

Section activities in any way they can. For Monroe, that means giving talks, writing letters, personal arm twisting, and writing in *The Grass Roots*.

"I'm a huge advocate of the Green Section," he says. "I think of all of the agronomists who have pulled me out of trouble. Why wouldn't everybody want to get this kind of help? So I've been kind of aggressive about it. When you get into some tight spots, those guys are always there. The Green Section is *good for golf!*"

"From a selfish point of view," Monroe continues, "I like having someone who is independent and objective coming to my course to review my work and provide a written record of his report. Some people are afraid of that, but I always welcome it because if I can be better, I want to be better."

The Green Section agronomist can also be a great ally when trying to convince golf course management to make a change, Monroe points out. "He comes in and says, 'You guys have got to replace that irrigation system,' and it's done because the Green Section agronomist says it needs to be done. I could talk about it for five years. But you get an outside opinion and they take care of it right away."

**Combining two loves...**

By helping to train the next generation of golf course superintendents, Monroe is able to assist both his profession and his alma mater, the UW-Madison. No wonder he enjoys it so much and is so good at it. According to Wayne Kussow, of the 200+ students that have graduated from the Turf and Grounds Management program thus far, nearly one-half have benefited from having worked for Monroe. "I've never counted," Monroe admits. "Some years I've had five interns, other years it's a couple."

"And how lucky am I?!" Monroe asks enthusiastically and rhetorically. "You talk about a motivated, smart crew. There's nothing like it." In addition to having interns in the summer, Monroe might also have some in the spring and fall. "A lot of them will work somewhere else in the summer, and then work here in the spring and fall. This gives them exposure to another golf course, another season, and another superintendent."

Student interns aren't just a source of labor for Monroe; he takes very seriously his duty to help train them. "I'm an open book. Anything they want to know I try to share with them," he says. "We sit down once a week and hash over what we did. I even go to the point of giving them story problems. We take them to field days, big tournaments, anything that might somehow inspire them, motivate them or reaffirm their career choice. And I try to instill in them the value and pleasure of hard work."

While some superintendents find it easier to have each summer employee stick with the same job all season, Monroe likes to shake things up. "I believe variety is the spice of life," he says. "Young people can get bored easily. So we shift the job responsibilities around. We invest a

huge amount of time in training them. But then there's always something for them to look forward to."

**Badger through and through...**

Is there anyone out there who doesn't know that Monroe is a Badger fan? We're not talking just sports teams here, although he does have season tickets for both football and basketball. Monroe is a fan of the entire University - what it represents, what it has done for Wisconsin, and the picturesque campus itself. More specifically, he's an advocate for the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences (CALs).

We've already talked about his efforts to make life easier and more productive for turf researchers. And we've talked about his dedication to training turf students. But Monroe has also served on the board of directors for WALSA (Wisconsin Agriculture and Life Sciences Alumni Association), including two years as president. Because he works just minutes from campus, he represented WALSA on numerous occasions such as senior breakfasts and award ceremonies.

More recently Monroe served on the prestigious CALs Board of Visitors for three years. The board was created to support the College and to give input to the Dean. "I loved it. It was a learning experience for me," Monroe says. "It was an interesting group of people, powerful people in terms of agricultural interests."

CALs recognized Monroe in 1989 by giving him its Honorary Recognition award - mainly for his work in establishing the WTA and Noer Facility. "That was just fantastic. It meant a lot to me," Monroe says. "I just love the place. I can't even put my finger on the reason why. I guess because it's been such a big part of my life and my prosperity. I remember hearing my father talk



about the University. When I was young and we'd be driving through Madison, he'd always go over Bascom Hill on Observatory Drive and say, 'That's where I went to school.' It's just such a part of me."

### **Crazy about family...**

By now this article has shown how passionate Monroe is about his work, Blackhawk Country Club, *The Grass Roots*, and his alma mater. You'd think he'd have no energy left for anything else! But he's equally as passionate about family and hobbies.

Monroe and Cheryl have raised three daughters, and papa is very proud of them. The two oldest, Amy and Holly, both live in the Twin Cities area. "They both went there for graduate school and liked it so much that they stayed there," Monroe explains. Amy is a French teacher and her husband is a hydrologist. They have blessed Monroe and Cheryl with their first grandchild, Grace, who just turned 4. Holly is a statistician for the St. Paul school district and also a part-time instructor at the University of Minnesota.

