

# DOC'S DUGOUT - An Inning From Our Past

By Dr. Kent Kurtz - STMA Historian

## Dr. James R. Watson - a man of Vision, Integrity & Knowledge

### The Early Years

Jim Watson began his college career in 1941 at Texas A&M University in agricultural engineering and planned to make his life's work teaching on the college level. At A&M in his first semester he took an agronomy class and did so well that the professor offered him a job in the department. Jim accepted the position because he needed the job to continue with his studies. When the professor discovered Jim was not an agronomy student, Jim decided to change his major from agricultural engineering to agronomy to keep the job he desperately needed. Jim worked in the agronomy department until 1943 when he was called into the Air Force during World War II. He served with distinction in the 8th Air Force and returned to Texas A&M to continue his studies. He taught soils and crops laboratory sections and occasionally was asked to substitute as a lecturer in other agronomy classes. His primary emphasis was pasture crops since the study of turfgrass management was not emphasized in those days.

In 1947, Dr. Fred Grau, who was the director of the United States Golf Association Green Section and O.J. Noer, the agronomist for the Milwaukee Sewage Commission, were hosting a turfgrass conference at Texas A&M University when they met Jim Watson. Jim was given the job of running a slide projector at the conference and impressed both Grau and Noer. During the conference Dr. Grau asked young Watson if he would send a telegram for him. Jim took the sheet of paper to the telegraph office and opened the message before the telegraph agent sent it. It was addressed to Dr. Burton Musser at Penn State University and read, "Jim Watson accepting fellowship, will arrive for spring semester". And that's how Jim Watson began his career as a turfgrass agronomist. On that day in 1947 Jim Watson established contact with three of the legends in the turfgrass industry and also learned that turfgrass was not growing pastures.

Jim left Texas to accept the fellowship with Dr. Musser and figured he could grow pastures for the \$100 a month stipend offered by Penn State. After all he needed the additional income because he now had a family to support. As far as anyone knows, Jim was the first student in the United States to receive support on the doctorate level to study turfgrass management. Jim received his doctorate in 1950 from Penn State and upon graduation accepted an appointment at Texas A&M University as an assistant professor in the department of agronomy. He enjoyed teaching.

### The Toro Years

Jim has always mentioned to colleagues and friends that he has always been in the right place at the right time.

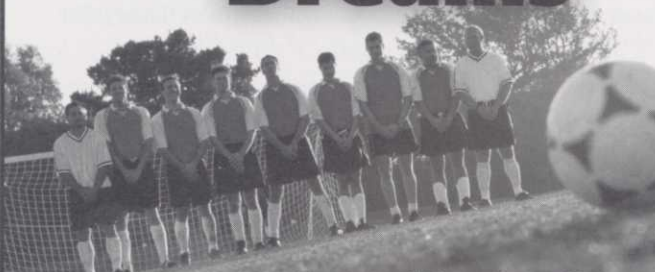


Jim had used Toro equipment while a graduate student at Penn State and was familiar with the company. In those days Toro distributors handled not only Toro equipment but also Milorganite for the Milwaukee Sewage Commission. Jim was invited to Houston to meet the Toro people and, when they offered to double his salary as well as

create a unique position for him, he accepted. Jim went to work for Toro in 1952. He originally planned to work for Toro for five to 10 years and then return to teaching. Jim never left Toro and retired as Vice President of consumer relations and director of agronomy. But even today he continues teaching whenever he speaks at turf conferences or offers advice as a consultant to turfgrass professionals.


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## Call for Nominations

Your Nominations Committee is seeking individuals willing to serve STMA as Board members representing the following groups of our membership:

- Sports Turf Managers of facilities used by professional teams;
- Sports Turf Managers of the facilities of schools other than colleges and universities (elementary, middle schools, high schools or junior colleges); and
- STMA Commercial members.

If you feel a strong commitment to STMA and would like to get involved, or if you know of someone you'd like to recommend, please contact STMA Headquarters.

STMA has a **WORKING** Board. The Board meets four times a year: once in conjunction with the Annual Conference, then once in March, July and November. The 1-1/2-day meetings usually are held on Friday afternoons and all day Saturday.

In addition, Board Members are asked to chair, or to serve on, one or more committees, provide input to other committees, review and vote on key issues affecting the direction of the STMA, and be responsive to the needs of the membership.

All nominations, questions or requests for further information may be directed to STMA Headquarters, 1027 South 3rd Street, Council Bluffs, IA, 51503, phone: 800/323-3975; fax: 800/366-0391 or email: [STMAHQ@st.omhcoxmail.com](mailto:STMAHQ@st.omhcoxmail.com).

All nominations input must be received by July 15th.

## Doc's Dugout

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Jim has served the turfgrass industry exceptionally well as a spokesperson and as a distinguished professor.

In all the years of public speaking when he represented the Toro Company Jim exhibited his professionalism by never preaching sales or Toro products. He has always been an educator, not a salesman.

### Contributions to Sports Turf

Jim has been actively involved with sports turf managers for most of his life. He has been a strong supporter of STMA and its goals and objectives. He served as Commercial Vice President for STMA in the late 80's and early 90's. He was instrumental in the formation of the SAFE Foundation. For many years he served as advisor for the NFL and resource person to one of STMA's founders, George Toma, for Super Bowls. When the United States hosted the World Cup Soccer matches in the 1990s, he was the agronomic coordinator along with STMA member, Steve Cockerham. In 1991, Jim was presented STMA's highest award, the Harry Gill Award, and is among a select group of people who are honorary life members of STMA.

Today, Jim is living in Littleton, Colorado, with his family and enjoying retirement. But when he is asked to speak or look at some problem blades of grass he is always accommodating. I look forward every year at STMA's annual meeting and conference to sharing experience, knowledge and fellowship with Dr. Jim.



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