



Toftrees—
**IMPRESSIONS
ARE LASTING**

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When Phil Sieg bought 750 acres of rolling wooded land in State College, Penn., in 1964, he knew he wanted to design and build a golf course and surround it with housing. His reasoning was very straightforward. The golf course would not only generate income, it would also increase the value of the residual land.

Once the land became his property, Sieg began assembling a team of highly-regarded specialists. Their job would be to turn his concept into

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concrete plans.

The group recognized immediately that the golf course would be competing against three nearby private country clubs. Accordingly, Sieg's team decided to make their course semi-private, with membership fees, but no member equity. The idea of building a motel or lodge on the site, too, was accepted because they felt such a facility would have several advantages. First, the area could use another motel, and the setting envisioned for it would make it appealing to anyone passing through. Second, any transient who happened to like to play golf would choose this particular stopover. Third, groups of serious golfers would jump at the chance of spending a weekend on the course itself.

Edmund Ault of Bethesda, Md., was retained as the architect. The plan developed quickly. In the summer of 1968, the first nine holes were opened for play, complete with a 1,000-square-foot starter's cabin and snack bar. A surprised Sieg found that Toftrees CC and Lodge had 100 members and was averaging 100 green fee players a weekend.

The unusually good reception given to the club prompted Sieg to revise his initial concept. Instead of creating a golf course surrounded by housing, his group decided to make Toftrees a planned community, a new town similar to Columbia, Md., or Reston, Va. They would make the clubhouse and lodge the focal point of what had turned into a major undertaking.

Sieg sought and found one of the nation's preeminent architectural and planning firms, Bucher Meyers & Associates of Silver Spring, Md. Having worked before with Alan Meyers, one of the firm's principals, Sieg knew the Meyers organization had an impressive track record in the field of recreational projects.

Alan Meyers recognized that a traditional design approach would not bear fruit. Given the natural setting of the site and the firm's propensity for retaining and improving upon as much of the natural environs as possible, Bucher Meyers began developing concepts of its own.

Within two months, Alan Meyers presented a preliminary set of drawings for a clubhouse complex. The architecture was untraditional, but reflected perfectly the type of work the

firm is known for: Striking contemporary design blended with earth colors and materials that take advantage of natural land forms. Says Alan Meyers, "The project we did [for Sieg], in fact, the only type of projects the firm does, are contemporary. Only with contemporary architectural design can you develop a free-flowing structure or complex of structures without having to go into extensive uprooting and grading to make the land suit the building. We had beautiful land to work with and we wanted whatever we designed to complement the site and so have the site complement the structure. In other words, with contemporary design, we feel we can achieve a unity, a oneness of sorts, which simply cannot be achieved through a traditional approach."

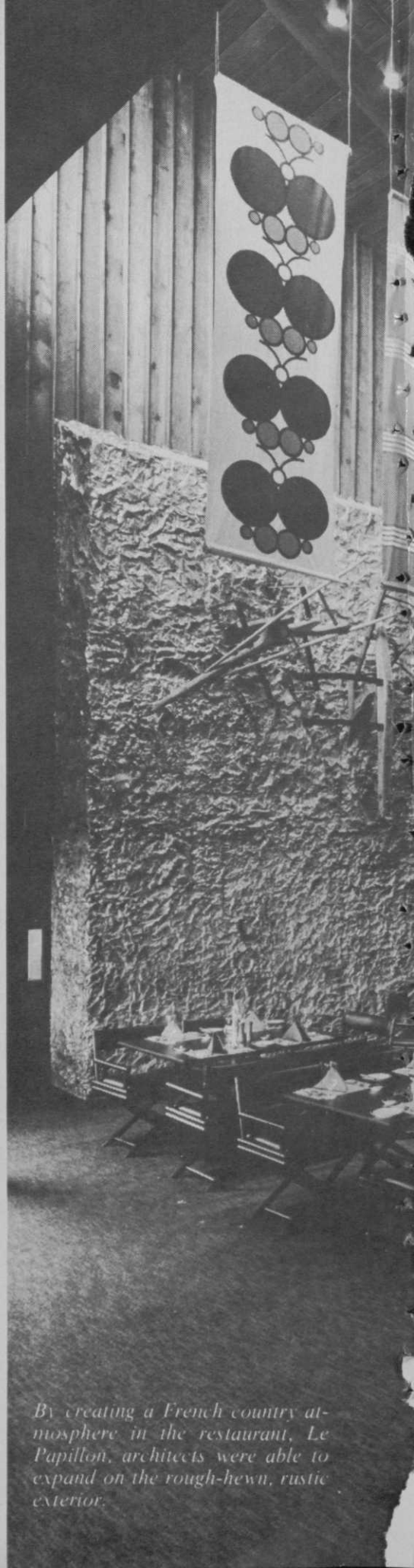
Sieg and his associates liked the concept. They loved the design. But the first set of preliminaries did not fully satisfy them. They felt that too much space was being used and too much cost was involved.

