



## IMAGE

By Monroe S. Miller

Sandy Noltner sent me the card shown here for my birthday this past summer. I was flattered that she took the time to make it for me; I plan on saving it among things important to me. Sandy is just starting kindergarten, and her Dad has been the equipment manager at our club for over twenty years.

Innocence and honesty are two things that make children such a pleasure to have and to be around. They tell it like they see it, and in Sandy's crayon drawing she sees me mowing a green behind a Toro walking greensmower. Talk about noticing the details!

Like everybody else, it seems we are closely identified by what we do in this life—for work and career. Doctors are shown with stethoscopes, bankers with money bags, lawyers with the scale of justice (and money bags!), farmers with a pitch-

fork, and accountants with a sharp pencil.

So, what about us? Usually we are portrayed with a golf club, and it is a misrepresentation. Sandy is much closer to the mark; leave it to a child to get it right.

Image is important in any career, maybe even more so in ours. It seems for many of the 25 years I have been a golf course superintendent in Wisconsin I have expended a lot of energy in trying to overcome false and negative images of us and attempting to convey an accurate picture of the majority of golf course superintendents.

A highlight for me was years ago when I was an officer of the WGCSA. We had a monthly meeting at the Nakoma Golf Club here in town. There was a big turnout—nearly a hundred for dinner—and the club had a dining room dress code that


required a coat and tie. All respected the code except one, and he had a tie and golf sweater on. Dr. David Cookson, one of the all-time best leaders of golf in Wisconsin, was our guest speaker. After the meeting he said to me something like, "what a great audience. You couldn't tell you guys from a group of bankers or accountants."

Dr. Cookson was saying two things: his image of us as a profession was like that of many golf player and a lot of the public. And he was also admitting he was wrong and likely his impression of us may well have changed for all time. It was a big victory for me.

Frankly, one big reason I have edited *The Grass Roots* for 14 years and written an untold number of articles for it, a bigger job than anyone other than Cheryl Miller realizes, is a commitment to show the outside world what we do, who we are and generally portray all of us and our profession in an accurate light. I flatter myself when I say I believe it has helped.



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You are, rightly or wrongly, closely associated with what you do, and what we do is exciting, exacting and difficult work. The world needs to know that.

Unfortunately, it's a tough battle to tell the story. We are still fighting the 'Rodney Dangerfield Syndrome'. That miserable, albeit funny, movie has made the battle even more difficult and protracted. The image too many have is purely Bill Murray—unshaven face, big belly, dirty clothes, and all that. Time, fortunately, is on our side, and the movie "Caddyshack" will someday be forgotten.

And let's face it—there will always be golf players who reduce our responsibilities to no more than cutting grass.

But we are making progress. Education is part of it, both continuing education for established superintendents and college for those who aspire a place among us. The product we turn out is another part of it—quality playing conditions on golf courses have become the rule rather than the exception. And individual efforts by each of us at his own course makes the most difference and is most important of all. Communication, we have all learned, is the key. Intelligent and straightforward dealings with players, one on one, green committees and boards of directors all add to the image of a dedicated and knowledgeable professional.

GCSAA has weighed in; some things they've done have been helpful; others are insignificant; a few are exaggerations.

The best way to portray us is to portray us as we are. We are not (90% or more) a coat and tie crowd. We do not, I'd guess to almost the same percentages, dress like the golf pro, either. The latest "for sale to the highest bidder" episode in GCSAA is the superintendent golf shoe deal with Etonic. Forsaking the temptation to comment editorially, I will say they'd have served us better to offer a member "benefit" with GCSAA logo work boots, say Red Wings or Wolverines. The reality is that most of us still wear work boots, out of either choice or necessity.

A clean shirt, pair of khakis and Red Wings do not offer up a negative image. Put those on a good golf course superintendent and he is still a good golf course superintendent.

