



# Giving Back to the Industry

By Lori Ward Bocher

Seems like Danny Quast has a long history of giving back to the golf/turfgrass industry. So much so that the GCSAA honored him with its Distinguished Service Award at its annual conference in San Diego on February 12. And, fortunately, he's not planning to stop giving back now that he's won his award. He has more plans for the future.

Born and raised in Ohio, Danny's career path has twice brought him to Wisconsin. From 1973 to 1989 he was superintendent at the Milwaukee Country Club. He left Wisconsin from 1989 to 2001 to serve as superintendent of the three 18-hole courses at Medinah Country Club in Illinois, but Wisconsin still claimed him as one of its own. Then in 2001 Danny returned to Wisconsin to jump full-time into his business, DHD Tree Products.

Danny learned that he would receive the GCSAA Distinguished Service Award back in December when the president of the organization called him. "I could hardly believe it when I first heard it," he recalls. "It set me back. I just couldn't believe that I was the one who was chosen."

The GCSAA listed several reasons why Danny was chosen for the award, and he elaborated on some of those points in a recent interview.

**1. Served as superintendent at two highly regarded golf courses - Milwaukee Country Club and Medinah Country Club.** And at both courses, Danny left his mark by making vast improvements. "The highlight at Milwaukee was updating the course to today's golf game," he points out. "I enjoyed the opportunity to work with Robert Trent Jones over most of those 15 years. We made a few changes each year."

He also enjoyed the challenge of improving the courses at Medinah. "When I first went there to interview, we toured the courses and I could see that there was a great opportunity to make improvements," he recalls. "Two of the three courses had been neglected. And nobody seemed to know how to make them better. So that was one of my main goals when I went there, and I feel I left a nice mark there."

He also started a tree program while at Medinah by hiring an arborist, Randy Miller, and giving him the equipment and people that he needed to get the job done. "The trees were a mess when I started there," he points out. "Over the years, I felt that we created the best golf course tree program in the country."

Danny admits that he likes the challenge of improving courses. "I see it as an opportunity to make a noticeable difference," he says. "And I believe we did. I had some great people working for me. I couldn't have done it by myself."

The two courses were worlds apart, according to Danny. "The Milwaukee Country Club is the most exclusive, private golf course in Wisconsin. It has a small membership and the amount of people who play each day is limited," he says. "Medinah is a private course, too, but it relies a lot on guest fees. And there are 650 family memberships. That translates to a lot of traffic on the course."

The two courses are also managed differently, according to Danny, partly because Milwaukee has one 18-hole course and Medinah has three. "At Milwaukee, we never had a green committee meeting - we just met with the

green chairman," he says. "At Medinah, we had many, many committee meetings. When I went to Medinah I realized that I had to change the way I did things. It had to be a well-run organization to be successful because there was so much more to manage."

**2. Has been a mentor to numerous individuals in the turfgrass industry.** "The most gratifying part of my job at both Milwaukee and Medinah was being able to work with superintendents who interned under my management and now have their own courses to manage," Danny says. "I am very proud of their successes and I consider them my extended family - 18 fine gentlemen in all."

Danny is able to name all of them and tell where they went after working for him at either Milwaukee or Medinah. "I always hired students out of college and the first year would be for placement and training. Then they'd be promoted to superin-

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tendent on one of the three courses with the idea that they would stay three or four years and then move on to their own positions," he explains. "Of course, Medinah was a great venue for doing that because it had three golf courses."

While many superintendents want to keep good help, Danny had his reasons for setting up this system. "When you present somebody with a future, they are motivated to do a good job," he says. "The student employees behind the three superintendents knew that they would move up to superintendent and then eventually go out on their own. And I was motivated to help them find a good job when they left me because that made the good students eager to come and work for me. It really was a beneficial cycle for all."

**3. Successfully hosted the U.S. Open in 1990 and the PGA Championship in 1999.** "I went to Medinah in 1989 and we hosted the U.S. Open in 1990," Danny recalls. "I went there knowing I'd have to get the course ready for the Open. But I really went there for the long term, not just for the Open."

When the PGA Championship came in August of 1990, it was a hot summer. "Because of the weather and some other issues that the club wouldn't face, we had our problems. But, all in all, we got through it quite well. I look at it as a great experience and felt it was a success."