The youngest, Christie, pleased her father in a very special way. "She's a CALS grad," Monroe points out. "She has a degree in genetics and works at a bio-tech firm in Middleton. She's a city gal totally, but there isn't

anyone who would do more to promote CALS because of her wonderful experience there."

Monroe gives Cheryl most of the credit for raising their daughters. She received her degree in nursing from the UW but never spent much time as a nurse. In addition to raising the girls she has worked part-time in the insurance and banking industries. Currently she works for Community Bankers of Wisconsin in Middleton.

### **Historical hobbies...**

It would take another full article to adequately discuss all of Monroe's hobbies. "I love the agricultural sciences. I love my agrarian background. Family has always been hugely important to me. I've always had great respect for those who have gone before me. Many of my hobbies are related to these things," Monroe points out.

There's his farm toy collection. "I've never counted them all," he admits. However, if you ever saw the toys that were in his office at Blackhawk, that was only about 10 percent of the collection, he says. He has since removed them because the humidity was too high there.

Monroe also collects book, pictures and other documents related to golf and farming. "I'm a pack rat," he laughs. "I like used books, not new books. I like bargains.



'IS THE COURSE OPEN YET? HOW ABOUT NOW?  
NOW? IS IT OPEN YET? NOW? NOW?

It's the chase that's fun. My wife thinks I'm a hick, the stuff I bring home sometimes."

When Monroe and Cheryl built their new one-story house in 1999, Monroe's hobbies were on in his mind. "I built a library with mahogany shelves from floor to ceiling, and I've got it jammed full of books," he admits.

His basement is reserved for his farm toys and other agricultural treasures. "I built an entire room down there," Monroe explains. "I have an actual boxcar sliding door that looks like a machine shed door, so that's what I call the room - my machine shed. Some day I'd like to build another room that looks like a barn - with a stanchion, gutter, and windows like we had in our barn when I was growing up. I've got lots of overflow that could go in that room."

His annual treks to New England each fall combine many interests. "I started going out there because of its natural beauty," Monroe explains. "It's one of the few places in the world where the color is so intense because of the combination of soil and climate. It's also where my ancestors are from. I have four generations of grandparents buried at Martha's Vineyard. So I go there to track down birth certificates, photograph graves. And I love American history and Revolutionary War history, so I find lots of places to visit."

Monroe also likes to visit presidential homes. "I've been to almost all of them," he says. "In 1959, when I was an 8th grader, Sen. John Kennedy was in Fennimore campaigning for president. My class picked me to go to the Community Center and ask him a question and get his autograph. So I've had this interest in presidents ever since."

### **The future...**

In case you were wondering, Monroe does have plans for retirement. "It's dawned on me that I'll never have enough money put away for retirement because I'm conservative," he admits. "So I've decided that whatever I have when I'm 62-1/2 is what I have and I'll retire. I actually keep a notebook of things I'm going to do when I retire. Being a farm kid and a golf course superintendent, I've never had a summer vacation. I'm not going to sleep in every morning. And I'm sure as heck not going to hire somebody to mow my yard."

### **And now a word from his better half**

No one knows Monroe better than his wife, Cheryl. And for her, words can hardly express how excited Monroe was about receiving the Green Section Award. "It was the happiest I have ever heard him," she says. "He called me at work and said, 'I'm sitting down. And you better sit down, too, because I cannot believe the phone call I just got. I'm just absolutely stunned.'

"And he truly was," Cheryl continues. "He never

dreamed that he'd get such an award. It was a complete surprise. He had no clue that anyone had nominated him. It was just right out of the blue. He's extremely humbled by it and still doesn't understand why he was chosen. But he sure has enjoyed life since. He was on Cloud 9 for weeks."

Not too long after he learned of his award, Monroe did something completely out of character. "One Saturday morning he was getting the oil changed on our car," Cheryl explains. "He knew that I've always wanted a red convertible, especially after the Thunderbird came out. There was one on the showroom floor. On a lark, he bought it! He never does anything on a lark! Even his daughters can't believe that he did this. But he was feeling so good about his award and he told me he wanted me to feel as good about something."

Monroe surprised Cheryl with the car two days before Christmas. "He put a big bow and a big sign on it and left it in the driveway for me to see when I got home from work," she says. "So I got something out of this award, too!"

