

PROJECT TITLE:

Grass Roots Exhibit

PROJECT LEADER:

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START DATE:

2014

PROJECT DURATION:

Five years

TOTAL FUNDING:

\$125,000

SUMMARY TEXT:

The 2017 season was the third season of the ‘Grass Roots’ exhibit at the U.S. National Arboretum in Washington, DC. While initially scheduled for four full seasons as a “temporary exhibit”, the National Arboretum informed us that ‘Grass Roots’ will continue through the 2019 season. The Arboretum will be hosting the national meeting of the American Public Garden Association that year and our hope is that the exhibit will inspire other public gardens to consider installation of educational turfgrass displays on their facilities.

In July 2017, full-time ‘Grass Roots’ coordinator Geoff Rinehart began a full-time faculty position at the University of Maryland. Geoff remains as the coordinator in a part-time capacity, managing the ‘Grass Roots’ Facebook and Twitter social media accounts and supervising part-time workers. The coordinator position will be re-evaluated and a new coordinator will be hired in early 2018.

During 2017, ‘Grass Roots’ hosted approximately 30,000 visitors, similar to past years. Typical ‘Grass Roots’ exhibit visitors include families with school-age children, new homeowners seeking information about properly caring for their first lawn, tourists from within and outside the U.S., Master Gardeners, and landscape designers seeking to learn more about different grass varieties.

We continue to publicize the exhibit and its contributions to communicating the importance of turfgrass benefits to the public. Articles in the European Turfgrass Society

newsletter, *Turf News*, and the *International Turfgrass Research Journal* highlighted accomplishments. In addition, updates were provided during presentations at the International Turfgrass Research Conference and the Turfgrass Producers International summer meeting.

As in the past, homeowner lawn care workshops in spring and fall were conducted. Master Gardener training was also conducted on two occasions by the Coordinator, with elementary and middle school students being engaged and educated on a Virginia golf course as well. In addition to conducting homeowner-oriented events, we also hosted several professional academic meetings/events this year.

Since the Initiative's inception it has been our goal to provide a high-profile venue for academic and professional turfgrass industry meetings. In February, we hosted a committee meeting for the newly formed Mid-Atlantic Sports Turf Managers of America (MASTMA) chapter. In March, we hosted a 2-day University of Maryland-organized turfgrass phytobiome research meeting. The International Turfgrass Research Conference tour group visited 'Grass Roots' in July. Finally, 'Grass Roots' hosted the National Turfgrass Research Initiative summit in September.

And again in 2017, 'Grass Roots' collaborated with the National Cherry Blossom Festival, the National Park Service, and BicycleSPACE to conduct the 3<sup>rd</sup> annual National Greenscape Corridor Bike Ride. This year almost 50 participants rode throughout Washington, D.C. visiting historic sites and learning about turf and landscapes, including 'Grass Roots'.

We continue to enhance 'Grass Roots' by making additions and improvements to the exhibit. As the turf and ornamental grasses have matured, visitors can note changes to the landscape and its aesthetic appeal. In addition, the crop plants are rotated so that visitors can not only see, but touch crops that they may not realize are also grasses, such as sugar cane and millet. Also, during 2017, we added new display features to the 'Grass Roots' exhibit, including an interpretive banner on *Danthonia spicata*/fine fescue mixes, and TifTuf™ bermudagrass sod in a 4' x 4' "turf module".

In 2017, we expanded the 'Grass Roots' Initiative by installing a 1-acre 'Grass Roots' exhibit at the Maryland Soccerplex, located approximately 35 miles NW of Washington, DC in Boyds, MD. This 24-field complex sees over 600,000 visitors annually that either participate in, or are spectators of soccer and lacrosse games. Therefore, this exhibit location focuses more on sports turf and home lawn applications. A \$40,000 USDA-NIFA Specialty Crop block grant was secured to fund the materials cost of exhibit construction. In addition, about \$60,000 of donated products and services from the turf industry were needed to complete the exhibit. Constructed adjacent to the complex's stadium, this site features 10 interactive educational displays while using a similar format to the Arboretum's 'Grass Roots' exhibit. The exhibit had a soft opening in November 2016, with a formal grand opening being held in May 2017. Local media coverage of the event helped to promote this exhibit site.

The visitation pattern of the SoccerPlex 'Grass Roots' exhibit is substantially different than visitation at the National Arboretum. Weekends are by far the busiest visitation days for this location, due to large soccer tournaments and National Women's Soccer League games

(Washington Spirit) . One of the highlight events for the SoccerPlex exhibit occurred on June 13, 2017 as a sellout (capacity: 5,000) crowd attended the U.S. Open Cup match between DC United (Major League Soccer) and Christos FC. Since the exhibit is located directly outside the entrance gates, fans waiting in line had a chance to examine the lawn, history, and irrigation displays. In addition, many youth played pick-up games on the mini-sports fields.

- A second ‘Grass Roots’ site, located at the Maryland SoccerPlex in Boyds, MD opened in November 2016. A USDA grant, along with donated products and services by the turf industry funded the construction.
- The Arboretum ‘Grass Roots’ exhibit hosted an estimated 30,000 visitors in 2017. The ‘Grass Roots’ website ([www.usna.usda.gov/Education/turfgrass.html](http://www.usna.usda.gov/Education/turfgrass.html)) complements the educational concepts in the exhibit and contains information about the benefits of turfgrass, basic lawn care information, and links to each state’s turfgrass extension education website.
- Coordinator Geoff Rinehart conducted four lawn care workshops and hosted tours for several groups visiting the exhibit.
- ‘Grass Roots’ hosted a regional STMA committee meeting in February, a regional turfgrass phytobiome research meeting in March, a stop on the International Turfgrass Research Conference tour in July, and a national-level USDA turfgrass summit in September.
- Two new display features were added in 2017: An interpretive banner communicating ongoing *Danthonia* research plots and the addition of a turf module containing TifTuf™ bermudagrass on a major pedestrian thoroughfare overlooking the exhibit.





Figure 1. National Greenscape Corridor bike tour stops at National Mall.



Figure 2. Grass Roots Maryland Soccer plex site.





Figure 3. Grass Roots at Arboretum.



Figure 4. Aeration services donated by Turf Equipment & Supply.





Figure 5. Capitol Columns at National Arboretum.