

And now, the rest of the story...

on Danny Quast, GCSAA Distinguished Service Award Winner

By Lori Ward Bocher

In the previous issue of *The Grass Roots*, we covered the highlights of Danny Quast's career as a golf course superintendent and the reasons why he was awarded the GCSAA Distinguished Service Award. And now, the rest of the story. No longer a superintendent at the Medinah Country Club near Chicago (1989 to 2001) or the Milwaukee Country Club (1973 to 1989), what's he up to now?

Running his own business, DHD Tree Products, out of Juneau, Wisconsin. DHD Tree Products was started with two partners, Dennis and Herman, way back when Danny was at Milwaukee Country Club (hence, DHD for their three first names). Dennis backed out of the company years ago and Herman ran the company from New Berlin. When Herman died, Danny and his wife, Beverly, had to decide what to do with the company.

"We decided to take the ball and run with it," Danny points out, adding that he left Medinah Country Club on March 31, 2001. "We decided the logical place for the business would be in Wisconsin. For my wife to give up our big home in the suburbs, I asked her where she wanted to live, and she wanted to live on a lake. She asked where I thought the business ought to be located, and I said between Madison and Milwaukee. It was sort of like throwing a dart at a map, and it landed on Beaver Dam. We ended up buying a log home on Fox Lake, and we found a warehouse in Juneau for our business. We took the chance and made the change."

Taking control of his life...

Now, three years later, Danny has no regrets. "I think putting my future in my own hands was a very smart thing to do," he says. "I just saw where one of the superintendents in the Chicago area lost his job, and he was 58 years old. That kind of thing happens and can be devastating, especially as we get older. Not that my job was in jeopardy, as far as I know. But it really did give me an opportunity to put my fate in my own hands. I know it was a risk, but it turned out to be very rewarding."

DHD Tree Products has grown nicely over the past three years, according to Danny. "Thanks to the customers out there, it has become very successful. And we expect it to grow more this year. We opened a branch in Mendota, Illinois, about 40 miles south of Rockford, and hired a salesman." The company's main territory now covers northern Illinois and the southern half of Wisconsin.

"We've added new product lines, too," Danny continues. "We're offering products that the bigger compa-

nies don't have in their lines. I think that by introducing products that other companies don't carry, it's somewhat of a service to the superintendents."

Danny warns golf course superintendents about the Emerald Ash Borer which, so far, is confined to the Detroit area. "It's probably worse than Dutch elm disease," he says. "The borer leaves a very small mark in the tree which is difficult to detect. Then about three years down the line, the ash trees start dying and it's too late to do anything about it by then. It can be prevented by treating for the borer. If you've got an ash tree in a key spot, it might be smart to start treating for it now."

The business is full time and then some for Danny and Beverly. "But it's been fun. It keeps me exuberated," Danny says. "I enjoy getting out and meeting a lot of nice people. That's one thing you can say about the superintendents in Wisconsin - they're a great bunch of people."

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I'm 60 years old and too young to retire. Nobody knows what to do with a 60-year-old. This keeps me off the streets for a while. As the business grows and we get more people involved, hopefully we can offer them a future with this company. I'd like to create a future for somebody."

He'd also like to give back to the profession through his company. "When we get the business on sure footing, we hope to give back more to the profession," Danny says, adding that this means more to him than acquiring more material possessions. "I think we've already started doing that with donations to the Wisconsin Turfgrass Association."

Now that he's been off the golf course for three years, what does he miss the most? "I miss the guys that worked for me," Danny answers. "We think we're in the grass business, but we're not. We're really in the people business. I really miss the association with the crew, the students, and some of the members. All different kinds of people make up a country club. The majority are very nice and very cordial to work for. I really do miss that part of it."

What doesn't he miss? Committee meetings and board meetings, what else?

Remembering the DQ Open...

Something that a lot of Danny's colleagues have missed for years is the DQ Open, with DQ standing for Danny Quast and not Dairy Queen. "I didn't call it that, but everybody else did," Danny says, adding that the DQ Open ran for several years while he was at the Milwaukee Country Club.

How did it get started? "Everybody wanted to play at the Milwaukee Country Club, so I asked if I could have one Monday (course closed on Monday) to invite 20 people," Danny explains. "They let me do that. We played golf and then had a cookout in my back yard which was on the property. Well, 20 soon grew to 70. What started out as having a few friends over to play golf turned into quite an affair."

The DQ Open was by invitation only - colleagues, industry reps and friends of Danny. "We had people come from all over the country," Danny recalls. "I'd set up foursomes and charge a little bit for prize money and for turfgrass research. It was a great way for everybody to get together and have a good time. A lot of people remember it, that's for sure."

