

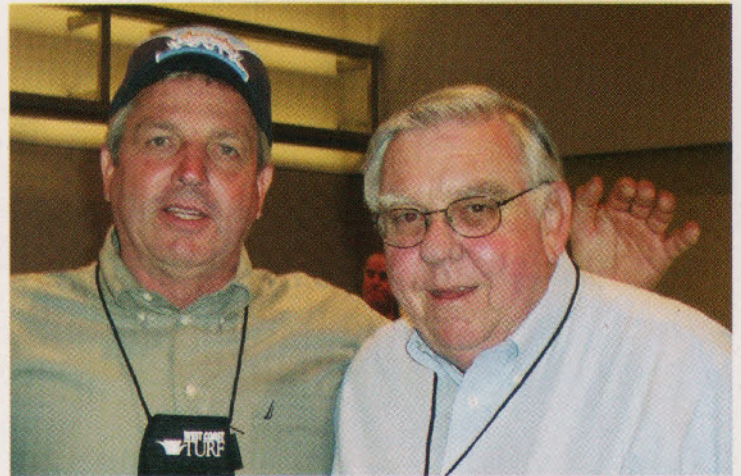
Remembering a Friend and Mentor

By Mike Schiller, CSFM

On Saturday morning February 18, 2006 the turf industry lost a good friend, innovator, teacher and leader, and I lost a mentor. After a brief but very courageous battle against cancer, Dr. Kent Worthington Kurtz left this life for his eternal reward.

Kent W. Kurtz was a son, a brother, a husband, a father, a teacher, a pack rat, a delegator, and friend. He was also the first real Executive secretary of the Sports Turf Managers Association.

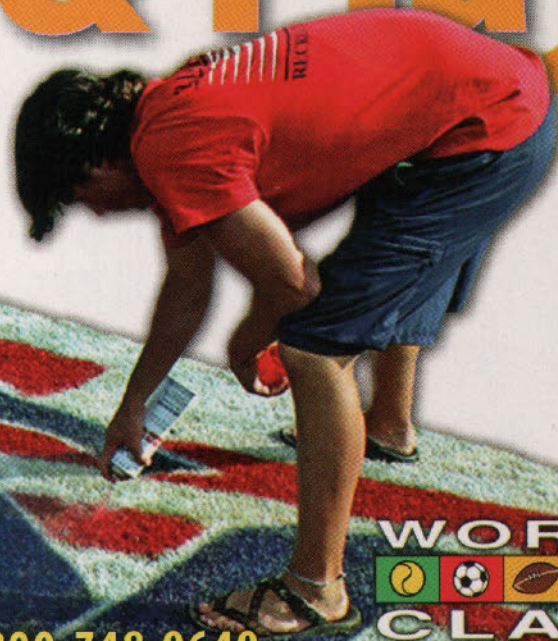
Kent was born in 1940, in Evanston, IL to Melvin and Elsie (nee Worthington) Kurtz. He grew up in Arlington Heights and Davis, IL and was the brother of Kerry Kurtz. Kent was married to Patricia Ann O'Hara, who passed away in 1991, with whom he had two children, Heather (Ford), and Todd. Almost 13 years ago he was married to Marilyn (Sands/Filbeck) Kurtz and they resided in Arcadia, CA while Doc still taught at Cal Poly Pomona. He was the heart and soul of the ornamentals and turf program there for 36 years.



Dr. Kent Kurtz, right, poses with Jon Hubbs, president of Stabilizer Solutions, Inc., at the 2005 STMA Conference

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He was a true
influence on the turf
industry, having
taught thousands of
young people,
bringing them into
the profession.

He was passionate about turf and providing the best playing surfaces possible no matter what level of competition or sport. Doc consulted for athletic venues all over the country and world, he spoke all over the world and was a member so many different societies and organizations it would fill a page. Suffice it to say he was a member of the STMA and the GCSAA.

Through all his years of educating, Doc was way ahead of his time, I think. More than 30 years ago he realized the need for trained managers of athletic fields. Yes he educated many a fine golf course superintendent, but I do believe he was most proud of those students he directed into a career in athletic field management.

He helped get the fledgling organization known as STMA on its feet and growing, and helping establish the first full time office out in California. In recent years Doc was asked to head up the historical committee of STMA and he was in the process of putting together several programs of slides to show the history of Sports Turf management.

Before the national Conference last January, Doc had called me several times to discuss different ideas for slide presentations and to show some of the historical items he had to display the past of our industry.

