



THE WISCONSIN IDEA

By Monroe S. Miller

I received the following note from Gary Tanko in early September. Gary has been the golf course superintendent at SentryWorld for a lot of years now, and he is a member of the WGCSA board of directors. His note went like this:

9/8/97

Hi Monroe,

I just thought you may want this picture. Dr. Maxwell and his wife are looking at our snaps in the photo. We had some disease problems that were a big concern and it took some lab tests to figure them out. Dr. Maxwell was very helpful with this; he is a good person to work with. His wife really enjoyed coming to SentryWorld to look at the flowers.

G. T.

It occurred to me that Gary's note and the obvious gratitude he felt for Dr. Maxwell's help was a perfect example of The Wisconsin Idea at work for a Wisconsin golf course superintendent.

The Wisconsin Idea is a phrase that was coined early in the 1900s by a professor of Political Science at the University of Wisconsin in Madison, Dr. Charles McCarthy. McCarthy was also director of the Legislative Reference Library in the Legislature. Our state back then was passing a lot of laws and programs that were beneficial and helpful to her citizens—workman's comp, for example. Education received a lot of attention and there was an attitude by lawmakers and some leaders that cultural and educational opportunities should be available and "extended" to the people of Wisconsin. Dr. McCarthy worked for the establishment of University Extension and in 1907 the state legislature greatly expanded UW Extension (it had actually been established in 1885).

Dr. Charles R. Van Hise was president of the University at that time.

He was a world renowned geologist, but will likely be remembered mostly for his attitude about educational democracy. His leadership advanced the principle of University service and help to the people who desired it.

Is there a Wisconsin citizen who doesn't know about Robert M. LaFollette, Sr.? LaFollette was our governor in these years, and through his youth and early adulthood he developed a concern for the citizens of the state. With Van Hise (a classmate of his at the UW) and McCarthy, LaFollette played a critical role in defining what became known then, and still is today, as The Wisconsin Idea.

The best description of The Wisconsin Idea I've read was written by E.E. Slossan in 1910; it applies today just as well. "It is impossible," he wrote, "to ascertain the size and the location of the University of Wisconsin. The most one can say is that the headquarters of the institution is at the city of Madison and that the campus has an area of about 56,000 square miles." Someone else described The Wisconsin Idea by



Dr. Doug Maxwell and his lovely wife Martha check on plant diseases in a SentryWorld flower bed.

saying the University was kind of a consulting engineer in the public life of the state." I can relate to that, too.

A little more history: the University had developed a loyalty among agriculturists in 1890 when Professor Stephen Moulton Babcock developed an easy, quick and accurate way to determine the fat content of milk. It was extremely useful and Wisconsin



"THE GROUNDS CREW HERE REALLY STINKS. MOST OF THE TIME I HAVE TO SHOVEL MY OWN GREENS."

agriculture grew exponentially as a result of the UW helping a group of its citizens. Another example of how the UW won support of citizens happened in the mid-1890s. Professor Harry Russell, a bacteriologist in the College of Ag, was asked by a pea canner if he could figure out why tin cans of vegetables would explode and, worse, why there were too many cases of food poisoning. Russell went to the canning factory, studied the canning process, identified a bacteria that was producing a gas, determined how much heat was required to kill the organisms, and advanced the canning industry in Wisconsin. We are still one of the largest vegetable canners in the country. It was classic—a professor helping solve a problem of citizens, just like Dr. Maxwell's help for Gary Tanko. In fact, Dr. Maxwell's office in the Department of Plant Pathology is located in Russell Labs, named after the same Harry Russell.

I was a beneficiary of The Wisconsin Idea at a very young age. Like many thousands of other rural kids in Wisconsin I attended a one-

room school. It's hard to believe that a guy as young (!) as I am had such an educational experience—one teacher teaching all subjects to kids in all grades in a single classroom, grades one through eight. Once a week we listened to WHA radio, broadcasting from the University of Wisconsin campus in Madison, to get some training in music. One-room school teachers gave us the basics; extras were taught by Wisconsin professors over the radio. It was The Wisconsin Idea in action.

Another experience came at an early age. Most country kids belonged to a 4-H club; I was no different. Most counties had a 4-H agent—a staff person in UW Extension. And when I showed a Guernsey calf at the Fennimore Community 4-H Fair, a faculty from the UW judged the animals. It was my first exposure to a prof; who could forget it? It was The Wisconsin Idea at work.

Like most of you, I've experienced much help from the UW-Madison and UW Extension as a golf course superintendent. The turf-

grass extension meetings, the Turf EXPO, meetings like our October WGCSPA gathering when Dr. John Stier came to visit with us, visits from Gayle Worf to help with golf course disease problems, Extension bulletins, Grass Roots articles written by faculty, Gregos' and Stier's visits to Lambeau Field, Rossi and Kussow giving a seminar on winter injury to club officials from all the courses in town, etc., etc.

The Wisconsin Idea obviously has been widely copied and that is good. And it has several other and different meanings, but the most enduring one for me has been the one that has connected Wisconsin golf course superintendents to the applied problem solving, technical assistance and educational abilities and talents of the University of Wisconsin. It gives us access to education and research, and that in turn improves golf in Wisconsin. That is the very fabric of The Wisconsin Idea. It has given us a broader and better working world.

Just ask Gary Tanko. 🌿

Thank You For A Great First Year ProGreen Plus LLC

A WISCONSIN COMPANY

HAPPY HOLIDAYS TO OLD FRIENDS, NEW FRIENDS, AND THOSE WHOSE TRUST WE HOPE TO EARN

CALL...JORDAN SENSIBAR

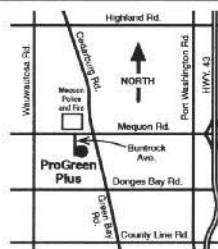
GOLF COURSE SALES MANAGER

CAR... 414 418-9101 • PAGER... 414 318-4280

TOLL FREE... 1-888-PRO-GREEN

7 7 6 - 4 7 3 3

MEQUON



11020 Buntrock Ave.
242-9100
Fax: (414) 242-2117

NEW BERLIN



16600 W. Rogers Dr.
789-9550
Fax: (414) 789-9509