Cheryl accompanied Monroe to San Diego to receive the award in February. "That was really special," she relates. "We went out to dinner with a group of USGA people. Everyone was lovely and kind. It was a wonderful evening. The next day they did a really great job with the award presentation. Monroe doesn't get very nervous, but he was very concerned about doing a decent job of replying to the award. He spent a lot of time on that speech."

### **UW sweethearts...**

Monroe and Cheryl met at an Alpha Gamma Rho party at the UW. "I was living in a dorm when the fraternity called and asked for some girls to come over for a party at the house," Cheryl recalls. "I went but wasn't having much fun. Just as I was about to leave, Monroe came in. He was going to go upstairs to his room, but his fraternity brothers told him he had to stay because there were more girls than guys at the party. So he walked over and started talking to me. He needed a date for Homecoming and he asked me almost right away. I said yes!"

Was it love at first sight? "Pretty much," Cheryl admits. "By the first date."

In more than 30 years, Cheryl has grown accustomed to being married to a golf course superintendent. "They spend a lot of time away from home. And they always have to rely on the weather for whatever mood they're in," she says. "I think it's a very stressful job. He tries not to bring it home, but he can't help it once in a while. I've gotten used to it, certainly. At first it was difficult. But it has become a way of life and it honestly doesn't bother me - hasn't for years."

Cheryl can tell what kind of mood Monroe will be in just by watching the weather. "If it's rainy and stormy

and cloudy, he's a happy man. I can count on that," she says. "But he's not happy when it's hot and dry and he has to worry about the watering system. So we're at odds that way because I like hot summer weather."

What drives Monroe? "His integrity. Knowing that he's doing the best job that he can do," Cheryl says. "He's a man of his word and he works hard to make certain that what he thinks should be done at the golf course gets done, and gets done in the best possible way. When Mother Nature takes over, he knows he can't change any of that. But for the things that he can change, he does it with every ounce he's got."

According to Cheryl, Monroe has done a pretty darn good job of balancing his work, volunteer activities and family over the years. "He knows all three are important," she says. "It still surprises me that he is able to do all of the volunteer work that he does. But he does a lot of it right at home, sitting with me in the living room with his yellow legal pad in hand. So we're certainly together that way. He's a home body, no question about it. He loves being at home."

Cheryl credits Monroe with being the best grandfather you could ever find. "Anything Gracie wants, he does," she says. "But he was not that way with his own children. He was strict, but always fair and loving. They grew up to be wonderful children with a sense of responsibility and citizenship. All of those qualities that are important to him he certainly was able to transfer to his children. At the time they thought he was too strict, but they have come back and told him time and again how lucky they were to have him as a father."

## What others are saying about Monroe...

### ***"He has a passion for what he does."***

Wayne Kusow, professor of Soil Science at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, has known Monroe for the 20 years he's been at Madison. "We go way back," Wayne comments. "We often get on the phone and just chat."

When asked to describe Monroe in a nutshell, Wayne responds: "He is a visionary. He has a passion for what he does. He's very well organized, very well schooled in turf management, and he knows what he's doing. He doesn't do things just because other people are doing them; it has to make sense to him."

As a professor, Wayne especially appreciates the number of student interns that Monroe has hired at Blackhawk. "Of the 200+ students that have graduated from the program thus far, nearly one-half of them have benefited immeasurably from having worked for Monroe," he points out. "He's a wonderful example (for students) of how to conduct yourself as

a golf course superintendent, both professionally and personally. His recommendations for job-seeking graduates are very highly regarded because people know that Monroe will tell things the way they are."

Wayne's favorite memory about Monroe is how he helped fellow superintendent Tom Harrison burn an old, dilapidated barn on the 5th hole at University Ridge to make more room for the Noer Facility.

### ***"He makes others feel important."***

As senior agronomist with the USGA Green Section's North Central Region, Bob Vavrek has known Monroe for 13 years. "Perhaps the quality I admire most about Monroe is his ability to make others around him feel important," Bob says. "He always publicly and privately recognizes others for their contributions to golf turf management or research. Others may seek recognition from their peers for a job well done. This has never been Monroe's style. He tirelessly works behind the scenes in relative anonymity and rarely takes credit for his considerable achievements."