Two months later, the design firm presented its second set of preliminaries. The same basic concepts were employed, but, once again, it did not seem to be right. This time it was too small.

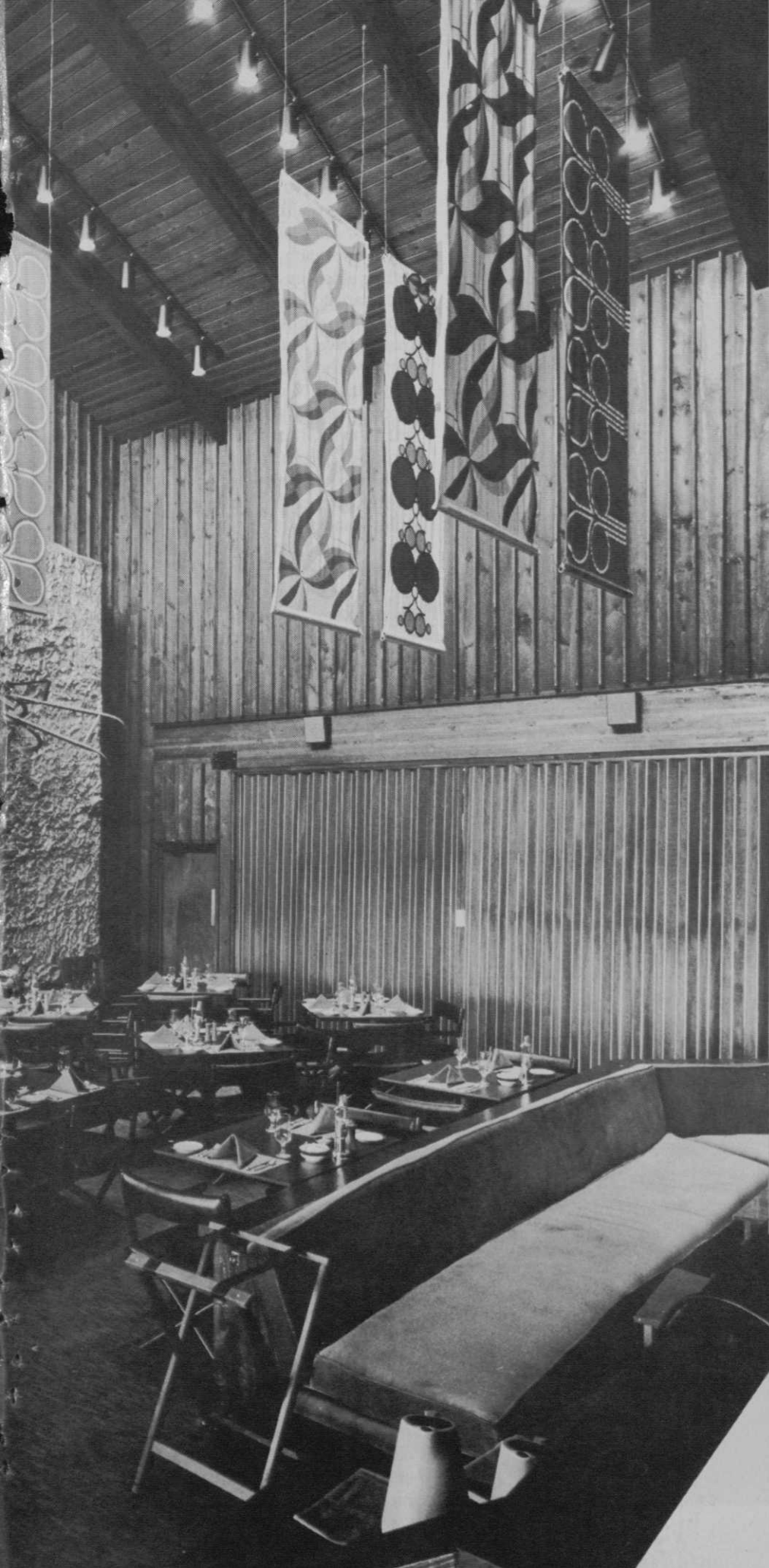
Finally, four months after first being called in, the firm presented the third, and as it turned out, last, set of preliminaries, which everyone agreed was the right way to go: spacious, but prudently so.

