

Rob Panuska Receives the 2006 Distinguished Service Award at MGCSA's Recognition Banquet

By Fred Taylor, CGCS
Mankato Golf Club

Rob Panuska is the recipient of this year's Distinguished Service Award, and there is no one more deserving. I have had the pleasure of knowing Rob for many years, and through his work he truly personifies the objectives of this Association: "Advancing the art and science of golf course maintenance, disseminating practical solutions to problems and promoting the welfare of the Superintendent and the profession."

Rob has been involved with the Board of our Association for over 12 consecutive years. During that time, he has chaired the Human Resources and Public Relations Committee; served as Hole Notes editor; was elected to the position of Treasurer, and then Vice President; was the President in 2004 and 2005; and is currently the Ex-

officio. His time on the Board has seen numerous challenges, and Rob has met those challenges with insight, dignity and honesty. He has been a leader in the industry's quest to partner with the University of Minnesota, serving on various committees and panels charged with everything from hiring a turf professor (Brian Horgan) to helping develop the TROE center. All of this was accomplished, of course, while maintaining the Waseca Lakeside Club in the manner that he and the membership expected and demanded.

Rob started his landscape career when he was about eight years old. A new home next door was being sodded and landscaped. When Rob and one of his buddies saw the new sod, they couldn't resist. So

they cut a hole in the property fence, and "borrowed" enough of the new sod to lay in their play area. Of course when his parents noticed the hole in the fence, and a couple of yards of sod missing from the neighbor's yard, they put a quick end to the newly formed sod company!

In 1977, Rob enrolled at the University of Minnesota-Waseca to pursue a career in agriculture. After graduation he followed his agricultural interests, but later returned to UMW to obtain that landscaping degree he so desired back when he was eight years old! It was at that time that Rob was befriended by Brad Pedersen, the turf and landscape professor that had implemented the Golf Course

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Rob Panuska –

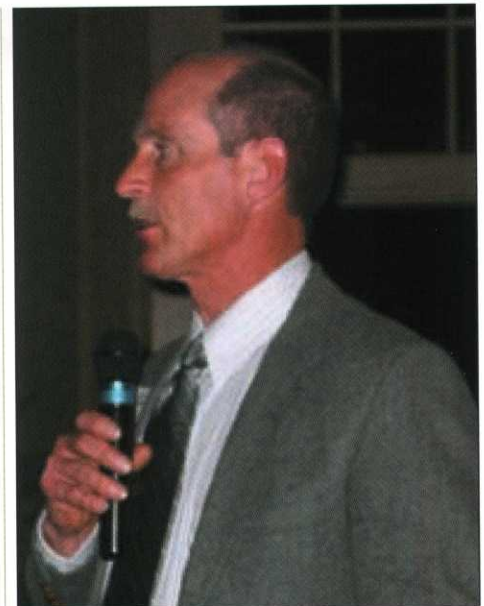
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Management program at UMW. Brad immediately noticed Rob's determination and desire to succeed, and began to encourage him to think about golf course management as a career path. It was at this time that Rob began working at the Waseca Lakeside Club as a crew member under Superintendent Ray Bloemke and developed the "Grounds Management Plan" for Lakeside, which was so concise and well conceived that it was used for all future grounds maintenance classes at UMW as a template for successful management strategies and practices.

Rob eventually graduated from UMW and was promoted to Assistant Superintendent by Ray. When Ray decided to retire from Lakeside, it was a natural to promote Rob to the position of superintendent. It wasn't long after this that Rob got involved in the MGCSA. Joe Moris asked Rob to run for the board in 1993, and his tenure on the board has been going strong ever since. Rob gives a great deal of credit to his experiences in student

government at UMW as to why he has excelled in leadership roles for the superintendent's association. He was vice president of the student senate there, and got an early exposure to the legislative process while lobbying for the University and, in particular, the Waseca campus. The connection to the University has served Rob again, as he has strived to bring our industry and the University together.

