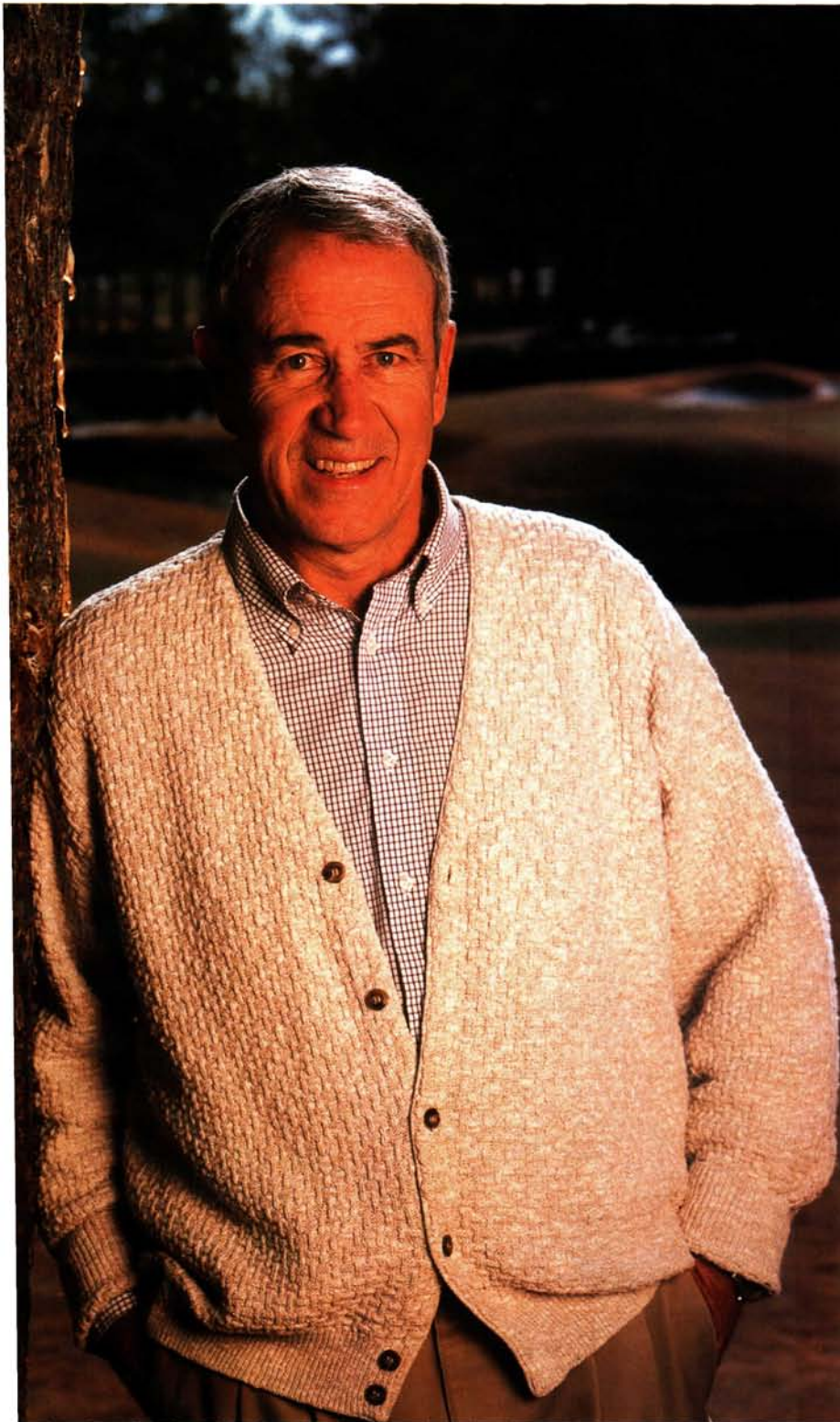


2002 USGA GREEN SECTION AWARD: George B. Thompson



“All of my heroes in the turfgrass industry have received this award,” George B. Thompson, CGCS, of Pinehurst, N.C., a man synonymous with leadership by example in the turfgrass industry, joins this prestigious list upon receiving the 2002 USGA Green Section Award. The award is granted annually by a distinguished panel of experts in the turfgrass field and recognizes persons for distinguished contributions to golf through work with turfgrass. The award was presented to Thompson by John O’Neill, a member of the USGA Executive Committee, at the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America Conference and Show in Orlando, Fla., on February 9, 2002.

A quiet, unassuming man, George Thompson is known throughout the industry as the consummate dedicated professional. As a golf course superintendent for 36+ years, he focused his attention on the golf course as he took pleasure in the tasks required to improve the course each day. And just as important, he developed the admirable quality of sharing his experience and knowledge with others, and teaching them the requisite skills for becoming successful golf course superintendents.

While delivering newspapers as a young boy, he always marveled at the beauty of the golf course, admiring the shadows and the dew in the early morning hours. He got his first taste of the game caddying at age 11. Even then, he tried to be the very best at what he did. Earning 65 cents for a nine-hole round, he noted how he learned a lot about Mother Nature as well as human nature. “This was my rite of passage into the industry,” said Thompson.

After a very successful stint at the Columbia Country Club (Chevy Chase, Md.), George moved in 1982 to The Country Club of North Carolina, where for 18 years he worked his magic. Always willing to investigate new techniques, he was one of the first to use the improved perennial ryegrass varieties for fairway turf in the transition zone in the late 1960s. Many university researchers and chemical companies sought him out to evaluate new products and turfgrass varieties. Researchers liked working with George because

they knew he understood the significance of research and was willing to follow the necessary research protocols to produce high-quality field studies.

When the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service wanted to establish the Safe Harbor Program in the mid-1990s to benefit the red-cockaded woodpecker in the North Carolina Sandhills, George Thompson and The Country Club of North Carolina were among the first to join the program. The Safe Harbor Habitat Conservation Plan offers participating property owners an incentive to manage their lands for this endangered species. The club worked actively to create hospitable woodpecker habitat among the old-growth longleaf pines on their property, and the course had the honor of having one of the largest populations of these woodpeckers on any golf course in the Southeast. Since 1991 Thompson has continued this environmental activism as a participant in the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program for Golf Courses.

George Thompson is often lauded for his willingness to give back to the industry. He was eagerly sought out by turfgrass students for the opportunity to intern on his golf course. Their training included not only the basics of golf course maintenance, but also life lessons about what it took to be successful in the business. Many of his assistants have gone on to become successful golf course superintendents and in-

dustry leaders in their own right. Even in retirement, George is sought out by superintendents for his advice and counsel.

George has been an active volunteer in the local turfgrass industry as well. His resume includes positions as president of the Mid-Atlantic Golf Course Superintendents Association, the Greater Washington Golf Course Superintendents Association, and the Turfgrass Council of North Carolina (TCNC). His leadership with the TCNC came at a time when the association was experiencing growing pains, and his guidance led to a beneficial collaboration with all sectors of the industry, including a strong, long-term university/turfgrass industry relationship.

George continues to influence the golf course superintendents of the future through his teaching and speaking activities. Throughout his career he spoke at countless meetings and conferences, and he is still in demand. In addition, since his retirement in 2000 he has continued to teach a turf management course at nearby Sand Hills College.

In accepting the award, he expressed gratitude to his friends and peers in the industry and promised to continue to instill desire in his turf students. George noted, "Contributions are what it's all about." The golf course industry and the caliber of its superintendents have come a long way because of contributions from people like George Thompson.

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