

## Trans-Mississippi Marks 50th Anniversary of Its Turf Scholarship Program

The Trans-Mississippi Turf Scholarship Program this year marks its 50th anniversary of granting scholarships to young men and women aspiring to become golf course superintendents or to pursue related areas in turf management.



On June 15, 1953 – after more than a year of careful planning -- the Trans granted a \$600 scholarship to Colorado A&M, now known as Colorado State, in Fort Collins.

Directors previously had been asked to contribute \$30 each to the scholarship program to get the program underway, but they also were requested to suggest various ways in which the Trans-Miss could raise money so that the program could be firmly established on a continuing basis. Not long after a Trans senior tournament became the primary fundraiser.

The Colorado scholarship was an auspicious start to a program that, during the next half-century, blossomed into one of the top financial supporters of educating potential superintendents. Various Trans directors including then President John Butts, David Stephenson, Johnny Dawson and Dick Braun were instrumental in developing the program with Braun, who lived in Denver, serving as the key liaison with the Colorado school.

In 1954 the turf program received an important financial boost when the Trans began its senior tournament at the Thunderbird in Phoenix. Later moved to Las Vegas, this senior competition, for more than 20 years, was successfully directed by Trans director Bob Goldwater of Phoenix Country Club. The first tournament attracted 104 entrants and, for the next quarter century it placed the scholarship fund on firm financial footing. However, in the late 1970s participation began to wane, courses had become harder to get in Las Vegas and the final Trans Senior was played in 1981. Curiously enough, that also was the year that the Trans-Miss agreed to a suggestion by director Jim Vickers to establish a four-ball tournament. From both a participant and financial perspective, the Trans Four-Ball enjoyed early and continuing success.

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## Trans-Mississippi -

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(Other universities which were among the early recipients of Trans scholarships were Kansas State, Oklahoma State and Texas A&M, who still receive Trans scholarships. Then Texas Tech, the University of Colorado, UCLA, Oregon State and Washington State began receiving grants. However, in the mid-1960s, the Trans began analyzing agronomy programs at several schools, then decided those which would receive scholarships had to have quality agronomy programs with an emphasis on turf management. In the early years various directors would serve as scholarship chairman for approximately

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two years until the late Judd Ringer of Woodhill Country Club in Wayzata, Minn. accepted the leadership position and held it on a continuing basis.

For years Ringer, also a past Trans president, had had both a personal and professional interest in the growing of grass as a golfer and as the owner of an organic lawn and garden care business. He also took time to visit and analyze various schools receiving Trans scholarships, making certain that they had the quality programs desired. In 1988 current chairman S.I. (Si) Russell, Jr., of Lakeside Golf Club in Toluca Lake, Calif., succeeded Ringer, who died in 1990. Much like Ringer, Russell continued close relationships with university professors.

During the past 20 years, the program has grown substantially. Since its inception, the Trans has granted more than \$825,000 to 1,038 students.

Currently the Trans grants 36 scholarships totaling more than \$50,000 to 15 universities including two new Jack Nicklaus awards at The Ohio State University, his alma mater. Jack won two Trans-Miss championships in 1958 and 1959 and last year was named the Trans-Mississippi's Golfer of the Century for his varied contributions to the game. Other schools now receiving

Trans scholarships are the Universities of Arizona, California State Polytechnic, Colorado State, Iowa State, Kansas State, Michigan State, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, Oklahoma State, Oregon State, Penn State, South Dakota State and Texas A&M.

"The Trans is proud of what it has accomplished over the years," said Scholarship Chairman Russell. "Particularly appealing is the fact that 85% of our turf graduates have become golf course superintendents."

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