

USGA

What It Was Like to Receive the USGA Green Section Award

By Monroe S. Miller, Golf Course Superintendent, Blackhawk Country Club

It is pretty hard to describe the indescribable, which is exactly what receiving the 2004 Green Section Award was like. I am still having to pinch myself every once in awhile to make sure I am not in a dream.

Like most normal people, I have never gone about my golf course business with the thought in my mind, "what award might I get for this?" Those thoughts have never occurred to me, which is the obvious reason for my surprise when Jim Snow called in late December to tell me the news.

In fact, when Jim called my shop I assumed he was calling about his visit to Wisconsin to speak at our Turfgrass Expo. I was babbling on about travel arrangements when he politely interrupted me to say he **wasn't** calling about a ride from the airport. The total surprise and shock has only amplified the experience for me over the past couple of months.

I must admit to some pretty overwhelming emotions after Jim's call. I went for a long walk on the golf course to try to come to grips with what had just happened. It was cold, but there was no snow and I covered quite a distance in the 45 minutes I was outside. The shock didn't go away. I called Cheryl but she wasn't real clear about what I was telling her. I think I told the guys on our crew then, but I am not sure. Other than that, I pretty much kept it to myself.

I have talked to a lot of very nice USGA people in the past months, and the first of them was Pete Kowalski. Pete has something to do with the USGA website and called (and e-mailed) me a number of times while writing a brief story. He was looking for a picture and since I am the one usually taking the pictures, I didn't have one. Cheryl found a photo of Herbert Warren Wind and me that was taken last fall. Pete cropped it and that was the picture on the USGA website. It was after that when Jim Snow suggested I have a professional photographer take one for me, which I did.

When their announcement was put on the USGA website, the fun really began. Rob Hernandez must have seen it and wrote up a brief blurb in the Wisconsin State Journal. More people than I realize check the USGA site and within a day I started receiving e-mails and notes, phone calls and letters, and some wonderful people even visited our shop. I heard from Blackhawk members, lots and lots of my great colleagues from Wisconsin, former employees, and quite a number of golf course superintendents

from out-of-state I didn't know. People in the Wisconsin golf community contacted me, and I received a cool caricature from Gene Haas. They were all very nice and I saved every one of them.

The next wave was a number of telephone calls from people in the golf and golf course media. I answered tons of questions in January and mostly the reporters were accurate but overly flattering. The most uncomfortable thing for me to deal with has been The Grass Roots. My preference was to say nothing since it seemed everyone knew. But some gentle persuasion by Dave Brandenburg and Marc Davison moved me to do otherwise. The first was to experience the interview process with Lori Bocher like so many of you have, and secondly, I agreed to let Jenny Samerdyke do a cover with Danny Quast and me. Dan, of course, received the GCSAA Distinguished Award. Dave and Marc made the case to me that these were significant events in the history of the WGCSA, and I agreed that they were correct. What else could the chapter historian say? But there is no false humility when I say I'd wish it otherwise.

We made arrangements for Cheryl to attend the GCSAA conference - it was Jim's Snow suggestion - and I am really glad she was there in San Diego to see

T.I.P. - SW-48




"SWEEP-N-CLEAN"

**THE PICK-UP
SWEEPER
WITH
ATTITUDE!**



"GROOM-IT"



"GROOM-IT"


**ONE PASS
TOPDRESSING**



"BRUSH IT"



"SPINNER/BEEDER"



"SCRATCH IT"

MADE AND SOLD IN WISCONSIN

CALL

Johnson Turf Equipment
 Bus: 920-293-5131 Fax: 920-293-5131
 Res: 920-293-8247 Mobile: 715-498-3004

and be part of the activities. There were two separate events: 1) dinner with a number of the Green Section staff and two of the USGA Executive Committee, including the chair of the Green Section Committee, and 2) the USGA Educational Meeting when the plaque for the award was actually given to me and I had the opportunity to comment.

The dinner could have been the cause for some nervousness, which often happens when spending an evening with people you don't know or don't know very well. There is always the worry about holding up your end of the conversation, and the hope that I wouldn't spill anything on my shirt. It was all so unnecessary; the evening was absolutely delightful.

Bruce Richards, chair of the Green Section Committee, sat to my left. We are about the same age, have similar interests (golf and grandchildren) and attended the UW. Fortunately my UW was Wisconsin; Bruce is a Washington grad. Stan Zontek sat across the table and to my left. He was a great comfort; I love the guy and have known him for years. Stan is never at a loss of words and is one of those guys with a wealth of knowledge about nearly everything. Next to Stan and right across from me was Jay Rains, a USGA Executive Committee member and also a Green Section Committee member. Jay is an interesting guy - Holy Cross, Notre Dame, football, golf and more. He was very easy to visit with. Then came Jim Snow and Kim Euruska.

Cheryl was seated to my right and next to her was Bob Vavrek. He made her feel at ease, as did Bob Brame at the head of the table.

It was a perfect evening. The meal was first rate, and I felt like I knew them all a lot better by evening's end. The two and a half hours flew by and kept us from going over to the Wisconsin hospitality room, probably my only regret of conference week.

The next morning, halfway through the Green Section educational meeting, Bruce Richards made some very kind introductory remarks and presented the beautiful plaque to me. I'd seen presentations of it before but I had never seen it up close in person. Stan Zontek told me the casting is of the 10th hole at the Baltimore Country Club, north course. It is inspiring as any big league golf tournament trophy. I am proud and humbled to have it. In fact, I carried it with me on the flight home, unwilling to trust it to airline baggage handlers. There is so much metal in it that it tripped the trigger on the X-ray inspection at the San Diego Airport. I had to empty my briefcase and unpack it so the security people could see what it was!

I had the chance to say a few words and I had no trouble with that. I am often reminded of that old Mark Twain comment, paraphrased, "it took me eight hours to prepare that extemporaneous speech!" I had plenty of time to think about the right words. The

microphone, so often a hassle, was clear and strong. But when I got to the podium the light was so bright that I could hardly see my notes. That, and trifocals. But it was over in minutes.

All that remained when I returned home was the toughest of all. John Mummert, the official USGA staff photographer, came to Madison from Golf House with an assistant and enough equipment to fill the box on my Ford F-150. He took a couple dozen rolls of film, obviously figuring (or hoping) one of them would be acceptable. He had that nearly impossible task of making me look good! It is also tough to make it look like spring in Wisconsin in February, and John was soaking wet and covered with mud trying to do that. I dreaded the thought of the day, but John was great.

It is becoming a little more clear to me just who are those responsible for these great memories, and I will always feel indebted to them. The only real way to repay them is to uphold the high standards of the award.

Surely, this event was the highlight of what is becoming quite a long career as a golf course superintendent. It has made this winter considerably shorter, and already the days are getting longer, turning my thoughts to the upcoming season. But the memories I was given have been magical and will never leave me. ♣



Everything To Make Your Course Beautiful

**Turf Seed • Fertilizers • Repair Parts
Golf Course Accessories • Equipment**

LESCO®

800 - 321 - 5325

LESCO is a registered trademark and Grow With Us is a trademark of LESCO Technologies, LLC.