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# LATHAM'S LONG AND PRODUCTIVE CAREER IN WISCONSIN COMES TO AN END: *Some Reminiscing By A Few Of His Friends*

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## GOOD FRIENDS TO ALL

By Danny Quast

Jim and Lois Latham—good friends to all. We're going to miss them, and Lois' cornbread (the best!).

I've had sweet memories this morning thinking about my friendship with Jim and Lois over the past twenty-five years. It brought a smile to my face and laughter to us as I was telling some of the many stories to my wife Beverly. Let me share a few with you.

We need to establish the fact that Jim is the best "soils" person in the business. His knowledge of soil and soil conditions helped to bring Dr. James Madison, who spoke on sand topdressing, to our Symposium years ago. Jim had advocated this program and helped establish the technique. He worked closely with superintendents in finding the right material and, through his efforts, had a big part in establishing the best putting surfaces in the country.

Most stories stem from a trio—Jim, Wayne Otto, and myself... "The Good, The Bad, and the Ugly!"

Many years ago, while I was at Milwaukee Country Club, Jim was working for the Skunk Works (MMSD). The only fertilizer that had ever been used on Milwaukee Country Club fairways was Milorganite. I decided to supplement the Milorganite with potash. Discussing this with Wayne, I told him not to tell Latham - "it would break his heart." You guessed it. Otto spilled the beans. The next time I saw Wayne "The Squealer" Otto, he told me that Latham would probably never speak to me again and I should consider getting out of town until things cooled down!

Every time anyone of us got into trouble, Jim was the first person we called. Come to think of it, he still is! If he didn't know the answers, he knew where to find them.

I can remember being at the Country Club softball games (I think it was the year Milwaukee CC won). I had just installed my new irrigation



Danny Quast and Jim Latham at the 1994 Wisconsin Field Day.

system and the central didn't work. I had one, two, maybe three beers and was complaining to Jim about it. He went home so fired up he called friends in higher places. The next day I had not only one, but two centrals in my office. I still don't know, to this day, how he did that. He's an amazing guy!

There was a sign in my room at college that read "YOU HERE AGAIN? ANOTHER HOUR SHOT TO HELL." Usually on Saturday mornings, but anytime I wanted to find out what was happening, I would stop by Jim's office in Brown Deer. We would hash and rehash the world of turfgrass for the week or for however long I hadn't seen him. Until Lois showed up. I can still hear her... "Quast, OUT, OUT, OUT. Jim has to get some work done." I never did like that office; there wasn't even a back door!

When I came to Medinah, much work needed to be done and programs needed to be changed. We were getting ready for the U.S. Open. Jim was there for me with recommendations and support. He helped me

sell programs that were necessary for the betterment of Medinah. Jim has also helped many of my assistants obtain jobs which better their careers. I, like many, will be forever in his debt.

I know Jim and Lois will enjoy their retirement. If Beverly and I are among the missing and can't be found, we might just be down Texas way, visiting good friends and eating hot cornbread.

## A TIRELESS PROFESSIONAL

By Wayne Otto

Yes, there was a day when Jim Latham was young and not so well known as he is today. It was in Omaha, I believe in 1961, when I received a soil analysis report from the Milwaukee Sewerage Commission (that's where Milorganite came from in those days), and it was signed by Jim Latham. I knew O.J. Noer and Charley Wilson, but where did this Latham character come from? Back then I believed that everyone was immortal,

and that nobody would ever retire from anything.

It didn't take long to get to know Jim Latham. He spoke at our Nebraska conference and Harold Glissmann, whom I worked for during a very learned internship in Omaha, was the Milorganite distributor for that area. Harold would bring Latham to town to "ramrod" roundtable discussions with groups of area superintendents. Jim also came to town when we had turf problems during the "dreaded hot and humid" Nebraska summers.

After moving to Wisconsin in 1967, I really got to know Jim. We spent many hours talking about "grass" over a lot of beers, pizza and even "Black-Eyed Peas." We would always end up talking turf no matter what or where the event.

Jim was in charge of putting the Wisconsin Golf Turf Symposium together for many years. One of the all time great ones was in 1974 when he got Dr. John Madison from the University of California-Davis to give a presentation. He devoted the entire morning session of the first day of the Symposium to a discussion about using straight 100% sand for topdressing putting greens. That did much to change not only the lives of superintendents but the playability of a whole lot of golf courses. Other than some golf courses in California, no one in the northern tier of the U.S. was using straight sand for topdressing, so a few of us right here in southeastern Wisconsin were really the "guinea pigs" about 20 years ago. Consequently, good or bad or whatever, Jim had much to do with this pivotal event.