**4. Founded *The Grass Roots*, the official publication of the WGCSA.** "When I came to Milwaukee from Ohio in 1973, there wasn't any association newsletter. And the association was also short of funds," Danny points out. "I suggested that a newsletter would not only be a good way to communicate, but also a good way to raise some funds through advertising."

He also volunteered to start up *The Grass Roots*. "It was nothing elaborate like it is today," he says. "Monroe's passion is writing and he got 20 straight awards at the

national level and deserved them. I'm not even trying to compare what I did to what he's doing now. But it was a way to get something started for the association and a way to get a little income."

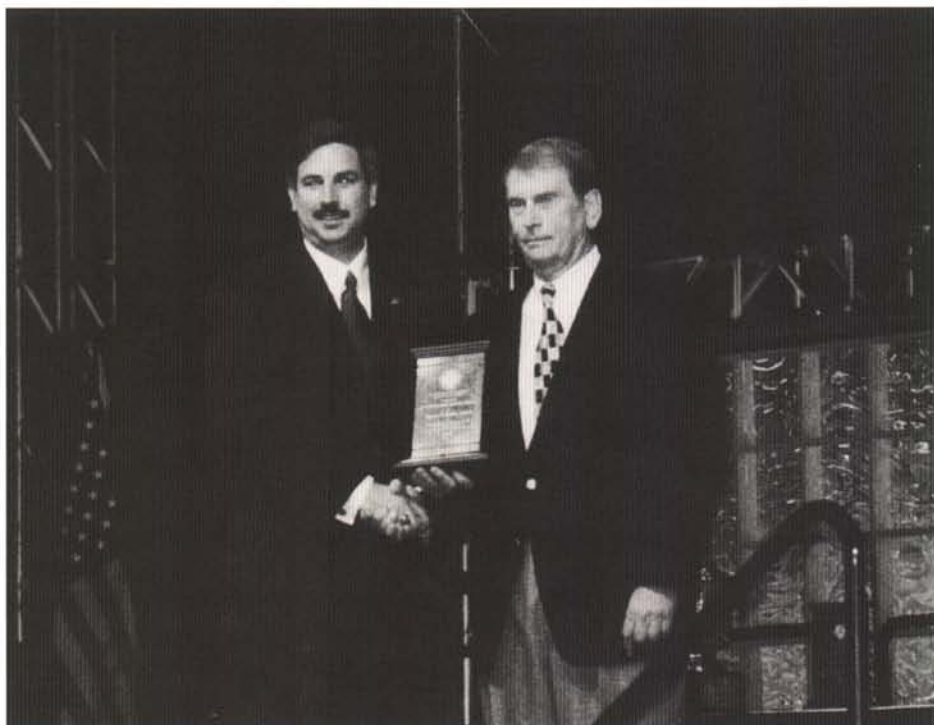
Danny recalls how the paper was put together in those early years. "I'd call Wayne Otto and Bill Douglas and buy some beer," he explains. "We'd come to the office to fold the newsletter and stuff it into envelopes and mail it. As the organization grew, it got to be more and more work. After doing it for five or six years, it was nice to be able to hand it over to Monroe."

**5. Advanced the Turfgrass Information File at Michigan State University.** "When O.J. Noer passed away, he left his collection of turf literature to Michigan State University," Danny explains. "They started a turfgrass library there. And Dr. James Beard, one of the foremost authorities in the country, categorized the information and put it into data form so it could be accessed by computer. That was called the Turfgrass Information File."

"The USGA had funded this project for many years, but they were getting frustrated because nobody was using it and they were going to give it up," Danny continues, adding that this was back in the era before the Internet was commonly used. "I thought this was crazy, so I volunteered to do anything to help save the TGIF." With others, they raised enough money to keep the project going over the years. Now the information is easily accessed via the Internet.

"It's especially useful for graduate students who are working on research projects," Danny points out. "They can go to the TGIF and look up previous work. The TGIF keeps people from doing duplicate research."

In the next issue of *The Grass Roots*, we'll visit with Danny some more about the DQ Open, DHD Tree Products, and the ways he might help his industry in the future. We'll also hear from some of his friends and colleagues and even his wife. Stay tuned. ♣



Danny Quast received the GCSAA Distinguished Service Award from John Maddern.