



SURVEYING THE NEW PIN HOLDERS

By Monroe S. Miller

It was a pretty impressive sight at this year's WGCSA spring business meeting—four of our colleagues receiving their 25 year pins.

Such sights are becoming more and more rare in America as loyalties to a profession or an employer become a thing of the past for more and more of those in the employed ranks. I don't know what the actual statistics are, but I recall reading that an average worker will change professions four or more times during his or her career. Think about that in terms of earning recognition for being in the same profession for 25 years. Really, it is quite a feat. Given the "norm", the recipients would have to live to something around 125 years of age to finish out their other three careers!

Maybe this is really a lament on my part. Sons and grandsons in America often followed in the footsteps of their fathers and grandfathers. People used to work for the love of the work or for a respectable place in a community where they were comfortable. No more, for many people, I guess.

Does this mean that there will be fewer and fewer 25 year pin holders in the future? Maybe. But I think our profession might be one of the last to fall victim to this new wave in careers. Why? The work, for many of us, is simply too enjoyable and too rewarding. Oh, there will be shifts among clubs and courses. There might even be movement within the wide boundaries of the profession. But hasn't that always been true?

Anyway, I really respect the four gentlemen who stood before us at our meeting in Fond du Lac. In any times, what they have done is quite remarkable.

So, for a new twist to this feature, I only wanted to talk to Jeff Bottensek, Tom Harrison, Larry Karel and Wayne Otto, and ask them some questions only 25 year pin holders could answer. It was fun for me because the conversations were lengthy, sentimental and quite revealing.

Here are the results for you to savor.

1. How did you get interested in golf courses and golf turf management in the first place?

For each of the four, their interest was piqued by the actual experience of working on a course during their teen years. Tom Harrison worked for Peter Miller at Nakoma and Pete nurtured Tom's natural interest and aptitude. Jeff worked for Ron Gruenwald and credits him for showing the way down a career path. Larry worked for Deke DeCramer at Tuscumbia in Green Lake and fell in love with the work. Wayne Otto was a farm kid who lived in the Mequon area and decided on golf turf management as an alternative to farming because he didn't want to milk cows for the rest of his life but very much enjoyed the many and varied aspects of agriculture. Wayne also added that he pursued it as a career option because "it looked easy and he wanted to be able to ride around and talk smart!"

2. Trace your career path for us.

Larry attended the two year program at Penn State and started working at River View golf course in Appleton. He was there for six or seven years before he moved to Camelot Country Club for another six or seven years. He then took the position at Rock River C.C. in Waupun and after six years he moved to Whispering

Springs where he has been golf course superintendent for seven years. Larry seems to get an itch to move every six years or so!

Jeff also attended Penn State for two years and was hired at the Ridges where he worked for Gruenwald for two years. He moved to Country Club of Beloit and was the assistant to Fritz Reinhardt for two years. Waupaca Country Club called him, he accepted and stayed there as the golf course superintendent for 14 years before moving to his current position at Stevens Point C.C.

Wayne is the third of these four men to attend Penn State's two year program in turfgrass management. Like Larry Karel, he went to college after six months in the Army Reserve. Graduation led him to a course in Nebraska, and shortly after that, in 1967, he moved to his current position as golf course superintendent at Ozaukee Country Club.

Tom Harrison is the only of these three Wisconsin natives to attend the University of Wisconsin in Madison, but his interest was initially in engineering. He moved to four years of service in the U.S. Navy and returned to Madison as the assistant golf course superintendent at Maple Bluff Country Club in 1968. When Bill Eckert resigned his position in the mid-1970s, Tom was promoted

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as his replacement and has remained there since.

3. Tell us a little about the most dramatic changes you have seen in your 25 years as a WGCSA member.

Harrison was the quickest to answer this question, and he did so without the slightest bit of hesitation. "Television has greatly affected golf and led most golfers to want and demand what they see on the screen, too often without regard to inquiry about the cost." Tom has something there, I think.

Bottensek gave some thought to the question and then offered his opinion that the greatest changes have come in the equipment available to us. He added, in roundabout agreement with Harrison, that the demands have become greater and have resulted in the job being less fun than it used to be.

