

Charlie G. Wilson Receives Distinguished Service Award

By David Brandenburg, Golf Course Manager, Rolling Meadows Golf Course

Late is better than never and sometimes for unknown reasons things are not done at a specified time. Awarding Charlie Wilson with the WGCSA's highest honor is one of those things.

If you read your directory you can see the list of WGCSA Distinguished Service Award winners is short on names but long on history of service to the WGCSA and the Wisconsin Golf History.

Although retired since 1979 and now 91 years old Wilson is well deserving of this late honor.

As part of the "Greatest Generation" Wilson grew up in the eastern US moving around a bit due to his fathers sales job as a buyer for the Atlantic and Pacific Food Company. The family was in Washington DC when World War II broke out and he enlisted in the Navy serving 37 months in the Pacific serving for a time under John F. Kennedy.

After the war Charlie enrolled in the University of Maryland and wanted to get a degree in agriculture despite his city upbringing.

Wilson started mowing lawns to raise some money to supplement his GI Bill income and wanted to learn more about lawn care and turfgrass.

This quest for knowledge led him to the USDA Plant Industry Station in Beltsville, MD where the USDA Green Section had it office. Reading was allowed at the office but material could not leave the building

so Charlie spent many days and hours poring over material that included USGA Green Section Journals.

Dr. Fred Grau, Green Section Director took a notice of Wilson and offered him a summer job that led to a part time school year job and after graduation in 1950 a full time position as a extension agronomist. After a year working in the Maryland USGA office Wilson was sent to California to see if there was any interest in having a visiting turf service for USGA clubs. There was a lot of interest so Wilson was chosen to open an office in Davis California and pioneered the USGA turfgrass advisory service as the first director.

After three years O.J. Noer wanted Charlie to be his understudy at the Milorganite Division of the Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District. The opportunity to work under the worlds foremost turfgrass agronomist brought Wilson to Wisconsin in the summer of 1955.

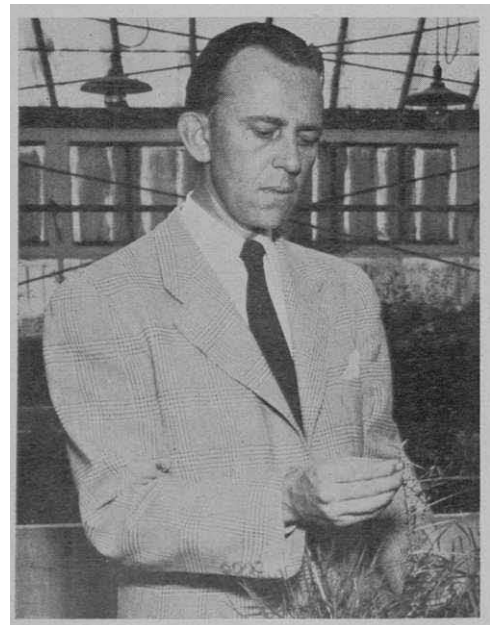
Wilson and Noer worked together for 5 years before Noer's retirement in 1960 when Wilson assumed his position as head agronomist and director of marketing for Milorganite. He spent much of his time traveling the country, visiting distributors, attending and speaking at conferences and visiting golf courses.

The job took Wilson to every state in the union and most of provinces of Canada. It was during Wilson's time at Milorganite he along with Jim Lathem and Bob Welch

approached WGCSA's Ron Verhaalen and John Stampfl to work out details on a day and half conference and in 1966 the first Wisconsin Golf Turf Symposium was held. It was fitting the WGCSA was able to award Charlie the DSA at the very conference he helped found.

In a relationship that continues today Milorganite paid for speaker travel, rooms and expenses while attendees paid for the conference rooms and meals. Any profit is given to the O.J. Noer Research Foundation.

The O.J. Noer Foundation was spearheaded by Wilson although it was a plan "B" proposal. The idea was to do something nice for O.J. so Charlie and several Milorganite Distributors wanted to send them on a trip around the world. Well O.J. caught wind of the idea and said under no circumstances!



Charlie Wilson becomes the first USGA Green Section Director in Davis California. (Picture courtesy of Golfdom Magazine June 1952)

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Plan “B” was to form a turfgrass research foundation in O.J.’s name and the O.J. Noer Foundation was started. Wilson served as the research director and on the board of directors for the foundation named in honor of the man who taught him so much.

According to Wilson the first project funded by the O.J. Noer Foundation was one of the greatest research projects ever done on turf. UW Wisconsin’s Dr. James Love work on how turfgrass responds to mineral nutrient deficiencies was ground-breaking for the time as that work had never been done. At that time turf research was hard to find and only a few colleges had recognized turf programs or professors.

The O.J. Foundation has provided over 1 million dollars in research grants and has been instrumental in helping build the O.J. Noer Memorial Collection at Michigan State University Library as part of the Turfgrass Information File.

When he retired in 1979 Wilson didn’t stop working and developed a product called Aquashade after seeing a Florida property that dyed a pond to make it look better after seeing it on a golf course where a movie was shot.

The colored pond looked better and did not have any weeds due to the filtered sunshine. Wilson did some research, developed the patented product and later sold the business to fully retire.


Charlie and his wife Marion retired to Wisconsin the state where they raised three children and created a Legacy with the Wisconsin Golf Turf Symposium and the O.J. Noer Foundation.

Wilson was awarded the USGA Green Section award for his work in 1982. In his speech with Marion at his side he is quoted as saying “We are proud to have helped the grass grow.” That is a simple synopsis of a career that spanned nearly 30 years as a turf agronomist. Charlie Wilson has seen a lot over his life.

He has seen golf course superintendents go from on the job trained farmers to educated professionals who are still trained on the job and through continuing education.

He helped turfgrass research go from near-non-existent to providing a wide scope of solutions for turf managers.

He served his nation in World War II, went to college, found a career and raised a family.

Charlie G. Wilson is very deserving of The Distinguished Service Award for his work as an agronomist, educator, researcher and his role in the golf industry. Congratulations Charlie! 

(Editors Note: More can be found on Charlie Wilson in the July August issue of The Grass Roots, archived at the Turfgrass Information File at Michigan State. Lori Ward Bocher Personality Profile penned “Hear It Again For the First Time”.)



Above: The first USGA Agronomist Charlie G Wilson with current USGA Agronomist Robert Vavrek.

Below: Charlie Wilson as caricatured by Gene Haas