Put a \$75 Italian golf shirt, a \$100 pair of golf slacks and a \$75 pair of Etonic GCSAA golf shoes on an idiot and he is still an idiot. Fraudulent portraits are good intentions run amuck and are every bit as bad as that image of the greenskeeper from Bushwood CC.

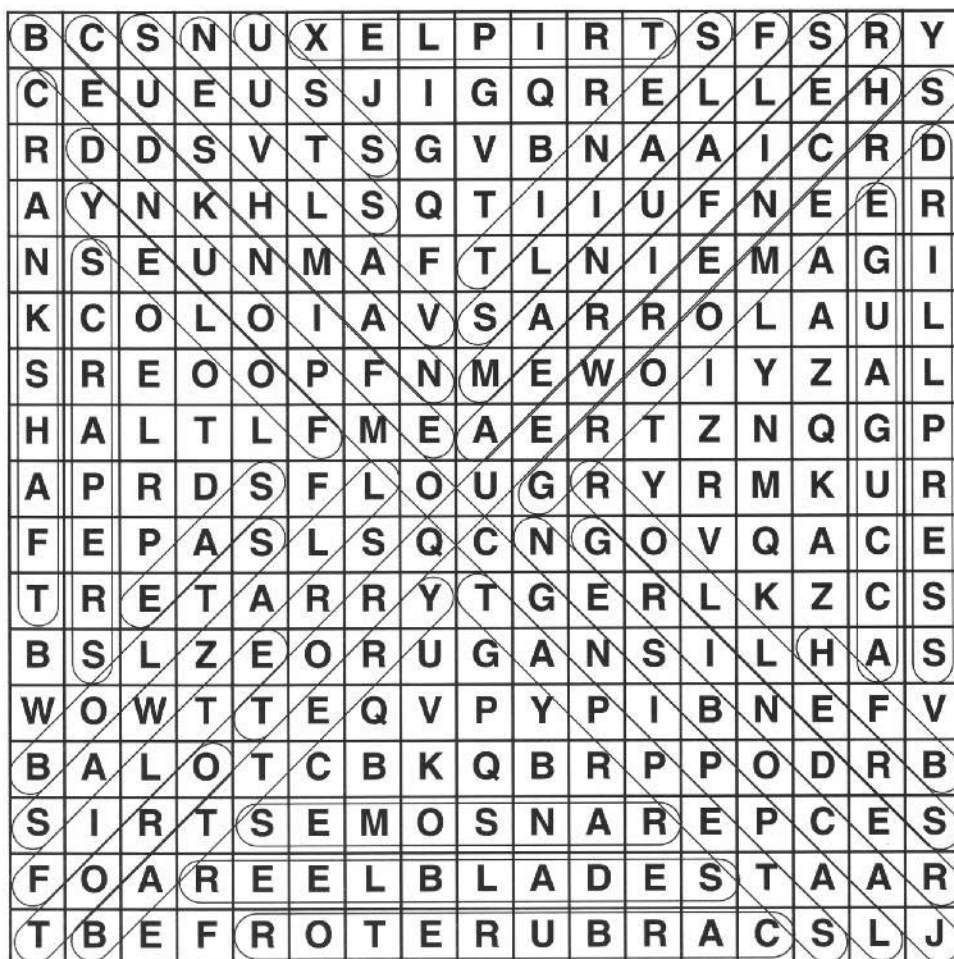
Which brings me back to Sandy's artwork. You can, if you choose, mow greens in the morning, lay sod with your crew the rest of the work

day, and attend a formal board of directors' dinner and meeting in the evening and still be viewed as the consummate professional. Each of those tasks is an honorable part of our business. In the end, what has and probably always will matter most is the substance of the person and the quality of his work. They are the well of respect.

To me, that is the way it should be. 🍷

(Answers to wordsearch and cryptogram from page 15)

## MECHANICAL GALA



## CRYPTOKEY WITH THE WORDSEARCH KEY

*The mystery puzzler is:*

**Dave Noltner, Equipment Manager, Blackhawk Country Club**