

ROBERT M. WILLIAMS — 1996 Green Section Award Recipient

COURTESY OF GCSAA/TOM PITT

Robert M. (Bob) Williams, retired golf course superintendent of the Bob O'Link Golf Club in Highland Park, Illinois, has been selected as the recipient of the 1996 USGA Green Section Award. Granted by a distinguished panel of experts, this annual award recognizes persons for distinguished contributions to golf through work with turfgrass. Williams received the award in February during the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America (GCSAA) Conference in Orlando, Florida.

"This is truly the ultimate recognition from the ultimate body in all of golf. I only hope I have given as much to golf as golf has meant to me," Williams said during his acceptance speech. "This award, originating in 1961, has recognized 36 individuals. Ten of these recipients are golf course superintendents. Now considering that 1995 was surely the most difficult turfgrass growing year of all time, I feel that every one of my fellow superintendents has earned a piece of this plaque. Thus, I want to share this recognition with all superintendents and express our combined gratitude to the USGA Green Section."

Williams' professional career began back in 1926 at just 12 years of age. That year, he became a student trainee at Bellaire Country Club in Wauconda, Illinois. His hard work propelled him to become the club's superintendent by the time he turned 18. He remained in the post until becoming the assistant superintendent at Medinah Country Club in Chicago in 1938, then later at The Ohio State University golf courses in 1941.

World War II interrupted his stint at Ohio State. Williams entered the army as a private in 1942, and received his discharge as a full captain in 1945 after service in the combat engineering corps in the European theater. After the war, he rejoined the Ohio State courses, then departed in 1947 to become superintendent at the Beverly Country Club in Chicago. He held that position until undertaking a similar role at Bob O'Link Golf Club in 1958. He re-



Bob O'Link Golf Club, Highland Park, Illinois, benefitted from the talents of Bob Williams beginning in 1958 until his retirement in 1979, when he was succeeded by his son, Bruce.

mained at Bob O'Link until his retirement in 1979, when he was succeeded by his son, Bruce.

Throughout these years, Williams assumed leadership positions in local, state, and national industry associations. His service culminated with his election as president of GCSAA in 1958. He implemented many programs during his GCSAA tenure, including several promotional activities that led to wider recognition of the organization.

These activities did not preclude Williams from initiating other innovations in the turfgrass field. Among these efforts were his design and construction of one of the first customized, automatic irrigation systems at Bob O'Link; his formulation of one of the first three-nozzle, tractor-mounted boom sprayers for golf courses; his service as a teacher and mentor to more than 90 students and apprentice superintendents who have gone on to become professional leaders; and his preparation and delivery of many articles and speeches around the world as a tireless spokesman on behalf of golf course maintenance.

Williams has actively supported a number of USGA Green Section initiatives. He has contributed many articles to the *Green Section Record*; served

on the review committee for the first edition of *Turf Management for Golf Courses*, the definitive text on the subject by Dr. James B. Beard and the staff of the USGA Green Section; and remained an early and enthusiastic proponent of the Green Section's Turf Advisory Service.

The nomination of Bob Williams for the 1996 Green Section Award received widespread and enthusiastic support from many people in the industry. Gary T. Grigg, immediate past president of the GCSAA, wrote: "Bob Williams truly exemplifies the spirit of the USGA Green Section Award. His lifetime contributions, particularly his commitment to professionalism, put him first among many you could consider for the 1996 award."

Perhaps the most heartfelt tribute came from his son and successor, Bruce, who has also followed in his father's footsteps to become the current president of GCSAA during the Orlando meeting. Bruce wrote: "I realize that I am perhaps more than a little biased, but I, too, believe he is a very deserving recipient. As one of many young superintendents who learned at his feet, I can attest to his skills, his commitment, and his love for the game of golf and the profession. He's also one heck of a dad."