Becoming an author...

Recently Danny teamed up with one of his colleagues




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to write a book, Golf Course Turfgrass Management: Tools and Techniques. "I was driving down the road one day and got a call from this lady with McGraw Hill in Maine," Danny explains. "She asked me, 'Would you like to write a book?' I wasn't ready for this question, so I asked her what she meant. She explained that they had contracted with someone else to write a book on turfgrass management, but he couldn't do it for whatever reason.

"I told her I'd think about it," he continues. "Wayne Otto was retiring from Ozaukee Country Club at the time, so I called him up and said, 'Wayne, if you want to do this with me, I'll do it. If you don't, I'll turn it down.' Wayne thought about it for a day or two and then called me back to say yes. There were six other people in the country on the publisher's list, and she chose us to do it."

The book is targeted for turfgrass students or golf course superintendents at any stage of their career. "It takes our combined experience on golf courses, answers a few questions for people, helps them make decisions on projects that they might start," Danny points out. "We hope that it's a practical guide and that, in another way, it's entertaining for people. We both put it in language that's pretty easy to understand - practical, not academic."

Work consumes most of Danny's time. But he does find time to do a few other things. "I've always liked to golf," he says. "We play at Old Hickory in Beaver Dam. Living on a lake, I do a little fishing. I throw a hook in the water once in a while, but nothing ever seems to bite. I'm such a bad fisherman that I've actually gone back and asked for my money back on my fishing license, but they haven't given it to me yet."

The home that Danny and Beverly bought on Fox Lake is a small two-bedroom log home. "We sized down quite a bit. It was quite traumatic for Beverly," he says. "She's from Chicago and then I move her out here into the country. It's sort of like Green Acres. People ask me where I live and I say, 'Half way between Hogs 'R Us and the State pen.' It happens to be true. There's a place on Hwy. 33 called Hogs 'R Us, and the Fox Lake prison is also nearby."

What makes Danny tick? What drives him? "That's a good question," he answers. "I don't know how to put it. I like to be successful. I like to have purpose, ambitions. I hope that never stops. I think I'm a forward thinking person, and that's what keeps me going. I could never sit at home and fish all day.

"As time goes on, I hope I'm able to contribute a lot more to the profession," he adds. "I've lived in a big house and had the big stuff. But that isn't what life is all about. It's about people and doing for others. That means more to me than anything."

With an attitude like that, it isn't hard to understand why Danny received the GCSAA Distinguished Service Award, is it?

What others are saying about Danny...

"When he says he's going to do something, he does it."

When Wayne Otto welcomed Danny Quast to Wisconsin back in 1973, a friendship was born. Wayne was at Ozaukee Country Club and Danny had just started at Milwaukee Country Club. "Our courses were only four or five miles apart, so I went over to welcome him when he came to town," Wayne recalls. "We really got to be close friends between playing golf and getting together to drink beer for 108 Saturdays in a row."

Wayne has great respect for Danny. "When he says he's going to do something, he does it. You can count on it," Wayne points out. "I remember when he'd been here only a year or so and we were at a monthly WGCSA meeting. Somehow we got to talking about how we needed a newsletter, and he said he'd put something together. And he did by starting *The Grass Roots*."

When Danny moved to Medinah, Wayne knew he could handle the challenge of three 18-hole golf courses. "I don't think just anybody could do that," he says. "Most of us are in charge of 18-hole golf courses and we can see every corner of it every day if we need to. But with a big spread like Medinah - I think it would drive a lot of us to the loony bin. You never want to steal more than you can carry off, and Danny could carry it off."

Why is Danny so well known in Wisconsin? "Partly because he was at the most prestigious job in Wisconsin, the Milwaukee Country Club," Wayne answers. "And he went to most of the WGCSA functions. But mostly because he was just Danny. Everybody knew Danny. Between Danny and Monroe, we made off pretty good in Wisconsin with them both receiving those prestigious awards. I couldn't be happier for both of them."

"He was a highly skilled superintendent."

Jim Latham, now retired from the USGA Green Section, has the distinction of knowing Danny even before he came to Wisconsin. "I knew him when he was the superintendent at Springfield, Ohio. It was part of my Milorganite territory," Jim explains. "I've known him professionally and personally ever since.

"He was a highly skilled superintendent," Jim continues. "He did an excellent job at two top-level clubs. He did a marvelous job for Medinah and for the USGA by preparing the course for two championship tournaments. He kept his courses in tip-top shape by looking around for things that needed to be done, things that had been left undone over the years. He was always looking ahead for the needs of the golf course.