Rob is known for his ability to speak with gusto and fervor as exemplified by his thrilling confrontation with then President Nils Hasselmo of the University of Minnesota at a rally on the Waseca Campus when it was announced publicly that the Campus would be closing. Rob stepped up to the podium in the standing-room-only auditorium, red-faced and with veins popping, and proceeded to let the world know that the decision was a bad one, and that Hasselmo should take a long and hard look at the campus supporters in the room and think again. "NILS!" Rob expounded, "You have single handedly destroyed one of the finest centers of agricultural learning in the country!" Unfortunately, the campus did close; but if you ever want to get the unabridged story



Rob Panuska

Distinguished Service Award Recipient

on that piece of history, ask Rob. Be prepared however, to experience the passionate response!

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Rob Panuska—

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Knowing first-hand of his public speaking skills (Rob was involved in Toastmasters for many years), I immediately called on him when the Minnesota PGA contacted me about speaking at one of their "Cracker-barrel" sessions. They were interested in learning some tid-bits regarding turf culture like, "Why do we need to aerify?" Seeing a real opportunity, Rob and I slightly modified the topic away from agronomy and put the emphasis on cooperation and understanding the pressures and plight of the superintendent. We started out using an example where an irrigation line has broken mid-summer and the superintendent is doing the repair as the properly attired golf professional casually drives up, takes a sip of his pink lemonade and asks, "Have you got a leak?" Rob then began verbally painting a detailed picture of the perspiration-soaked superintendent being knee-deep in mud and water, mosquitoes the size of sparrows swarming in the 98 degree, 90 percent humidity air, desperately attempting to wrestle a three-inch diameter pipe into position. About that time, the wry reply is given: "Yep, it's a leak alright, but it only affects half the golf course - the half that will be dead and brown tomorrow if I don't get this pipe back together by dark! By the way, be careful not to get any of this mud on those new Footjoes the sales rep "set aside" for you. Oh, and have a nice round." Our point became painfully clear to the audience that day.

As a leader and ambassador for the MGCSA and golf course superintendents in general, Rob has been well-versed and articulate in promoting our cause. He has tirelessly led the dialogue with the University, albeit with some frustrations in dealing with such a large bureaucratic juggernaut. He has been a strong proponent of incorporating a turf pathologist into the state golf scene, having worked with the MGA and the MTGF to rally support and financial involvement. Rob has also been involved with the metamorphosis of the MGCSA annual conference, collaborating with the MTGF, MNLA and the University to create one of the largest and most comprehensive green industry shows in the country. There are countless other issues and challenges that surface during the course of doing business as an association, and Rob has faced every one with a logical, focused approach to find solutions and add value to the membership. As Paul Eckholm, CGCS put it, "Rob epitomizes what the Distinguished Service Award is all about: Dedication and service above and beyond expectations for the good of our industry, our Association and our membership."

When asked to provide three words that best describe Rob, his peers, co-workers and employers were in agreement: Passionate, Dedicated and Good Friend. It's not surprising to hear stories of Rob turning that splendid shade of red while pontificating on a subject of a controversial nature, staying at the golf course all through the night to monitor pumps, or providing assistance or consolation to a fellow superintendent in need. It also fits that Rob would volunteer on the Church Council or chaperone a cross-country band trip. Yet, if you were to ask him, his family always comes first, as it should for a man of such integrity and humility. Humble as ever, Rob has never let a title or position get in the way of being genuine and down to earth. He is probably more comfortable in coveralls and overshoes than in a suit and tie, but he carries himself superbly dressed in either. Besides, at the end of the day, it's what is inside the man that counts.



All smiles at the Awards and Recognition Banquet at Rush Creek Golf Club on December 5, from the left, Mike Brual, Greenhaven Golf Club, Al Starke and Fred Taylor, CGCS, Mankato Golf Club, and Butch Greeninger, MTI Distributing Co.



Representing Versatile Vehicles at the banquet are Kurt Ruehling, left, and Ron Manske. Kurt is rehabilitating after shoulder surgery.



Rob Adams, Superintendent at The Ponds at Battle Creek Golf Course, right, received the 2006 Watson Award from Hole Notes editor Jack MacKenzie, CGCS, North Oaks Golf Club, during the MGCSA Awards and Recognition Banquet at Rush Creek Golf Club on December 5. Rob received the award for his series of letters published in Hole Notes over the past year during his tour of duty in Iraq.

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