Karel echoed Bottensek's observations about equipment, adding that sophistication in irrigation technology was close behind. He added that he cannot these days believe the amount of disease pressure, especially when he thinks back 25 years and realizes there was very little then. He also noted that changes have included a return to basics and some time proven procedures.

Otto quickly answered that the biggest change has come in fairway management, adding that immediately after the introduction of the triplex greensmower in the late sixties and early seventies, Bob Brue (golf pro at Ozaukee at that time) commented that "someday you'll be using those machines to cut your fairways." Otto added that he told Brue "you're crazy." Otto also felt that green speed demands have nearly gotten out of hand over the years, pointing out that much of the other work on a golf course has become more and more detailed over the years.

4. Now that you have this significant accomplishment in hand, do you ever think of retirement?

"Never!" came the immediate reply from Wayne Otto. "I'll slow down to a lesser job on a course somewhere, but I likely won't ever leave golf."

"I still like to work," said Larry Karel. "I may slowly give up my responsibilities and go back to mowing fairways or setting cups for someone else."

"I'll probably die one a golf course," said Jeff Bottensek. "I may not be a golf course superintendent, but I will

be working on a golf course at least until I am 65. I have a thought in the back of my mind that I would sometime in my life like to work on a golf course out west. It would be a nice complement to my interest in hunting."

"Years like this year has been make me think a lot about my retirement," said Tom Harrison. "The pressure is too great when you have to deal with seasons like this one—winter injury, too much rain and too few nice days to keep golf members happy. But I will probably never fully retire. I want to work to keep active."

5. How have WGCSA members changed in 25 years?

There was a consensus among the four men that our members have become better educated. One veteran observed that he really feels they, as a group, are less dedicated and have taken the view that this is work and not a labor of love. It was noted that more of them now enter as a result of interest in golf in contrast to more historical paths they have followed. There also was near consensus that the WGCSA meetings are now too geared to golf. Years ago, the Wisconsin golf course superintendents held a meeting a NO golf was played. There might be a course tour, a meeting in the clubhouse or even in the shop, a lunch and then an easy trip home. Nowadays, if

there was no golf, no one would be in attendance, they predicted. One, who agreed that they are better educated, also pointed out that WGCSA members today are no more professional than they were years ago.

And, of course, Wayne noted that "they have all gotten younger!"

6. What changes have you seen in our relationship with the University of Wisconsin in Madison?

Near unanimity with this question—"better." All were thrilled with the Noer Research Facility and the prospect of lots of grass research coming from there. Bottensek even said he'd "recommend the place to my son!"

7. Would you do it all over again?

"YES!" was the enthusiastic reply from Jeff Bottensek.

"Yes, probably," came the answer from Larry Karel.

"Yes," was the more thoughtful response from Wayne Otto.

"Yes," was Tom Harrison's rather curt reply.

8. Would you recommend this career to someone else?

"YES!" was the enthusiastic answer from Jeff. Larry Karel said "yes, if there is an interest in agriculture." Tom Harrison responded that he would not recommend it as a career choice and stumbled a little before he responded

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in the affirmative. Wayne offered a "yes" response.

9. *Would you recommend it as a career choice for your son?*

"YES!" as the enthusiastic answer from Jeff Bottensek.

"Yes, but with words of caution," said Wayne Otto.

"No," said Tom Harrison.

"Yes," said Larry Karel.

10. *What has been your greatest satisfaction and your greatest frustration?*

Harrison: "I get a thrill from completing a success amateur tournament and I get frustrated by club politics."

Otto: "I am most frustrated by club politics and I am most satisfied by the fact that I still like to go to work."

Karel: "I am frustrated by changes in green committee personnel and resultant havoc, and I am most satisfied by the fact that this profession allows me to follow the seasons out of doors."

Bottensek: "I derive enormous satisfaction seeing people on my golf course enjoying themselves. I am frustrated by things out of my control—weather, budgets and sometimes employees."

I greatly enjoyed talking to these four perceptive, experienced and dedicated men and thank them for their openness. I hope that someday I will be able to wear that same pin on my lapel that they can now wear on theirs.

In the case of all four, it was a recognition well deserved. ♣

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