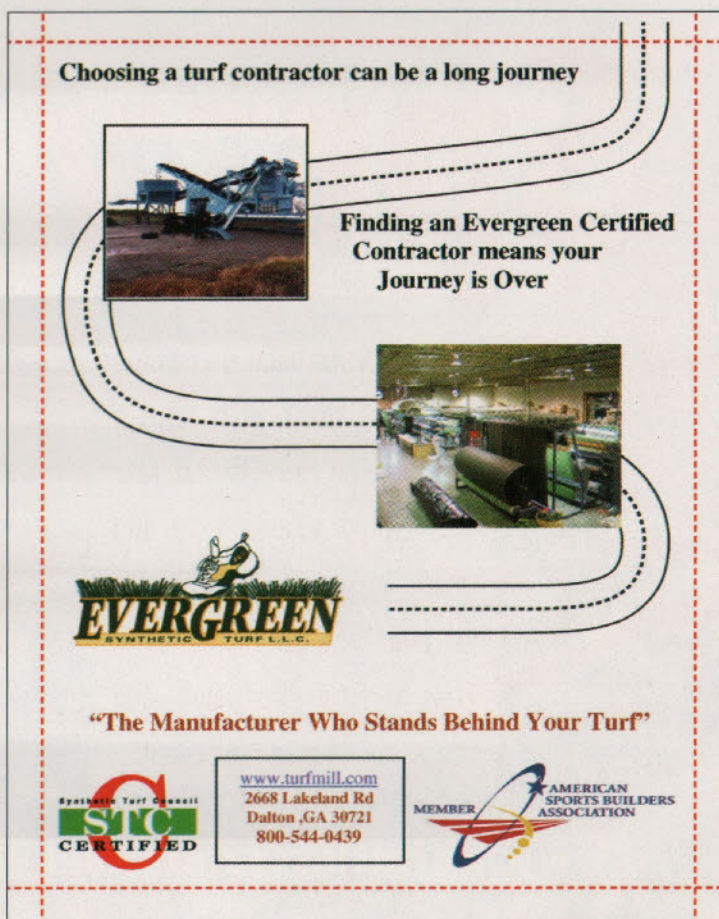


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Unfortunately, when just before the conference Doc was admitted to the hospital because of heart problems, he was diagnosed with stage four cancers that had spread into several parts of his body.

I was very lucky to get to speak with Doc and his son over the last 6 weeks of his life, and I got the chance to tell him how important he was to me and thank him for being a good friend and a mentor.

The week before his passing, he had to go back into the hospital briefly but returned home to witness the marriage of his daughter to Steve Ford; it was a proud day for Doc. He called me that night and said, "My little girl is married, I can rest now and let go." I believe that was his way of saying goodbye to me, to let me know it would be the last time we spoke.

We laughed about the memories of our good friend Harry "Gramps" Gill and Dr. Bill Daniel and his friend Dr. Henry Indyk, and the good times we had. We laughed about putting my young daughters to work in our basement binding our first membership directory.

I also remember a time shortly after I met Doc, I was working for the Northbrook Park District in Illinois. I was in charge of grounds maintenance for our parks and golf course. My phone rang one early evening and it was the good doctor. "Schiller, it's Kurtz, what the hell are you doing to my Uncle Gene? Trying to kill the old guy?"

I asked what he meant, and he said his uncle was on our course and he had been hit in the head with a golf ball. I did some checking and came to find out that Gene Worthington had been quite a good golfer in his early years and was still one of the best instructors around back then. Uncle Gene was Doc's mom's brother and was working on our grounds crew as well as instructing to supplement his retirement income. He had been working with one of our crewmembers fixing an irrigation problem. Gene had a hard hat on, heard the infamous cry of "FORE" saw the ball coming at him, but the reflexes did not let him get out of the way in time.

He was out like a light, trip to the hospital for a check up and he was good as new. However, it was all my fault as far as Doc was concerned. I should have known the ball was going to hit Uncle Gene and not have let him out there. Uncle Gene loved being on the course, and even as a senior was still quite strong and he did a good job for us.

I reminded Doc of the old shoes he always wore to our house; they were a pair of look-like alligator style shoes that my kids called "toad shoes", so of course Kent was always Doctor Toad Shoes! Years ago I got a package from Kent, and it was those old shoes. My wife had kept them and so I gave them back to Doc the day of his funeral.

There were a lot of good times with Doc and some tough times as STMA grew, but always his faith and friendships stayed strong. You could call him for a straight and direct answer, if he didn't know, he'd tell you so, but a few days later call you back with information he had gathered.

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IN MEMORIAM

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He was a true influence on the turf industry, having taught thousands of young people, bringing them into the profession. He was a great delegator! He would call and it was always that same old gruff voice at the other end: "Schiller, Kurtz here and we need to . . ."

First off I can never ever remember him calling anyone by their first name, and most importantly if he said, "We have to" it usually meant you were going to have to do something to keep things moving along. I never minded no matter how many times he got me.

The ultimate "delegation" now goes to Marilyn, Todd, and Heather, as they have to go through all the boxes of stuff, pictures, paraphernalia that Doc had accumulated over all his years in the business.

Doc was all I have mentioned and as his friend George Toma always says, "And then some."

Of Kent Kurtz, Toma said, "I always thought of Doc as one of the founders. He was just a little behind those of us who started STMA, but to me Doc will always be a founder of STMA."

Jim Prusa, former GSCAA administrator, said, "I have lost a true friend who helped him through many tough times."

Amy Fouty, CSFM, and Abby McNeal, CSFM, both said they will miss the warmth and welcome Doc always gave them, and how he always expressed his happiness that so many young ladies were making their mark in the profession.

I am sure glad my path crossed with Doc's. I know I am a better person and better professional for having the chance to know and work with him so often.

Doctor Kurtz was laid to rest beside Trish, on Saturday February 25th, following a beautiful celebration of his life in the Calvary United Methodist Church of Davis. Rev. Randall Shepard led a service that connected Kent back to his roots in Illinois and celebrated his life among friends, family and colleagues.

Mike Schiller, CSFM, is a former president of STMA, former chairman of the SAFE Foundation, and grounds manager at Lake Forest Academy, Lake Forest, IL. ■

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