Plans called for two connected structures—clubhouse and lodge—comprising a total of 22,000 square feet. The lodge would contain 32 units, but was expandable with room for major banquet facilities. The clubhouse would contain a 1,400-square-foot cocktail lounge designed to seat 70; a 2,400-square-foot dining room to seat 200; a conversation pit and fireplace off the cocktail lounge; a 430-square-foot pro shop, 2,300 square feet for men's and women's lockers and saunas; a golf car storage area and a swimming pool and two adjacent tennis courts.

A significant return on investment was contemplated for the clubhouse, because of the high ratio of usable area to total area. The potential confusion that a multi-purpose clubhouse could cause was completely avoided through the development of traffic patterns. Alan Meyers explains, "By taking the



By creating a French country atmosphere in the restaurant, Le Papillon, architects were able to expand on the rough-hewn, rustic exterior.

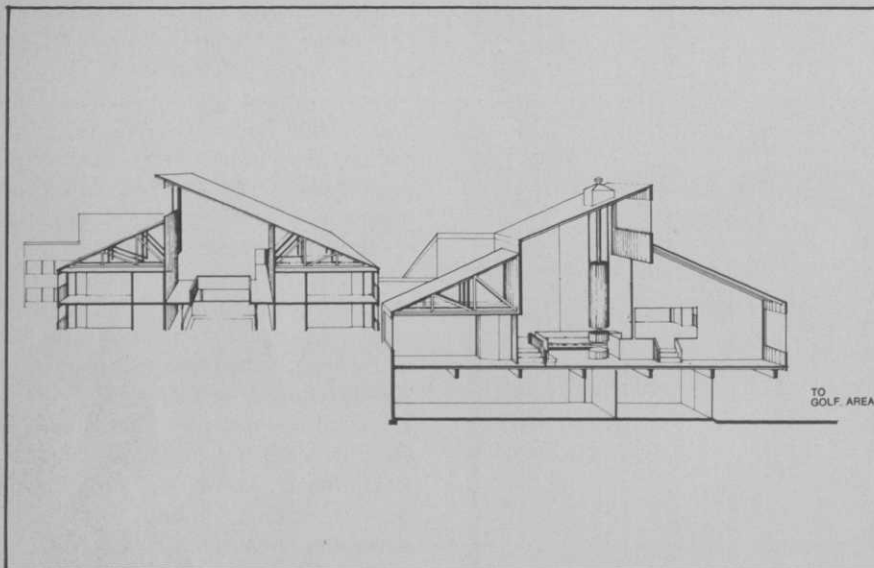


approach we did, the working value of the structure was increased many times over by creating pockets of space, each with its own character and purpose. Without such attention to traffic flows, there's the very real danger that those using the space feel as though they're in a three-ring circus, conscious of being just one element out of many, all going on at once. By segregating flow correctly, we still have a lot of things happening at once in one core space while each function still maintains a reasonable degree of privacy."

Once basic plans were finalized, Bucher Meyers turned its attention to interior design. The restaurant was of particular concern. Here, a basic and wholly unorthodox decision was made. Rather than creating a typical country club restaurant, somewhat elegant, but usually devoid of character, Sieg and Meyers decided to take a chance and create the ambiance of a French country restaurant. They felt that this gambit would risk "turning off" some people who like typical country club restaurants that serve the traditional steak and potatoes, but, equally persuasive, the restaurant could "turn on" many area residents whose only interest in Toftrees would be the restaurant. Another important factor: By utilizing a French country atmosphere, the architects were able to expand on the rough-hewn, rustic, but still sophisticated, exterior theme, while also generating significant cost savings.

Realizing that they were to some extent playing the odds, both Alan Meyers and Phil Sieg felt they should leave as little as possible to chance. When the basic dining room design was complete, it was turned over to Bucher Meyers' interior design department. Working with Sieg's team, they chose not only the tables, chairs and other usual appurtenances, but picked out all graphics, place settings, silverware, even napkins and table cloths. Says Meyers, "Sure, someone may say it's a lot of detail, but in cases like this, detail is crucial. By designing and coordinating the total interior, we can take a strong concept and be sure that it's developed thoroughly, just as it should be. In all too many cases, we've seen excellent designs almost ruined by someone who didn't know what he was doing when it came to developing an interior design scheme."