In September 1984, Steve Blendell and I were sitting in a hotel room eating pizza and listening to Stanley Zontek, our USGA agronomist, tell us that he was leaving the Great Lakes Region and moving to Philadelphia in the Mid-Atlantic Region. He said "you'll never guess who is going to take over this area after I leave." After a brief silence, as "Blender" and I were swallowing, Stanley told us that it was to be Jim Latham. We were both surprised and shocked at the same time. The decision was, in my estimation, an excellent one. I am firmly convinced that it would have been a huge mistake if the USGA had hired a "green horn" to replace Zontek. Jim was a first-class agronomist with a distinguished

career. So after taking a 25 year sabbatical to work with the city of Milwaukee—Milorganite Division—Jim Latham went back to work for the United States Golf Association. He has since done a tremendous job for the USGA.

We will all miss Jim, but we know that he will never retire from something that he loves so much.

## THE ROAD WARRIOR

*By Jim Snow*

From both a personal and professional standpoint, I'm awfully sorry to see Jim retire from the USGA Green Section. During the past ten years, Jim has brought a perspective to our staff that only 40 years of experience in the turf industry could build. From his days as a Green Section agronomist in the 1950s to his years with O.J. Noer and Charlie Wilson at the Milwaukee Sewerage Commission to the past decade as the Green Section's regional director in the Great Lakes, there isn't much that Jim hasn't seen. Most of our current staff are a generation younger than Jim, so that alone should indicate what a loss his retirement is to us.

One of the things that has kept our staff in awe of Jim is his attitude toward work and travel—he's an extremely hard worker and seems to thrive on travel. We kiddingly refer to him as our Road Warrior for his frequent journeys through the hinterlands of Minnesota, the Dakotas, Montana and Wyoming, visiting golf courses with nothing between them but hundreds of miles of pavement and lots of interesting scenery ("for the most part," he says). I think he enjoys it because it gives him lots of time to think about his favorite subject—TURF!

That's what is most remarkable about Jim Latham. After nearly 40 years of roaming the world looking at it and talking about it, there's nothing he'd rather do than get into a good discussion about turf. Of course, he knows a lot about it and has seen it in just about every condition imaginable, so he has lots to offer the conversation. And his enthusiasm is catching, too. The agronomists on our staff who have been fortunate enough to travel with Jim really appreciate the breadth of his knowledge and the enthusiasm with which he shares it.

You might ask how we can let someone with Jim's talent slip away when he clearly has so much yet to offer. Well, we're not! I'm pleased to say that Jim has accepted a seat on the USGA's Turfgrass Research Committee. So, although our staff is losing a highly respected associate with Jim's retirement, the Research Committee is gaining a seasoned veteran whose knowledge of the industry is matched only by his enthusiasm for the potential of the research program. How's that for a nice ending to the story!

## A STERLING CAREER

*By Monroe S. Miller*

It won't be the same in the golf turf business in Wisconsin next year. Jim Latham will retire at this year's end. Come January 1995, he and Lois will be relaxing in their retirement in Texas, not far from where they grew up.

Today, Jim Latham may well be the most savvy, experienced and well trained turf expert in the country. By way of his education at Texas A & M, training under O.J. Noer, and experience of 25 years with MMSD and more than a decade with the USGA, no one rivals this man's background. Therefore, who else could rightly claim the title?

I've enjoyed Jim's USGA Green Section visits to my course over the years and prospered from them. The scores of talks and lectures, from the Symposium to the Green Section regional conferences to our WGCSA monthly meetings, proved time and again that he is an articulate and accomplished speaker.

Despite being so close to retirement, there was Jim at our summer Field Day, taking pages of notes during the research tour and kicking tires during the morning hours. That tells a lot about this dedicated turf man.

And for an editor, there's nothing like a straight up, tell-it-like-it-is article from Jim Latham's pen. His writing for *The Green Section Record* and *The Grass Roots* were always the best.

It is pretty easy to answer the question "does Latham pass the Miller 'did he make a difference' test?" For everyone I have talked with, the answer is a loud and bold **YES.**

This is a guy we will solely miss. 🌿