Bob also admires the job Monroe has done as editor of *The Grass Roots*. "Superintendents and a variety of other turf professionals across the country subscribe to *The Grass Roots* because, hands down, it is simply the best," he points out. "Some of his most well known articles are summaries and critiques of educational meetings. He will document a job well done and is never afraid to criticize and challenge a group or speaker to reach the next level."

Bob remembers one time when he came to Blackhawk for a Turf Advisory Service. After touring the course with Monroe and his assistants in the morning, Monroe told Bob to take his student interns and assistants out on the course while he stayed in the shop - thus giving them a chance to question their boss' practices on the course. "No one has ever done this before," Bob adds. "There aren't many superintendents who are willing to be second guessed by students. He is a master at providing tactful, constructive criticism and he has no problem accepting the same."

### ***"He's a true role model."***

Chris Knox was a college student when he worked for Monroe in the summer of 1998. He was not a turf student, but a business student who had plans of being a golf course manager one day.

"My first day on the job we had to push-mow around every tree on the course, pulling by hand the grass we couldn't get with the mower. It was 90 degrees and humid," Chris recalls. "When we finally finished, I was ready to quit. But I told myself to stick it out for the week before making a decision. Staying on Monroe's crew was the best decision I could have made."

"We all know how difficult working on a grounds crew can be," Chris continues. "But every time I turned around, Monroe was working as hard as or harder than

## How well do you know Monroe?

Having known Monroe since the mid 1980s, I've always appreciated and enjoyed his candor. Like it or not, you always know where Monroe stands on an issue. So I thought it would be interesting to give some of his friends and colleagues a multiple choice quiz to see how well everyone knows him.

1. **Is Monroe a Republican or Democrat?** Four say Republican, one says Democrat (I won't divulge who answered this way). Monroe says: "I've always voted for the best candidate!"

2. **Does Monroe have strong opinions or no opinions?** All five say strong opinions.

3. **Is Monroe a hard worker or a slacker?** All five say he's definitely a hard worker.

4. **Is Monroe a flag waver or a protester?** All 5 say he's a flag waver.

5. **Is Monroe quiet or talkative?** One says he can be both, the other four say he's talkative. Comment: "He's a great listener. But once he's done listening he'll give you an earful."

6. **Is Monroe a farm boy or city boy?** All 5 quickly answer farm boy.

7. **Is Monroe a leader or a follower?** All 5 say he's definitely a leader.

8. **Is Monroe a man with few interests or many interests?** All 5 say many interests.

9. **Is Monroe modest or boastful?** All 5 say extremely modest.

10. **What part of the job does Monroe enjoy most: a) growing grass/nature side of it; b) mechanical/equipment side of it; or c) working with and training others?** Three answer 'a'; one answers 'c'; one splits his answer between 'a' and 'c'. Monroe answers: "I like all three. And that's not a cop-out; that's the truth. Because of my farm background, at first the nature part appealed to me; you sow, you cultivate, and you harvest - but you don't have to milk cows! And the mechanical things are very interesting to me. But I also like the relationships - the young kids on summer crews who keep you young, the people who work here year-round, the golfers who play here. So I'd have a difficult time choosing one over the other."

Final comment from one participant: "As far as these questions go, if you know Monroe at all, I would be surprised if anybody answered too much differently than anybody else." Touché!

I asked Monroe some additional questions.

1. **Who has been the best president in your lifetime?** Ronald Regan.

2. **Who has been the worst president in your lifetime?** Bill Clinton, far and away. I cannot stand that guy.

3. **What is the best thing about America?** You can be whatever you want to be. Freedom to move around and see things. You can live like you want to live, be who you want to be.

4. **What is the worst thing about America?** That's a tough one. I don't have a beef.

5. **If you could have a one-on-one conversation with anybody dead or alive, who would it be?** I'd probably say my ancestor, old William Monroe. He's the one who came over here from Scotland in 1652 and he lived to be very old. What was it like in Scotland? How did you get over here? What was life like in Colonial America? I'm intrigued by that.

6. **What makes Monroe Miller tick? What drives you?** We all have to support ourselves. I've heard my wife tell people that the thing I'm most proud of is never having missed a paycheck. I think that comes from growing up with Depression-era parents and grandparents and hearing so many horrific stories. And then there's what I learned from my parents: "If you're going to do it, do it well and do it right." I try to live by that. I have a hard time doing anything half-assed. And that's not a boast, it's a burden. There are people who have told me I'm a perfectionist. And I'd give anything if I wasn't.

the rest of us. Whenever it was time to learn a new task, he taught me personally. He told me when I did things well, and he pointed out how to improve something when needed. He never told me something I did was bad; he told me how to do that task better.

