



## Anniversary Story

“Evolving”

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Evolving is often described as the gradual development or progression to a more complex or organized state. In more simplified terms it is “change.” I have been a golf course superintendent for over 40 years and have seen the golf course industry evolve from the many advances in technology, science, and environmental understanding. It does not matter what profession you are associated with, we all have more knowledge and scientific tools available than ever before that will make us more productive and efficient.

My “story” begins with a brief journey from my childhood and ends where my beliefs are today concerning our most important resource – water. I grew up in south-central Nebraska on a family farm in the 1960s. Gravity irrigation of row crops was king. Irrigation wells were drilled and land leveled to accept gravity flow. Water was taken for granted and considered an infinite commodity. We drank water directly from the wells without any thought of testing for quality. Nobody gave a second thought about how fertilizers or pesticides could have a negative impact on our underground water supplies. Irrigation discharges at the end of fields filled roadside ditches and eventually provided tributary flows into rivers and streams. Our farm had a branch of the Big Blue River passing through it that we affectionately called the “sewer creek” (named appropriately because of discharges made into it upstream). It really didn't bother us in that we always fished and swam in the “creek.” We observed turtles, waterfowl, beavers, and muskrats. I'll always remember the day when I went down to the creek and saw dead fish floating down the river. Something happened!

Fast forward to today. Pivot irrigation is now king. Water is applied much more uniformly and discreetly. Fertilizer and pesticides applications are monitored in such a way to protect our underground water supplies. Roadside ditches are dry with little or no irrigation waters leaving its application site.

My childhood shaped who I am today. I have evolved too. I now realize how our actions today will affect the environment of tomorrow. I am an advocate for the protection and conservation of groundwater. I have become a more skilled spokesman for the golf course industry on a state and national level, serving on numerous committees. That is why I became involved with the Groundwater Guardian Green Site program. I have to admit, when a peer suggested I join the group several years ago, I was highly skeptical. It would have been very easy to ignore the important environmental issues that always seemed to be confronting the golf course industry and let others “fight the fight.” I always considered myself a good environmental steward and was always trying to do the “right” things...so why should I get involved?

After reviewing the Green Site program, it revealed that I was already doing many of their suggested practices. The program would validate the positive things we were already doing. The program is essentially a self-evaluation process. It allows you to assess your facility and make changes at your pace and level of financial commitment. Plus, it provided positive press to local media outlets.

The Green Site program has also given me the opportunity to network with professionals from other varying fields. It has allowed me to advocate on behalf of our industry and clarify any misconceptions. Often it is the uninformed public that can do irreparable damage. Communicating environmental issues to a “guarded” public will always be one of our greatest challenges. Thus, it is important to combat negative public perception with factual results. I am proud of our industry and feel we are leading the way to a cleaner and better environment. However, it may even be more challenging to convince our elected government officials and regulatory agencies to recognize the impact of their decisions. Our lawmakers must be able to balance environmental sustainability without jeopardizing economic vitality.

Evolution will continue. Sensible and sustainable actions that produce results will be fundamental to a healthy tomorrow.

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