisconsin Arborists feel that way about him too. So do his colleagues in the Plant Pathology Department. So do his peers in Extension and in the CALS. So it is with other Pathologists from around the country. He has left a lasting impression on all groups his work touches.

Heroic credibility, it has been said, is found only in those who give of themselves, rather than for themselves. That seems to be the bottom line for Gayle Worf. The ideas and visions and values and challenges he has given to us and for us have, fittingly, put him in a class most only dream about. He has helped open up the possibility for the best in all of us in the golf course management profession.

This "Distinguished Service Award" presentation came at a good time for me. We are reminded of Gayle's hard-won professional skills and his hold to high standards when much else of what we read and hear is cynical and pessimistic. He has restored my faith in heroes and their idealism. I'll bet he has done the same for you.

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