"The camaraderie developed among the crew members was one I have yet to experience in another job," Chris adds. "Where did that come from? Straight from the top. I will always remember when Monroe pulled me aside the last day of work and told me how much he appreciated what I did for the course. I certainly didn't expect that."

Monroe gave Chris an invaluable lesson on how to work with people. "He never tells you how to do something, he shows. He never dwells on the negatives, but points out the positives. Now that I am in a management position at a golf course, when faced with a challenge I

am constantly asking myself, 'How would Monroe deal with this?' He was a wonderful man to work for, a great friend, and a true role model," Chris concludes.

**"He's not afraid to say what must be said."**

Tom Harrison, superintendent at Maple Bluff Country Club in Madison, has known Monroe longer than most and has much in common with him. "We worked together as students at Nakoma Golf Club starting in the summer of 1966," he recalls. They're both farm kids at heart with a passion for collecting farm toys. And they've both worked at just one Madison course in their careers.

When asked to describe Monroe in a nutshell, Tom laughs. "That might take a while. He's a detail guy. He's big into the history of things, how and why they are the way they are. He's that way about golf, farming, farm toys and U.S. history. He'll stick with something

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from beginning to end. Instead of losing interest and moving on, he'll take a life-long interest."

Tom and Monroe go to various farm toy shows together. "He and I take some strange journeys together, like to the John Deere museum in the Quad Cities," Tom points out. "While other people take golf journeys, we bounce around the country going to anything farm related.

"His passion is *The Grass Roots*," Tom continues. "He is known and respected by so many people for his honesty, his integrity, what he does for *The Grass Roots*. He's not afraid to editorialize and say what must be said. He's good for the game of golf that way. And *The Grass Roots* paints a picture of who Monroe is. He writes about so many things and so many people he knows - the people who are the bread and butter, the heart and soul of golf course management. People know Monroe just by what he writes."

**"I can't imagine working for another guy."**

As the equipment technician at Blackhawk, Dave Noltner has known Monroe since 1974. Dave was 17 years old when he spent his first summer at Blackhawk, working with his father. Monroe had been at the course for one year.

"Because my dad had worked there, I knew what this place was like - equipment wise and the condition of the course - before Monroe stepped in as superintendent," Dave recalls. "I've watched this place blossom under his supervision. It really, truly has come a long, long way. The course members really do appreciate the hard work that he puts into Blackhawk."

What's it like to work for Monroe? "Monroe is just awesome," Dave relates. "He cares a lot about his employees - not just at work, but their family lives, too. He's always asking questions. 'How's your mom? How's your dad?' He always eats lunch with his employees in the lunch room. And in the summer, when we have to put up an extra lunch table in the shop, he takes turns sitting at one table or the other. That's when he gets to know his summer employees.

"Monroe is such a down-to-earth person," Dave continues. "When he makes a decision, he thinks it through thoroughly. He also gets input from his employees. If he wants something done a certain way, there's a darn good reason for it."

Dave can witness to the fact that Monroe doesn't conduct *The Grass Roots* business on Blackhawk time. "I was at a dinner a few years ago and some people were speculating that Monroe must spend a lot of Blackhawk's time working on *The Grass Roots*," Dave recalls. "I stepped in and explained, 'I've know this man for many years. He does all of his Grass Roots work after hours. We start work here at 6 a.m. in the summer, and Monroe often goes to Kramer Printing early in the morning and is still here at work

by 6 a.m.' That shows you how dedicated he is to his job and to *The Grass Roots*."


Dave is not looking forward to the day that Monroe retires. "I can't imagine working for another guy," he says. "It's going to be weird for me to work for someone else. When he does retire, I'll have had him for my boss for 35 years. Not many people can say that. I think that alone tells the story of what kind of man Monroe is to work for. I just love it here. He makes it a really, really excellent place to work."

**"He never lets down his guard."**

As the assistant superintendent at Blackhawk, Chad Grimm has known Monroe for eight years. "He's honest, consistent, and hard working," Chad says when asked to describe Monroe in a nutshell. "He never lets down his guard on the course. He's been the same every day for as long as I've known him and, from what I've heard, for his entire career. He's intense as far as his goals and objectives on the course.