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At the same time Bucher Meyers' interior designers were at work, the firm's landscape architects also were busy. Of particular concern to them was the entrance drive. As Alan Meyers explains, "We're convinced that first impressions often are lasting. If you approach a beautiful structure or setting along an unattractive route, you necessarily view the setting with some mixed emotions. We wanted the entrance drive to the country club to exemplify the mood of the entire Tof-trees theme. Our landscape architects recommended that the entire setting be left as natural as possible, keeping the beautiful pines intact. The roadway was carefully laid out to provide brief vistas of the golf course—now 18 holes—and its mountainous surroundings. New trees, shrubs and earth mounds were added, so that the end of the drive would present a perfectly framed view of the clubhouse. As a result, the crescendo of events developed along the entrance is heightened and expanded upon until you arrive at the country club complex.

"In terms of business—and that is really the name of the game—it means that people enjoy coming here, not only because of the facilities, but also because it's a very beautiful visual experience."

The clubhouse and lodge construction program took 10 months to complete. As the opening date approached, Bucher Meyers reviewed every detail to ensure that everything specified in the plans was carried out in construction. Meyers and an associate were up until 2 a.m. June 1 adjusting exterior lighting to ensure that effects achieved were precisely those intended for the grand opening scheduled for that evening. (A June 1 through 5 grand opening week was held, with 200 guests invited each evening. Public opening was held June 18, 1972, and 1,600 people attended.)

The opening also found the club prepared with marketing packages to enable people to take advantage of the facilities they wanted, still within the framework of a semi-private country club.

Membership categories offered and still operational, include:

1. Family full membership (\$300), which permits family members (except children over 21) to play golf, tennis and to use swimming pools and sauna on an unlimited basis;

Tof-trees' architecture, with the lodge and clubhouse as the focal point, is un-traditional, contemporary design blended with earth colors and materials that take advantage of the natural land forms.

2. Single full membership (\$200), same as family, but for a single individual only;
3. Family tennis (\$100) and single tennis (\$75), which allows member(s) to use tennis facilities on an unlimited basis;
4. Family bath and tennis (\$150) and single bath and tennis (\$100), which allows member(s) to use swimming and tennis facilities on an unlimited basis (for Toftrees residents only);
5. Nonresident (\$100), allows member and spouse who live outside a 50-mile radius to play golf on an unlimited basis.

Those staying at the lodge pay the same fees as public players: \$5 for 18 holes on weekdays, \$6 on weekends. Golf cars (25 to begin with) are \$8 for 18 holes and \$4 for nine holes. Tennis courts are available by the hour at no charge and lockers and saunas also are free for guests.

Sieg also established a transient charge system, which he felt was excellent for year-around. Items can be charged to a personal account and payment of full personal account by cash, American Express or Master Charge. Regular members are billed directly to their homes through the club charge system. Membership fees are payable quarterly, biannually or annually.

In addition, the club instituted a reservations system, which members and non-members use to reserve a tennis court or starting time. Although it received only 70 per cent utilization when initiated, it now has more than 90 per cent use with very few no-shows.

The cost of the complex was \$900,000 for the clubhouse (including tennis courts and pools) and \$300,000 for the lodge. Says Sieg, "Naturally, it costs a little bit more to go first class. But, as is so often the case, an investment in the best means a far greater return. First, we own adjacent property that now is much more valuable. Second, by using a top designing firm, I obtained a beautiful design that was less costly than a traditional one and they were able to take care of all the details, making the entire complex look like a well thought out, complete project that takes just about everything into consideration. Third, because of the design that Alan [Meyers] came up

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A conversion pit and fireplace is located off the cocktail lounge. Light fixtures, wall hangings, furniture, and even place settings, were selected to coordinate the total interior.

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with, in terms of the project concept, we have increased our membership, increased the number of green fee players and have a fantastic restaurant, cocktail lounge and motel business. One of the keys to the big increase and activity is the fact that each element of the complex plays on the other. For example, if you're looking for a motel we have a motel. If you're looking for a restaurant, we have a restaurant. Except that we have a set-up that lets you play golf before you eat and then, if you want, you can spend the night. In other words, we haven't added business, we've multiplied it."

