



## A Tribute to the Head Greenkeeper

By Robert Trent Jones, Jr.

*Editor's Note: This tribute to those in the business of caring for the golf courses of the world was written by golf course architect R. T. Jones, Jr. following the GCSAA Conference in San Francisco in February. Some may have gotten his autograph while there. Jones is the designer of SentryWorld in Stevens Point and University Ridge outside of Madison. His sentimental thoughts about our profession appeared in READING THE GREEN, news notes from his design office, Volume 6, No. 1, April 1995. It appears here with permission.*

Those of us in the golf business know well what GCSAA means. It stands for the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America. These are the folks who truly make the game of golf enjoyable for all of us.

In those olden days when our great game was played almost exclusively on Scottish seaside links, these people who are now known as golf course superintendents, were then called "Head Greenkeepers." Not Greenskeepers, but Greenkeepers. You see, the old Scots refer to the golf course, the entire golf course, as the green. The Head Greenkeeper was responsible for maintaining the turf, cutting the greens and tees, and, generally, presenting the course for play. Actually much of the mowing in those days was done by the sheep...the fertilizing, too!

When irrigation was first used on golf courses, a few spigots were situated on the links from which long hoses were extended. With gears, powered by water pressure, the sprinklers would revolve, and these "watering machines" would actually pull themselves the length of a fairway. It was later that the "quick coupler" was introduced, but all of these sprinklers still had to be placed in position by hand, often in the dead of night.

Many of today's golf course superintendents started as "the night watering man", placing and moving sprinklers in the darkness, so as not to disturb play the following day. When you have the chance, ask one of these "night owls" about the adventures of night watering and the creatures which appear after the sun goes down. Reptiles of all kinds, raccoons, opossums, coyotes, bobcats and even mountain lions and bears in some locations, come out to play and provide entertainment for the lonely night watering man. Amorous teenagers are also encountered from time to time.

This is all a nostalgic look at our past and a little of the folklore as we used to know it in the ancient game of golf. It provides the foundation on which the golf course superintendent now operates. There is a grand and glorious history which substantiates the importance of our hard working people today.

We now have marvelous computerized systems with which to irrigate our courses and conserve water as never before. The superintendent now has remarkable machinery available to bring golf courses to a standard of maintenance

never before achieved. Where the preservation of the environment is concerned, we now ask the golf course superintendent to be the moral conscience of the game.

Whether it be a municipal course which attracts 100,000 players a year or an exclusive private club, every golfer expects the superintendent to make each round of golf pristine and perfect every time.

So let's take the occasion of the GCSAA's recent annual conference in San Francisco to say "thank you" to these wonderful folks who make the game so enjoyable for all of us. Our business is to design and build golf courses, and we take pride in the work we produce. But, our work would never be noticed nor appreciated in the least without the magical efforts of the old "Head Greenkeeper". Many thanks and much appreciation for your enormous contributions to the game and the professional and efficient way you do your jobs.

Golf is a living game, and it would be a short life indeed without you folks! 🌱

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