"I enjoy working for him. He's a great person. I'd consider him a friend," Chad continues. "As an assistant superintendent right out of college, he has given me lots of room to make my own mistakes and learn from them, to make decisions and grow. It's been wonderful."

Chad was with Monroe when he received the USGA Green Section award at the GSCAA meeting in San Diego. "It was really neat seeing him accept the award," Chad relates. "He presented a great speech. It was really wonderful. He really appreciated it." ❧



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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

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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 Euraska.

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. ♣



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# More of a Tropical Atmosphere

By Pat Norton, Golf Course Superintendent, Nettle Creek Country Club

I have to chuckle when I consider the phrase **'more of a tropical atmosphere'**. This phrase came up in recent management conversation concerning what to do with our huge, concrete, uninviting, underutilized back porch here at beautiful NCCC. The idea is to make our porch more inviting by making it...more tropical. Today being February 5th...puts me totally in favor of anything 'more tropical.'

I laugh because today it's about 20 degrees Fahrenheit outside and we're expecting another shot of snow and cold as we tough out another upper mid-western U.S. winter. More tropical, my butt!

Right about now I'd just love a huge shot of 'more tropical'...complete with heat, humidity, sweat, sunshine, verdant landscape, a nice cocktail...and nicely tanned skin instead of this dry, itchy, pasty white exoskeleton that I'm acquiring as I get older...bring on the idea of 'more tropical' right away!

Diane Lane in *Under the Tuscan Sun*...now that's more tropical, although Italy is technically not in the Tropics. Any guy reading this with Diane Lane under the Tuscan sun would be definitely be feeling 'more tropical,' yes??

Let's all think about 'more of a tropical atmosphere' by planning a totally cool, totally unaffordable annual Caribbean or Mexican vacation...starting with the winter after our youngest child has departed for college!

Winter has persisted long enough...and haven't we all had enough of the cold, the snow shoveling, the basketball games, and indoor house time? I think that I'm the resident expert on reality TV...simply because we watch all of that crap due to winter boredom...which leads to a real lack of tropical attitude and atmosphere.

I, at this point, will settle on the simple goal of opening this golf course by mid-March...getting busier...getting outside...and getting 'more tropical' by enjoying the upcoming springtime weather and helping NCCC become hotter and 'more tropical'.

The upcoming year promises to be a good one here...with lots of changes and improvements. We have survived four years of golf professionals who didn't have a very strong feeling for customer service and frankly didn't have any business trying to interact with the golfing public on an ongoing basis.

I have a very strong feeling that this public golf course now has to start over...as concerns our golf program and our relationship with our patrons. We

have wavered between being a strong blend of annual members/public play/outings and more lately...deemphasizing annual members and stressing discounted public play blended with golf outings.

Golfer customer service had declined over those four years also...resulting in us being perceived as an average, middle of the road public course. Golfer customer service used to be one of our mainstays...but in the quest for more rounds we let slide our attitude and our actions...

The fault, though, does not entirely lie with those departed golf professionals. The breakdown in the relationship between managers and ownership is a two-way street...which starts with hiring the right person to be your golf professional.

As an aside, it does seem to be so easy...perhaps too easy...certainly too convenient... to throw blame at that departed manager. That's right...blame that 'former' guy for all of the ills of Wherever C.C. He was the root source of everything negative about this place...and now that we got rid of him...we'll all sail along and not admit to ourselves that we should all probably be sharing the blame! Sound familiar???

Any golf course or club that has been through that painful learning process knows all about this type of thing. I am entering upon my eleventh season here at NCCC...and am now starting to work with golf professional #5. It is imperative for any golf facility to have sustained high quality management...which sounds very obvious... but is oftentimes elusive.

We have not had sustained high quality management here over the last few years...and have stagnated as a result. It was very frustrating to be a part of a dysfunctional management team...with too limited a voice as to instituting change.

Any business...any golf course or club...needs a management team that interacts beautifully and seamlessly. If you can attain this, your golf course will click...and you will be fostering more of a hot, tropical atmosphere!

Although not quite tropical...the upcoming springtime weather in our temperate latitudes symbolizes a new start...a new season...and a new beginning...for the management of both the golf program and the golf course proper. Everybody flocks outside...comes rapidly out of hibernation...and we all discover anew that the neighbors and almost all of the golfers have indeed also survived the winter.