Even the glowing statement above does not do justice to the true extent of what has happened at Toftrees. Golfing memberships have gone from 100 in 1969 to 400 in 1973. Number of weekend green fee players has increased from 100 to 225 in the same period. The restaurant, Le Papillon, aided by an excellent chef, does turn-away business on the weekends (some people reserve two and three weeks ahead of time and some drive 50 miles each way) and is packed for luncheons. It even does a breakfast business thanks to the lodge. The lodge, too, does a turnaway business. As shown below, Sieg's decision to do something out of the ordinary for a country club generates an excellent income:

Income item	Gross income (February, 1973 to November, 1973)
Golf club	\$125,000
Room rentals	\$120,000
Food	\$295,000
Beverages	\$120,000

The nearly \$700,000 gross in 10 months of 1973 compares with a \$270,000 gross for the same period a year earlier. It includes 7,000 member rounds and 9,000 public rounds, plus 5,000 car rentals (77 per cent occupancy grossing \$28,000). Sieg estimates that the gross will pass the \$1 million mark in 1974.

Looking back, Sieg says, "Bucher Meyers and I both agreed that we did the right thing when we scaled down the first set of preliminaries. After all, it was prudent and the best thing to do."

Fortunately, the Bucher Meyers design featured many expandable components. Some expansion has already taken place and plans now are being

finalized for even more. A platform tennis facility with two courts and a warming hut/tennis pro shop already have been added, which members use when the weather isn't right for golf. Two more tennis courts are underway, plus 15 more golf cars; expanded pro shop facilities; 96 more lodge units; members' dining room and enough space to turn the country club into a conference center for business, the Pennsylvania State University, which is nearby, associations and other groups, much of which will help Toftrees CC expand its already booming business, and its off-season business.

Although Toftrees is unique, it should be pointed out that this uniqueness is so only because it is among the first, if not the first, to use a golf course as the focal point and expand outward. It would not be difficult for other golf courses to follow suit. But, as Alan Meyers warns, "First of all, don't depend on gut reactions alone. Undertake at least a rudimentary market survey to determine what people want, what the competition is and so on. Second, assuming that you think you can proceed, hire a top architectural/planning firm with experience in recreational and related planning. Take a look at what they've done in the past. My own advice, naturally based on my own biases, is to select the firm that doesn't go along with the traditional, simply because 'sameness' can kill the entire project. A healthy respect for the existing nature of things also is very important. Third, integrate all your planning, so you create and work with unity as you go along. If the design firm has interior design and landscaping capabilities, fine. If not, then be sure that whatever additional talent is retained works together, so everyone's on the same wavelength. Appoint one competent team leader, preferably the architect. Fourth, don't wait for the right time, because there really is no right time. The longer you wait, the more likely someone else in your area will pick up on the idea or that construction and related costs will make the project unfeasible. At the very least, put down a few ideas on paper and look around on your own. Fifth, do as Phil Sieg did, go first class all the way. Even if it is more expensive, which in many cases it isn't, top quality means extracting a lot more value per dollar than second or third best." □

COMING EVENTS

RHODE ISLAND TURFGRASS FIELD DAY, University of Rhode Island, Kingston, R.I., August 21.

NORTHERN MICHIGAN TURFGRASS FIELD DAY, Michigan State University Experimental Area, Traverse City CC, Traverse City, Mich., September 10.

TURF AND LANDSCAPE DAY, Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center, Wooster, Ohio, September 10.

FLORIDA TURFGRASS ASSN. CONFERENCE AND SHOW, Riverside Hilton, Curtis Hixon Convention Center, Tampa, Fla., September 16-19.

SOUTHERN ILLINOIS TURFGRASS FIELD DAY, Southern Illinois University Agricultural Research Station, Belleville, Ill., September 24.

NORTHWEST TURFGRASS CONFERENCE, Sun River Lodge, Sun River, Ore., September 24-27.

MIDWEST TURF FIELD DAY, Purdue University Agronomy Farm, West Lafayette, Ind., September 30.

SOUTHWEST TURFGRASS CONFERENCE, New Mexico State University, Las Cruces, N.M., October 10-11.

CENTRAL PLAINS TURFGRASS CONFERENCE, K-State Union, Manhattan, Kan., October 23-25.

WISCONSIN GOLF TURF SEMINAR, Pfister Hotel, Milwaukee, Wis., October 30-31.

FIFTH ANNUAL GEORGIA GCSA/UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA TURF-GRASS SHORT COURSE, Center for Continuing Education, University of Georgia, Athens, Ga., November 3-5.

TEXAS TURFGRASS CONFERENCE, Texas A & M University, College Station, Tex., December 1-4.

OHIO TURFGRASS CONFERENCE AND SHOW, Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio, December 3-5.