

## Tom Harrison Receives Distinguished Service Award

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

“An exceptional person who has made exceptional contributions” is how WGCSA Historian Monroe Miller chose to describe his longtime friend and colleague Tom Harrison as he listed the many contributions he has given to his community, his family and his industry. Harrison was a leader who did so many things without wanting recognition.

Tom spent a career getting things done in a professional manner as a leader for the Wisconsin Turfgrass Association, the Wisconsin Golf Course Superintendents Association and as the Golf Course Superintendent at Maple Bluff Country Club.

Tom entered the golf industry while at McFarland High School working at Nakoma Country Club. After graduation Harrison enrolled at UW-Madison as an engineering student despite enjoying his time at the golf course. As a freshman Tom was the last man cut by the basketball team and was recruited to row for the crew team before he left the Field House.

With the Vietnam war going on in the mid 1960's it was pretty much enlist or be drafted and Tom wanted to choose what he did so he enlisted in the Navy. Nearing the end of his enlistment Tom decided what he wanted was a career at the golf course and in 1968 he headed to Maple

Bluff Country Club to work as an assistant to Bill Eckert. In 1975 he took over for Bill and now after 44 years maintaining the historic golf course he has retired.

Tom served the members of the WGCSA as a board member but is better known as a founder and leader for the Wisconsin Turfgrass Association. Tom has served the WTA as a board member for over 30 years and as president from 1983-1986. Harrison was instrumental in building the O.J. Noer Turfgrass Research and Education Facility near Verona and giving it to the University of Wisconsin. Tom was there every step from buying the land, designing the layout and building the facility.



**Top Left:** Thomas Harrison receives the Distinguished Service Plaque from WGCSA President Chad Harrington.

**Top Right:** Dr. Gayle Worf, Dr. Dan Mohr and Dr. Robert Newman receive keys to a new vehicle from WTA President Tom Harrison in 1985.

**1993 25-Year Members** Jeff Bottensek, Wayne Otto, Larry Karel and Tom Harrison.

# WGCSA

His knowledge of the slow moving university system made Tom a key negotiator when working in the best interest of the golf and turf industry.

Early on in the days of the WTA a vehicle was needed for the professors to travel and do their extension work and research but the association only had enough money for the down payment. Harrison took out a personal loan to finance the vehicle so Dr. Worf and the other university staff had it to use.

His leadership carried over to his personal life. As a member of Holy Cross Lutheran Church when a school addition was needed Harrison acted as the general contractor to provide the project on time and on budget. To allow more students to attend the school his kids attended Tom established the Lutheran Bus Company to transport them. He

bought used buses that had life left, maintained them and hired qualified drivers.

He served as a volunteer fireman in Maple Bluff for decades and as a trustee on the McFarland Village Board for three terms. Of course he chaired the Public Works Committee for the village as that was the natural place for him.

Tom married his high school sweetheart Diane in his second year of college and together they have four daughters and two adopted sons. As an example of Tom and Diane's personal contribution to the community for 20 years they were reliable foster parents to scores of children needing a home.

As Tom accepted his Distinguished Service Award he stressed that the board and members cannot let go of the ties he and Monroe built with the University Deans

and Department Heads. The school leaders need to be reminded of our presence or we will be quickly forgotten and replaced by a new cause. Every time the university has turnover we need to start the process over and remember our relationship has a lot of politics involved.

So Tom gave us a challenge for new leaders to step up to take over for the many trips he and Monroe made to the UW College of Ag and Life Science to offer a hand or bend an ear to make sure our voice was heard.

Tom Harrison was humble in his acceptance of the WGCSA's highest award just as he was his entire career. He turned a moment about him into a lesson for rest of us to improve our industry.

Congratulations Tom Harrison, Distinguished Service Award Recipient. 🌱



Tom Harrison as WTA President was busy in 1985 planning for the new O.J. Noer Turfgrass Research and Education Facility. Vendors and industry partners stepped up to donate. A few of the many donations came from (Top Left) Dave Legg, with Ransomes (Top Right) Ron Schumacher and Dennis Robinson with Horst Distributing and (Left) Monroe Miller serving as WGCSA President.