

A TWOSOME'S TALE OF TWO TIMES

The evolution of the Green Section and the Turf Advisory Service from an inside perspective.

BY LOIS AND JIM LATHAM

We served the

Green Section twice: 1957-1960 and 1984-1994. These times are remembered as the pre- and post-television eras, or when the USGA just existed, and later, after it became a leading participant in the sports world. In the pre- years, income came only from dues and admissions to

USGA championships. Joe Dey, USGA Executive Director, ran a very tight ship in every respect, with few employees and a low operating budget. The post-years were more amenable, with more attention given to streamlined operations, wider ranges of activity, and greater educational responsibilities.

Lois: I came into the picture when the Southeastern office was moved from Tifton, Georgia, to Beltsville, Maryland, after B. P. Robinson resigned in 1956. The legendary Fred Williams, whose tenure (1922-1959) dated from John Montieth's time, had become the secretary for both the Mid-Atlantic and the Southeastern offices, and he simply couldn't cope with Jim's southern lingo on imperfect, mail-in disk records made while driving the pre-interstate roads. I helped Fred, part time, with Jim's reports and expense accounts, and when the midsummer reports came in



Lois and Jim Latham

hot and heavy. In those days, the agronomist made two visits to each subscriber each year, and although the reports were short, the work load became a chore.

Jim: The mail-ins were mandatory, since the Southeastern Region amounted to seven states from North Carolina to Florida to Tennessee. I had to drive across D.C. and the state of Virginia to go to work! By sharing an office in the USDA building in Beltsville, the USGA saved rent and a secretary's salary. Coming home for weekends was out of the question, as was the expense of using airlines. And leaving on Monday left little work time that week. One year I was out of town 176 days.

Lois: After recounting the distance and communications problem (calling home frequently was frowned upon when the long-distance bills came in), Mr. Dey gave permission for us to seek

another location within the Southeast, preferably at a university or research facility (i.e., rent free!). George King, director of the Georgia Experiment Stations, found a place for us on the third floor of old Conner Hall on the University of Georgia campus in Athens.

It was not exactly an office; it was a laboratory

room. We had no office furniture and neither did the university. Jim had a lab table to work on and I had an old typewriter desk, but *no* typewriter. I brought in my own typewriter, but working only half time I sometimes needed it at home. Carrying that heavy manual machine around became a real chore. A request to Joe Dey to buy a typewriter was denied, so I inquired about rentals. I found that the monthly rental was \$6.00, so I began billing the USGA \$6.00 a month. After the second month, we received a note from Mr. Dey to buy a *used* typewriter. Frugality at its finest. The greatest help was a phone line connected to the Horticulture Department, so at least our phone was covered at all times.

Jim: Green Section travelers have never lived high on the hog. In the fifties we ate and slept on \$18.00 a day. The two Holiday Inns that existed then

were too expensive. Joe Dey personally checked all expense accounts. He also spot-checked reports to make sure we used good English. The cars we drove were minimum transportation, but I was more fortunate than most. In 1957 I bought a mid-range Chevy equipped with a radio, automatic transmission, and nothing else. I once got a quail in my lap — feathers, blood, and all — while driving with the window vent facing forward to bring in as much air movement as possible. The next car, a finned beauty Plymouth, had air conditioning because the dealer (a Green Section committeeman) didn't want to see us coming to his golf course looking like a limp dishrag.

Lois: Sometimes the fiscal reconciliation was slow, between the time the local bills were submitted to Golf House and the time we received their check. More than once, our bank called to report overdrafts in the Green Section account. I just told them to take the amount needed out of our personal account and we would then reimburse ourselves when the USGA check came in. Imagine — the Lathams bankrolling the USGA! There were a few panic attacks, since salaries ran parallel to expense levels.

Jim: There was a substantial dislike of the USGA by superintendents at golf courses that had hosted the Open. There was no way, they felt, that bentgrass would survive a $\frac{3}{16}$ -inch cut in late June (the normal mowing height was $\frac{1}{4}$ inch or perhaps higher), because the greens always died in July or August. More than one superintendent told me that the two best ways to be fired were to be president of the GCSAA and to be at a course that hosted the Open. I knew a few who had moved south after bad experiences upcountry. Incidentally, many superintendents of that day worked on northern courses during the

golf season and then moved south to run the winter clubs during that season. Those were the kinder, gentler days.

We left the Green Section in 1960 to follow other turf work — at a slightly better salary. I was told that the other agronomists were glad to see me go, since all of them got significant raises — to above that for which I left. So went the world.

Lois: Returning to the Green Section after an absence of 25 years (through the grace of Bill Bengeyfield and Stan



Zontek) was a great experience. All we had to do was move the office equipment from Crystal Lake, Illinois, to Milwaukee, Wisconsin. But we had furnishings this time — an electric typewriter, chairs, and desks. No personal move was involved. The expense reimbursement checks came in on time, but they were subject to the same scrutiny. Getting into computers is another story for another time.

Jim: The post-TV USGA has allowed the new order Green Section to be more conscious of creature com-

fort, but the work is no less intense — probably more so, since golf courses are now subject to more demands and greater scrutiny. In the fifties, much of the reports to subscribers dealt with rates and dates of application of any consumable (like lead arsenate, sodium arsenite, potassium cyanate, mercury compounds — and Italian ryegrass) used on golf courses. Today, the label on any chemical is the law, and knowledge of many governmental regulations is mandatory. The other components of reports are essentially the same, except for the much more intensive management given golf courses today. And the preparation of championship courses today begins much earlier than it did in the fifties, so the superintendents are much better prepared for that stress.

Lois: Nepotism has not been a dirty word in Green Section offices, because the work must be done within certain time frames, and if it isn't, everyone involved will hear from the subscribers and/or the national director. That includes turf advisory reports, articles for publication, conference notes, etc. Today, telephone and e-mail are a way of doing business that has simplified operations considerably. That's where the practicality of having spouses in the know about office matters comes in. Communication after business hours can accomplish many things, including her knowing where the old man is and what he is up to.

A neighbor once asked me how our marriage had held up for so long since Jim had spent so much time away from home. I told her that she had just answered the question (we celebrated our 52nd anniversary in 2003).

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