

Terry Bonar - 2009 USGA Green Section Award Recipient

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Terry Bonar is a superintendent's superintendent. Having worked at the Canterbury Golf Club in Shaker Heights, Ohio, since 1961 (with a stint in the U.S. Air Force from 1963 to 1967), he is still going strong with his border collie Molly at his side. He works, inspires, maintains, teaches, manages, and cares!

Terry was born on December 30, 1940, the same date as Tiger Woods but just a generation older. He grew up in Steubenville, Ohio, and graduated from Steubenville High School in 1957. A year or two later he attended the two year turf program at Penn State University, interned at Oglebay Park Golf Course, and graduated from Penn State in 1961. Afterward, he worked on the crew at Canterbury Golf Club and became the assistant superintendent there in 1963. After serving for four years as an intelligence analyst in the U.S. Air Force, he returned in 1967 to Canterbury as an assistant superintendent, and in 1984 he was appointed its golf course superintendent.

Terry truly embodies what is good about the game of golf. He has worked hard throughout his career, gaining the trust, respect, and loyalty of so many people in the industry. A man of great integrity, Terry continues to improve upon the past year and consistently generates a top level product. His quiet demeanor neither seeks attention nor requires publicity, but fittingly he has been recognized by his peers. The Ohio Turfgrass Foundation honored Terry with its annual Professional Excellence Award in 1996, presented to highly deserving individuals who have made significant contributions to the turfgrass industry. In 2003, Terry received the prestigious Mal McLaren Award, the highest honor bestowed by the Northern Ohio Golf Course Superintendents Association, and given only sparingly when a truly outstanding candidate is identified. Terry was nominated for Golf Magazine's "Superintendent of the Year Award" and came in a close second. He also has served as a volunteer on the USGA's Green Section Committee for 12 years.

In his long tenure, Terry has helped Canterbury host numerous championships, including the 1979 U.S. Amateur Championship and the 1996 U.S. Senior Open, the 1973 PGA Championship, the Senior TPC in 1983, '84, and '85, and currently is directing the club's preparations to host the 2009 Senior PGA Championship. Terry has never jumped to invite large numbers of volunteers at his club's championship events, preferring to count on his own outstanding crew and a few nearby colleagues.

Bonar has mentored many employees in the golf course maintenance industry, and he has seen more than 50 assistants or former interns move on to other positions in golf, including 18 current superintendents at other courses around the country. He doesn't push them out after a two-year stint, but prefers to keep them for a few years to help build a veteran and efficient crew. Some have stayed for decades! Many of those who do move on to new venues establish themselves and mentor their own group of superintendents. This makes Terry "The Dean" of many golf course superintendents!

In addition to his mentoring programs and his skills with his crew, Terry is an innovator. Stan Zontek, longtime USGA agronomist, said this of him: "Terry was the first golf course superintendent that I visited in my 37 years with the USGA who took a holistic approach to maintaining a golf course. That is, he maintained the entire golf course. That was a most unusual and groundbreaking concept in those days. Terry provided the golfers with smooth, true putting and consistent greens, high quality and closely cut tees, high quality bentgrass fairways, and roughs that were the best anywhere. The roughs were grass . . . not weeds and not infested with pests and diseases, and they were not a forgotten part of the golf course property. That was novel thinking at the time. It is much more common and accepted as a standard today. The result — a renowned championship venue maintained to the highest standards."

In addition, Bonar has long been viewed as an efficient user of water, with the goal of providing firm and fast playing surfaces for Canterbury's golfers. He also was among the early pioneers to adapt the use of lightweight mowers to maximize turf health and playability on fairways.

"Terry has been the essence of what a golf course superintendent should be," said Jim Snow, national director of the USGA Green Section. "He has excelled in every phase of the profession and has left his mark on the industry in so many ways."

note: This article was written by Bob Brame and Jim Snow of the United States Golf Association and originally appeared in the USGA Green Section Record May-June 2009 issue. The article was reproduced with permission.