"He's not only a great superintendent, but he's a great friend with a very strong personality," Jim con-

tinues. "Anything anybody needs, he will help to get it. Most obliging, I guess is the word. He was helpful in every possible way with the WGCSA. He started *The Grass Roots* on a shoe-string because he thought there should be better communication among superintendents, and look where it is now."

(After 10 years of retirement in Texas, Jim and his wife, Lois, now live in Florida.)

"He really gives back to the industry."

"I met Danny Quast for the first time at the University of Massachusetts turf conference in 1973," reports Stan Zontek, Mid-Atlantic director for the USGA Green Section in Pennsylvania. "We met through a mutual friend, and over the years we would simply meet at professional seminars and functions. In 1980, I was transferred (as a USGA agronomist) from New Jersey to the Chicago office which was only 90 miles away from Danny (at the Milwaukee Country Club). Our relationship went from a professional acquaintance to a personal and professional friendship."

Stan fondly remembers the DQ Open at the Milwaukee Country Club. "Of course, we always think of Dairy Queen when we hear DQ, but this was the Danny Quast Open," Stan points out. "He would always host a golf outing for friends and industry people. It was a chance for the average person to play a golf course that would be difficult to play otherwise. It was something I looked forward to every year. I just never missed it."

And he has great respect for Danny's work as a superintendent. "First, he's a good grass grower," Stan says. "But he also did a very, very good job of developing people. I think that's important. You can be an island onto yourself very easily in this business. But he was good at delegating, at training young people and bringing them up through the ranks."

"He really gives back to the industry," Stan continues. "He gives back his knowledge. He gives back opportunities for young people to develop and advance in this industry. He's a good communicator. He has a quiet influence over a lot of people in the industry. You can always count on Danny to do the work. And he's just a very warm, caring person. He cares about people and the industry."

"Young people should aspire to be like him."

"Danny's the best. There is no comparison. I've dealt with a lot of great superintendents and, no disrespect to anyone else, but Danny just set himself apart," says Tim Moraghan, director, USGA Championship Agronomy. "He set himself apart not only in the way that he maintained a high profile course like Medinah on a day-to-day basis, but also in the way he interacted with his staff, his members, and professional people like me. He was always very low-

key, very polite, and he was only assertive when he needed to be."

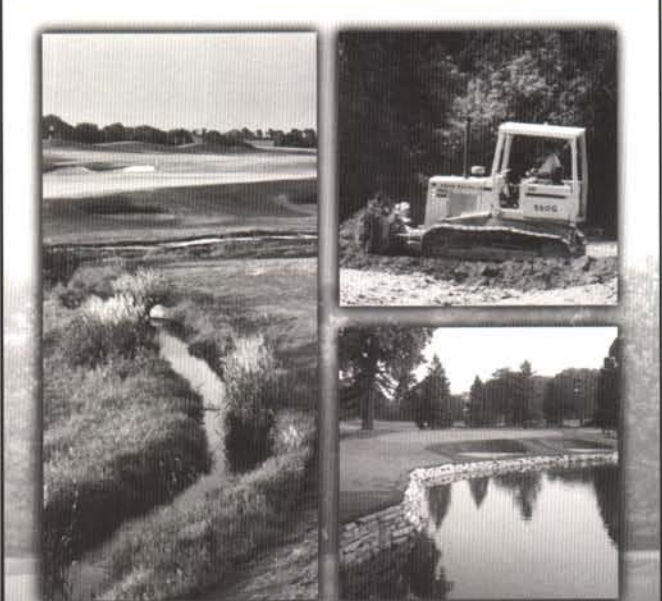
Tim first met Danny when he was at the Milwaukee Country Club. Then he worked with him extensively when the U.S. Open was at Medinah in 1990. "We all know life can get a little difficult during a major championship," Tim relates. "But Danny was just as calm and flat-lined as could be. He never got excited, never got sidelined with any issue. He'd just say, 'OK, you got a problem? We'll move forward and fix it.'"

"For any young person who's just getting started in the industry, Danny would be a great role model. They should aspire to be like him," Tim concludes.

"The business is his passion right now."

Danny's wife, Beverly, says he was humbled to receive the GCSAA Distinguished Service Award. "He was honored, very happy to receive it," she says. "He's very humble. He knew nothing about it. He was very, very honored and delighted, but humbled."

