



OUR KIND OF GUY

By Monroe S. Miller

The Wisconsin Golf Course Superintendents Association has shown a lot of wisdom over its long history in the awarding of the Distinguished Service Award. From 1930 through our spring business meeting, it has been presented only ten times. The careful and sparing use of the DSA has made it very meaningful and significant. Most often, associations make similar awards every year, or even twice a year, and the effect is the dilution of its importance. Congratulations to us for exercising wisdom in this matter.

It was clear to everyone who stood to honor and applaud Wayne Kussow when he walked forward to receive the DSA on March 3rd that he understood what was happening to him. For me, it has been awhile since I have seen anyone so emotionally affected by an act of respect, which is what the DSA really is. I was looking through blurry eyes to take the photograph of Wayne and President Kienert, and I cleared my throat several times before I was able to smile and feel the pure joy of the moment.

Wayne had driven to Fond du Lac after his lecture in Soil Science 301 in the morning to give a 15-minute report on WGCSA funded research he is conducting at the Noer Facility. I was chuckling to myself while he was speaking, knowing what was going to occur shortly after.

I also smiled to myself as I watched him speak—the shock of now nearly white hair, neatly combed, the navy blue blazer and red tie and gray slacks he was wearing, and the glasses he now must wear most of the time. It was in stark contrast with how he looks when I usually see him.

The uniform of his work days as a professor and respected faculty member is a pair of Red Wing work boots, blue jeans, and a long sleeve shirt with the sleeves half rolled up. One look and you say, “he’s one of us!” It is no wonder we love him so much.

Dr. Kussow has been involved in our business for over ten years now; it doesn’t seem possible and begs the question “where has the time gone?” Wisconsin alums, individually and collectively, owe Professor Jim Love much for many reasons. As I reflect back, his most important contribution to us, alums and all others, in the golf course business may be his gentle persuasion that interested Wayne in making a change in his career emphasis. Love’s legacy to us may end up being Wayne Kussow.

If you want to know, really know, about a man, ask the people he works with. I did that when I learned Dr. Love was trying to arrange for his position to be assumed by Kussow. One of the toughest faculty members in the Soil Science Department at that time was Professor C.B. Tanner. He was an exceptionally bright man—a member of the National Academy of Science—and respected the world around. He worked constantly and was demanding of grad students and colleagues. I asked him about Kussow, thinking if anyone would give it to me straight, Dr. Tanner would be the one.

And he did. The man was absolutely effusive in his praise of Wayne. He had great respect for his intellect and his talent, telling me “he’s one of the best plant physiologists on the campus.” Considering the source, that was all I needed to hear. I knew Wayne would be excellent for us.

Over the intervening years, I’ve seen and learned more about him, all of it good. It has been amazing, at an institution that drives on basic research, to see a full professor so willing and happy to engage undergraduate students. He is a premier advisor who has won the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences Advising Award. Most students at the Madison campus aren’t lucky enough to have access to an advisor who is

actually a professor—my two oldest daughters will testify to that. Not only does Dr. Kussow have an open door at all times—kids like to chit chat and socialize with him—but he lays before them their program requirements, options and degree needs so they can do serious planning. It is a rare dedication to undergraduates that he has.

Another thing about the turf doc I noticed early on was his work ethic. If I want to speak to him or ask some advice or harass him about his GRASS ROOTS article, I’ll call him at 6:00 a.m. or 6:30 a.m. and he will be in his office. Or, on a weekend drive past the Noer Facility, you often will see him working, by himself or maybe with a grad student, in the field, doing outdoor research on everything from runoff studies to root-zone amendments for USGA Green Section specs.

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The men who have had him as a major professor in graduate school reveal more about Wayne than most of us would see. What they will tell you about is his keen mind in defining problems, designing experiments that get to the heart of those problems, and analyzing data to see what it all means. It seems his ability to sort through numbers and figure out what they are saying may be one of his greatest strengths. "He is," they'll plainly say, "an excellent scientist." And they all greatly appreciate their time with him.

As I have gotten to know Wayne better over the years and come to call him a good friend, my appreciation for his sense of humor always comes to mind. He is lucky to be able to laugh at the world around him and at himself, and the two of us can tell "farmer jokes" until the cows come home, so to speak. And no one will laugh harder or tell more Polish jokes than this former farm kid from northeast Wisconsin. I think you call this humility—he has generous

portions of it—and it is one more thing we like so much about him.

During difficult times in the turf program—faculty retirements, position changes, delays in hiring, new faculty and all that—the glue that held everything together has been Wayne Kussow. Again, we may never really know of the unselfish acts he committed on our behalf; he would never tell anyone about them. One I am aware of that was particularly generous involved his passing on a request for funding his research work so more money would be available for a new faculty member. Nobody does those kinds of things anymore, except for a rare bird like Wayne Kussow. And how about the very day of his award—he delayed the issuance of an already approved grant of \$10,000 because he did not need it yet. Honesty—that is what he's about. Rather than spend the money on equipment or computers or travel to a place like the GCSAA conference, he put the good of the group first. It was a perfect example of why we honored him with the DSA.

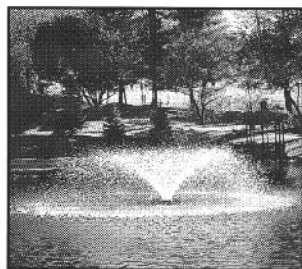
I am convinced if you cast about, looking for a professor who embodies the very essence of "The Wisconsin Idea" you will choose Wayne. He doesn't hesitate in exercising his belief that the borders of the state are the boundaries of the Madison campus. He's a Wisconsin guy, through and through.

The hot topic of late in the biological sciences has been the successful cloning of a sheep by Scottish scientists. Of course the reaction from everywhere you read anticipates the worst, fearing the consequences of cloning a human. That is a legitimate concern—unless—they clone Wayne Kussow! What could be better?!

For a man who will never blow his own horn, who is perfectly satisfied to labor in our behalf with some anonymity, our Distinguished Service Award was very meaningful. Now he knows how much we think about him. I hope the emotion he felt on March 3, 1997 lasts until he retires.

"Thanks, Doc, for everything. From all of us. You're our kind of guy." 🍷

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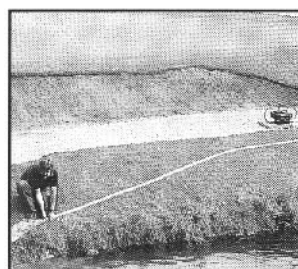
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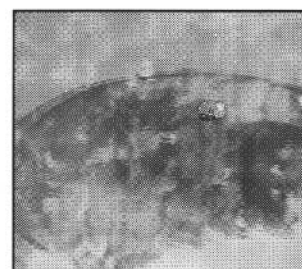
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