

A Conversation with U of M Professor Brad Pedersen:

2005 MGCSA President's Lifetime Achievement Award Recipient

By ROBERT PANUSKA
MGCSA President

Rob Panuska: Congratulations Brad! MGCSA is proud to present you with the 2005 President's Lifetime Achievement Award.



Professor Pedersen explains the proper angle for pruning an arborvitae.

Brad Pedersen: Thanks, Rob and the members of MGCSA. I really appreciate this great honor. I got to know some of my oldest and best friends during my association with the turf industry and especially the MGCSA.

RP: You are a South Dakota boy, correct? Tell us a little about that time in your life and how you became interested in Horticulture.

BP: I grew up as a typical farm kid outside Brookings, South Dakota. I was the only son of a third generation livestock and crop farmer. I attended a country school through eighth grade. The school was just down the road from our house. Many days I walked home for lunch. I attended high school and college (SDSU) in Brookings which was only six miles away. Like most farm kids in those days, many of my outside interests evolved around 4-H and later FFA. Our farm was neat and clean. The lawn was mowed every week. Extensive annual and vegetable gardens accented our property. Yard work was not work to my parents. Their idea of recreation was mowing, trimming, gardening, landscaping and painting. I opted for the mowing and landscaping. That is how I became interested in Horticulture.

I graduated from the Department of Horticulture, Forestry, Landscape and Parks at South Dakota State University with a Major in Park Management and a minor in landscape design. Off and on through my four years of college at SDSU,

I worked for the horticulture department and for the South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks as a night and weekend ranger. I was, of course, still farming and raising cattle. It was a great time of my life.

RP: Did you meet your wife, Diane, in college?

BP: Actually we met at work. We were both employed at Oakwood State Park during the summer between my junior and senior year. We were married the following summer - that was 32 years ago. Diane is with the U.S. Postal Service and is currently the Postmaster for the town of Elysian, Minn.

RP: And your sons?

BP: Brent is 25. He is currently at Camp Shelby, Mississippi, and on his way to Iraq. Brandon is a junior majoring in Business Econ at SDSU.

RP: How did you end up at the University of Minnesota?

BP: I was fortunate to get the position of Landscape Maintenance Supervisor at the University of Minnesota, Waseca campus. Diane and I moved to Waseca in May of 1973. UMW was a very unique place. The landscape department was not in Facilities Management but in the Department of Horticulture. We all used the same equipment. The full-time landscape employees provided technical assistance in laboratories for the horticulture faculty and the entire grounds were outdoor teaching laboratories. This was my first real experience with other than

residential and park landscape and turf management. UMW also had a full spectrum of sports fields and later turf plots and golf greens.

I soon found teaching to be as exciting and rewarding as working on the grounds. For that reason, I began to work part-time on my Master of Education degree at the UM - St. Paul campus. I completed my graduate work in 1978 and joined the faculty at UMW. In 1978, the campus was selected by *Grounds Maintenance* magazine and the Professional Grounds Management Society for the Professional Grounds Maintenance Grand Award for the best maintained college campus in the nation. This was a great tribute to the faculty and

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163 Yard Par 3 eighth hole at the Refuge Golf Club in Oak Grove, Minnesota.



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staff that worked in the horticulture department, and especially the students who had so much pride in the wonderful outdoor laboratories that they had designed and implemented.

RP: How about telling us a little about the UMW Horticulture Department and your responsibilities as a faculty member?

BP: Initially, the department had three full-time faculty members and four to six technical and teaching staff. However, students learned from over 50 faculty and staff on the Waseca campus. The Horticulture Major included emphasis in

Nursery Management, Floriculture and Retail Management and Landscape Design, Construction and Management. Enrollment ranged between 125 and 175 students each year. In horticulture, technical educators and industry leaders (including the United States Golf Course Association and the American Nurseryman's Association) recognized the quality and effectiveness of our curriculum, indoor laboratories, studios, grounds and specialized outdoor teaching laborato-

ries. My specialty was landscape design, construction and management. I also taught courses in turf and landscape management.

RP: The turf management emphasis evolved during the 1980's. Can you tell us about that?

BP: Because of the exploding growth in the golf and sports turf industries and the need for qualified Assistant Superintendents, mechanics and technicians, new programs were developed in Golf Course and Grounds Management, and Golf Course and Grounds Mechanics. An additional faculty with design experience was added, and I was given the opportunity to head up the new Golf Course Program. That curriculum soon became one of the largest in the college in both student numbers and placement. The arrangement was unique because of a relationship with the local country club that allowed classes to design, construct and maintain course features, e.g., tees, greens, bunkers, etc. Rob, you probably know a little about that, my turn to ask a question. Remind me - When did you graduate from UMW and start working at Lakeside Country Club?

RP: I actually completed my Golf

Course and Grounds major in the winter of 1989 and was hired as assistant at Lakeside that spring. Then in 1991 I was promoted to superintendent after Ray Bloemke retired.

BP: Rob, what are your memories of having students on the course all the time?

RP: It was pretty hectic when there were projects to coordinate as part of the construction class, but we had a great time working with the students. As you know many of those students are now superintendents. The program was so comprehensive and provided the students with "real" world experiences in both construction and maintenance.