Danny and Beverly have been married for 13 years. "We met through a real estate agent," she explains. "He was closing on some property in Illinois, and I was a friend of his real estate agent. I was out for dinner



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one night and she introduced us. We call her a full-service realtor!"

Beverly recalls the long hours and non-existent summer vacations when Danny was a golf course superintendent. But now that they're in business for themselves, she doesn't see much more of her husband even though they work out of the same office. "He's out on the road a great deal of the time," she points out. "And when he's here in the office, which is not very often, he's doing one thing while I'm doing another. We really have less time together now than I thought we would."

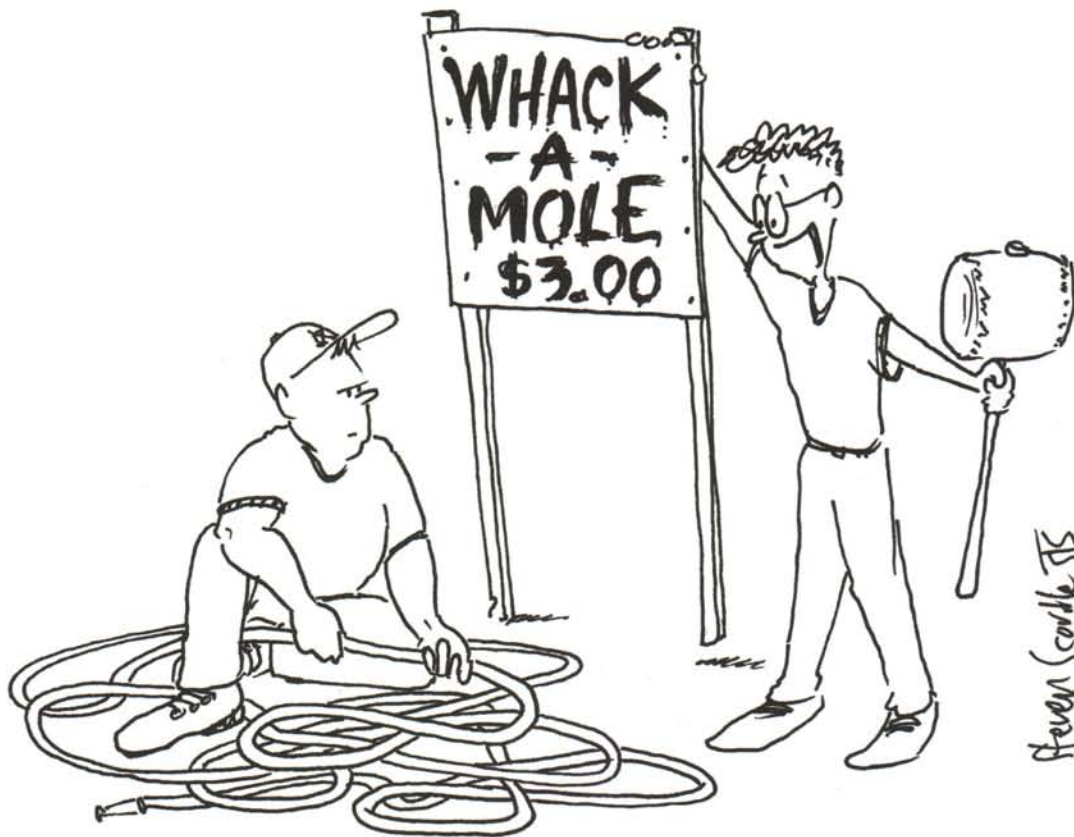
And that elusive summer vacation still is a dream. "Last January (2003) I asked to go someplace with a beach, but we didn't make it," she says. "And when Wayne Otto retired (in 2002), he and JoAnn were presented with a trip to Ireland. He says he doesn't want to go without us. We're still trying to put that together. It's difficult when you have a business. You can't leave it."

Beverly is in business with Danny at DHD Tree

Products. "He does the sales and advertising, and I do everything else," she says, adding that advertising is minimal because of Danny's reputation in the industry. "I do accounts receivable, accounts payable, the office work, even get on the fork lift to pull the pallets off when they arrive.

"The business is Danny's passion right now, and it needs to be mine, too," she continues. "It seems like everything I've done in my life so far, all of my education and work experience, has led me to this point. I feel a real purpose here."

When asked what makes Danny tick, Beverly answers: "He's a man of character. He means what he says and says what he means. He truly is a gentleman. You can count on him to have common sense. You can count on him to have the wisest wisdom in everything, in every category. Sometimes I wonder why he isn't president of the United States! Maybe we could get somewhere then." ♣



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