

# *In memoriam:*

## The life and legacy of industry legend Dr. James R. Watson

**I**MAGINE, if you will, a bright, warm day in Pennsylvania in the spring of 1950. A young man named James R. Watson walked across the stage at Penn State to receive his Ph D in agronomy. Just 5 years earlier, this young man was in the 8th Air Force, where he received a Purple Heart for action over Berlin during the Second World War. The future seemed much brighter now, on that brilliant, vernal day, than it had before.

Then a professor at Penn State, James, or “Dr. Jim,” as he would become affectionately known, was hired by The Toro Company in September of 1952 as Director of Agronomy. David Lilly, president of Toro from 1950-1968, believed that the company needed an agronomist, but wasn't quite sure what to do with one, so Dr. Watson had to work with Mr. Lilly to build his own job description. That same year, the company opened a new 24,000-square foot research and development building on the 25+ acre plot of land on which the company's corporate headquarters now resides.

Leading a team of 25 researchers, Dr. Watson established 50 test plots, some with underground heating cables and others in climate controlled green houses, encompassing more than 10 acres of land; this facility is now known as the Dr. James R. Watson Research & Development Proving Grounds. Research was conducted on a wide variety of grasses, seeds, yields, the type and nature of soil conditions best suited to different varieties of grass, optimal fertilization and watering practices and the best approaches to controlling unwanted grasses, disease and pests. This was pioneering research that set the global stage for the future of the turf industry.

Dr. Watson spent the next 46 years with Toro, where he continued to pioneer turf and water management research that had an increasing global impact. Many of the world's leading golf courses, parks and sports facilities frequently sought Watson's advice and counsel. Throughout his career, Dr. Watson was



held in the highest regard throughout the industry for his kindness, knowledge, and professionalism.

Dr. Watson remained active in the industry following his retirement from Toro in 1998, serving as a consultant to both the company and the industry at-large, as well as serving on a number of prestigious turf and water management boards, organizations and research efforts.

While Dr. Watson had received countless awards and recognition for his years of research and accomplishments, his true goal was the advancement of the industry. Today, people have Dr. Watson to thank for many of the scientific innovations that have contributed so significantly to their enjoyment of beautiful, healthy, thriving, environmentally-friendly green spaces around the world.

Dr. James R. Watson passed away peacefully on October 1 of this year. A loving family man and a devoted scientific pioneer, Dr. Watson's life and good works touched countless lives. As a man of science, Dr. Watson was undoubtedly familiar with the First Law of Thermodynamics, which tells us that energy can neither be created, nor destroyed. Perhaps, in a poetic way, it also tells us that even though he is no longer with us, his life and legacy are quite literally all around us. ■

### Biographical timeline:

- Born, December 24, 1920 in Leesville, LA
- 1943-1945, bombardier with 8th Air Force over Europe
- Received Purple Heart and Silver Star for action over Berlin, March 1945
- BS in Agronomy 1947 from Texas A&M University
- PhD in Agronomy 1950 from Penn State under Dr. H. Burton Musser
- 1950-1952, Professor Texas A & M University
- 1952-1998, Vice President of Agronomy, The Toro Company
- 1998-onward, Consultant to The Toro Company and the industry

### Awards and Recognition:

- Fellow American Society of Agronomy
- Fellow Crop Science Society
- 1967 Turf consultant to professional football's first Super Bowl – a relationship Toro continues to enjoy to this day
- 1976 United States Golf Association's Green Section Award for distinguished service to golf through work with turfgrass
- 1977 American Society of Agronomy's Agronomic Service Award
- 1979 Elected to the Board of the International Turfgrass Society
- 1982 Appointed to United States Golf Association's research committee
- 1983 Golf Course Superintendents Association of America's Distinguished Service Award
- 1983 Appointed adjunct professor in the Horticultural Science and Landscape Architecture Department of the University of Minnesota.
- 1985 Elected Director of National Golf Foundation
- 1985 Elected Director to the Board of the Freshwater Foundation
- 1986 Landscape Management's Man of the Year
- 1986 Landscape and Irrigation's Man of the Year
- 1987 First recipient of the Crop Society of America's Fred V. Grau Turfgrass Science Award
- 1988 Elected to the Board of the Sports Turf Managers Association
- 1989 Minnesota Golf Course Superintendents' Distinguished Service Award
- 1989 Appointed to the Board of the Landscape Architecture Foundation
- 1991 Appointed to the Executive Board of the Landscape Architecture Foundation as Vice President of Research
- 1991 Sports Turf Management Association's Harry Gill Award
- 1993 Appointed to the Planning Council of the Irrigation Association and Water Science and Technology Board Committee on "The Future of Irrigation"
- 1994 Served as agronomic coordinator for nine of the World Cup venues
- 1994 Donald Ross award from Golf Architects Society of America
- 1995 Golf Course Superintendents Association of America's highest honor – the Old Tom Morris Award
- 1998 Texas A & M University, College of Agriculture and Life Sciences' Outstanding Alumni Award
- 1998 United States Golf Association's Green Section's Piper and Oakley Award
- 1999 Honorary Member of the Sports Turf Managers Association
- 1999 Inducted into the Minnesota Golf Hall of Fame
- 2002 Appointed to the Board of Trustees of the Agronomics Science Foundation
- 2007 American Society of Irrigation Consultants' Ray Williams Memorial Award
- 2009 United States Golf Association's Ike Grainger Award