But back to you, Brad. In 1992, the University of Minnesota, Waseca graduated its last class due to a decision by the University to close the campus. You moved on to St. Paul.

BP: In August of 1992, my tenure home transferred to the Department of Horticultural Science in St. Paul. My appointment was 51% teaching and 49% turfgrass extension.

RP: And your responsibilities were ...?

BP: Initially, I was asked to work

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Vince Dodge, CGCS, The Wilderness at Fortune Bay, Tower, Minn., submitted the above photo because it's one of his "favorite golf course pictures because it shows how damn cold it gets up here." Pictured above are two shapers from a golf construction company.

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toward two goals. First, I was to develop undergraduate curriculum and support laboratories for a three-course sequence in landscape design, implementation and management. The second goal was to develop and foster the creation of an educationally-based industry organization uniting the various turf and grounds associations in Minnesota.

RP: The industry organization you mention became the Minnesota Turf and Grounds Foundation (MTGF).

BP: Yes, and that was the hardest job of my professional career. I remember the first meeting of the steering committee. It was difficult to get members to even communicate about the possibilities. However, I guess everyone who reads this knows how it all worked out. Now is a good time, and it is especially important to me, to recognize the hard work of the MTGF presidents and board members over those first several years. I especially want to thank Greg Hubbard and John Hopko for their contributions which were greater than my own. Most importantly - and not to lessen the importance of all participating associations - if it were not for the

foresight, participation, sharing and sometimes sacrifice of the MGCSA, the MTGF would never have happened. As I look at the evolution of the MTGF today, I am very proud to have been part of the team.

RP: Well said. One more question: Your present duties revolve around two undergraduate programs in the Department of Horticultural Science. If I understand correctly, the Landscape Design Program and the Landscape Implementation and Management Program are two of five programs in the Environmental Horticulture Major.

BP: Both are recently developed programs. The other programs include Turfgrass Science, Floriculture/Nursery Production and Retail Management as well as an Individualized Program of Study. The Landscape Design Program is a joint program with the Department of Architecture and Landscape Architecture (CALA). This curriculum combines the best of landscape architecture and horticulture-based landscape design. Students who graduate from this program are designers. They design for or own landscape design/build firms, retail nurseries and garden centers. They also might work in LA firms, school systems, park departments, arboretums and botanical gardens. Students can go on to complete a Master

of Landscape Architecture Degree (MLA) or a Master of Agriculture in Horticulture Degree (M.Ag.). The Landscape Implementation and Management Program prepare students for a broader range of positions in the landscape industry. This program is strongly management based. There are a variety of elective options including: landscape design, landscape contracting, arboriculture, as well as turf and landscape maintenance. These students end up owning/managing businesses or supervising departments.

I should mention that we call these 'programs' because they are composed of much more than course work. The landscape programs include the Department of Horticultural Science Display and Trial Garden on the St. Paul Campus. Like UMW, this garden was designed, constructed and partially maintained by students. It is used as an outdoor laboratory for 16 different undergraduate classes in the college as well as industry seminars and workshops, and it is open to the public.

The Landscape Design Program is supported by the design studio and CAD Lab. The four core landscape courses are based in the studio. The studio is open to students 24/7 and includes 40 student design

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stations, a dedicated lecture center and wireless communications for computers and peripherals. The CAD Lab features 12 Dell workstations, an Epson 745 wireless digital projector, a tablet PC for instruction and various color printers and scanners ranging from desktop to 36" wide.

Finally, the classes as well as industry are supported by the Sustainable Urban Landscape Information Series (SULIS) website. Developed in 1997 by Extension Educator Bob Mugaas and me, this landscape and turf site receives almost ten million hits and over 450,000 unique visitors each year. The SULIS website is used as an on-line text for several of the courses in the curriculum.

RP: Sounds like you have been staying busy!

BP: I sure have been! However, we're lucky to have a great teaching team working full or part-time with the landscape programs. Dr. Jim Calkins, Education Specialist, teaches courses in landscape design and management as well as classes in plant propagation. He is also the coordinator of the M.Ag degree program.

Teaching and Technology Specialist, Julie Weisenhorn is a graduate of the M.Ag program and teaches courses in landscape design and CAD as well as managing the studio/CAD Lab and the SULIS website.

Research Plot Coordinator, Karen Vidmar, manages the Display and Trial Garden and is completing her M.Ag degree. Of course, we also all work closely within the department and the college. Landscape and turfgrass science courses are required for students in both programs, so students are impacted by over 40 faculty from many departments and several colleges during their undergraduate program.

RP: Wow. It's mind-boggling to hear about all you have accomplished in your career. I know I speak for all members of MGCSA and the industry when I say it is a pleasure to give you the President's Lifetime Achievement Award and to congratulate you on a job well done. Do you



Brad and landscape design students pose at the new Display and Trial Garden entrance patio they constructed in spring semester.

have any closing remarks?

BP: Thanks a lot, Rob, and thanks to everyone who have supported the students and programs over the years. To me, undergraduate education is like a business. Students are our products and the industry is the consumer. As educators, we need to listen carefully to the industry and maximize our resources to provide students with opportunities to help them meet their educational goals. Like a business manager, a successful educator must be continuously evaluating and changing. That is the challenge, that is the joy.

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