

cial camaraderie and cooperation superintendents have always shared with one another may be the next casualty.

Other good evidence, in my opinion, is the length of time a typical graduate spends as an assistant or in other secondary positions before finally getting the chance as a superintendent, if he gets one at all. While I haven't seen statistics, it seems that graduates often spend 8 – 10 years before they land their first superintendent job, and those of us over 50 wonder if our current job will be our last. I don't think it farfetched to say that today's typical grad will be lucky if he or she manages 20 years in a superintendent capacity.

As for management companies, I do see them as being a cause and effect of the economy, sometimes creating opportunities and sometimes taking them away. Anything that smacks of protectionism goes against a core American value of free trade and competition in the marketplace, so I can see why the issue never came to a head a few years back when pressure could have been exerted to stem the tide.

Your gut instinct – my gut instinct – is to sneer presidential-like and snarl. "Bring 'em on!" when competition appears, but this is not sandlot baseball or playground basketball. It is your career, your earning potential, your children's education, the quality of your life, and your retirement security.

It is you, on the golf course at age 72, either mowing fairways to make ends meet or teeing it up with your buddies.

Helping to steer all these bright, recent turf grads now lining up to take your job into biotechnologies or computer engineering a few years back would not have been unethical or un-American.

When the issue first surfaced in the early 1990s, many of us recommended a conservative approach, but this view was not supported by those organizations that could have influenced or regulated the proliferation of new programs or the expansion of existing ones. I suppose it was the unbridled optimism of the potential limitless growth of golf projected by some

organizations and individual "experts" when we were churning out 400 – 500 new golf courses in this country each year. If there were just enough golf courses, then everyone would sell their bass boats and bowling balls and head over to the local links, right?

Optimism is one thing, but the math always looked fuzzy for those of us who learned to calculate the size of our fairways.

## The Trouble with Turfgrass

### GREEN SIDE UP



Joel Jackson, CGCS

The trouble with turfgrass as most of us know it is that it's an artificial environment that we impose on a local ecological system. Of course regional malls and housing developments that now sit on old orange groves and pastureland are also artificial environments. Thank God for turfgrass to help buffer and filter the runoff and other environmental impacts from such sites and other urban development and sprawl.

And then there are those thousands of miles of turfgrass that border our roads and highways. By keeping a clear field of vision they help with traffic safety.

The trouble with turfgrass of course is that it does need mowing from time to time and some nutrients help keep it thriving during stressful growing conditions.

Native grasses are great out on the prairies and as accents in

landscape and golf course settings; tough for the kids and rover to play in a yard 3 feet deep. Manicuring a yard requires maintenance and regular maintenance is artificial manipulation of the ecology of grass. If you have ever seen a photo of a grass plant in a botany book, it is a gangly looking thing with a seed-head stalk sticking up; not your average suburban homeowners association covenants and

restrictions type of thing.

Recently at the Turf and Ornamental Communicators Association conference in Seattle, the

speaker from the Washington County DEP said he could tolerate golf course fairways and roughs, but because the greens were such an artificial surface requiring so much chemical and fertilizer attention, the golf industry should sincerely consider using new and improved artificial turf to avoid the "toxic" inputs.

And when it comes to recent trends in county governments' attempts to conserve water, the best solution they can come up with is to limit the amount of turfgrass on a newly developed lot. Fifty percent seems to be the number in favor right now. Landscape irrigation designs for residential and commercial landscapes seem to be lagging behind golf courses. It would be real interesting to see how they cover little ribbons of turf winding through the ground cover and mulched shrubbery beds.

Using turfgrass limitations as a water-conservation measure violates private property rights as far as I'm concerned. The real waste and overuse as we all know are the irrigation systems that are not managed properly or at all. Golf courses generally get an A-plus on this score because it is such a critical playability factor that we adjust our system settings daily or turn them off when it is raining.

It is certainly no strain for me to flip the Auto/off switch on my home controller out in the garage when

it is raining, but this seems to be too technical for the average homeowner with an automatic system. And we have all seen the commercial and municipal systems running during rainstorms. Those systems are managed by landscape crews that might visit the site once a week. So the trouble really isn't turfgrass, but it gets the blame.

And for that official in Seattle who thinks golf greens are ruining the environment because of their "high maintenance" requirements, the general public still doesn't get it that we are talking about three to four acres of turfgrass scattered over 150 acres in 5,000-square-foot chunks. And while they harbor visions of barrels of pesticides being poured down a funnel into the aquifers or streams, they ignore the scientific evidence that has said and continues to say over and over again that properly applied pesticides and fertilizers just don't cause environmental problems.

The caveat for our industry is that products be properly applied according to the label. I don't think that's too much to ask. Those who don't abide by best management practices and the label don't deserve to be in the business and that goes for those who own the facilities as well. This is no time to be playing fast and loose with the products that have been approved by the EPA. They are too expensive and hard to come by without violating the rules for using them.

Mankind needs turfgrasses a lot more than turfgrass needs mankind. We have learned to manipulate turfgrasses to fit into our lifestyles and recreational past times, and thanks to science and technology, we can maintain those "artificial" turf environments safely when done properly. People with a zero-tolerance policy for pesticides will always oppose these artificial environments, while ignoring their dependence on other chemicals in their lives because they don't appreciate turfgrass like we do.

Grass is the Rodney Dangerfield of plant life; it gets no respect and that's the trouble with turfgrass.