

Turfgrass exhibit takes root in D.C.

A U.S. National Arboretum project is set to promote positive messages about turf. BY **MARISA PALMIERI** EDITOR

The U.S. National Arboretum's (USNA) plan for an interactive outdoor exhibit called Grass Roots is great news

for the Green Industry, says Kevin Morris, president of the National Turfgrass Federation (NTF). The four-year initiative is slated to include a 3/4-acre exhibit plus workshops to inform the public about the importance of turf and turf research. Organizers hope to break ground early next year.

Grass Roots was spearheaded by the USNA's Director Colien Hefferan, Morris says, adding the NTF is collaborating on the effort. Current plans include 15 educational stations, including the history of lawns, fertilizer, irrigation, green roofs, sports fields and lawn games and golf.

"It's unique because the exhibit is at a federal government facility and they're going to talk about what turf does and its benefits to society," Morris says, noting the USNA gets about a half million visitors per year, including Congress members. "This is a federal agency that's going to be making positive statements about the turf industry. That's pretty significant. We haven't had that kind of exposure."

The USNA is administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Research Service. Located on 446 acres in Washington, D.C., its goal is to serve the public need for scien-

tific research, education, and gardens that conserve and showcase plants to enhance the environment.



LM: How's the design coming?

Kevin Morris (KM): The Arboretum is in the design stages. They have a design firm offering their services for free, a new firm out of Maryland called Rain Underground. It's quite a nice gift.

They have some preliminary designs and drawings worked out. Besides that, the

Arboretum has to work on the messaging: What to deliver and how to deliver it. The idea is this will be a fun, interactive exhibit to attract and inform people who don't know much about the turf industry.

LM: How about fundraising?

KM: The Arboretum is donating about \$80,000, so they need to raise the other \$400,000 or so to meet the proposed

The USNA is in the design phase, evaluating sketches and concepts, like the one at right, from the design firm.



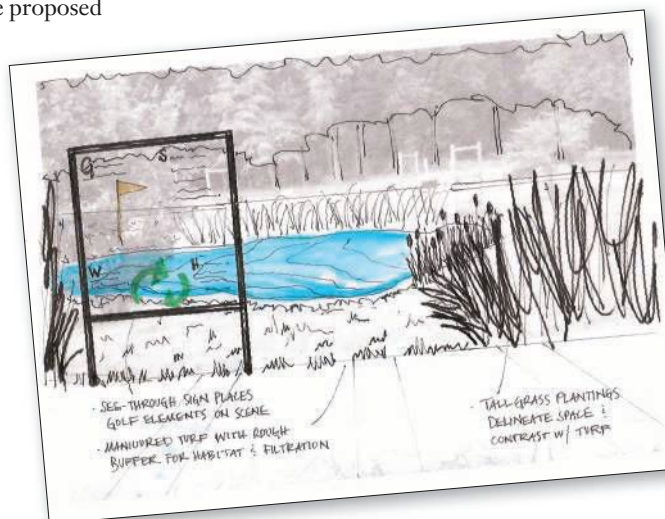
\$480,000 budget. That's where they are right now, trying to raise the money. The plan is to try to have a grand opening in October of 2013. To do that they'd need to break ground in the spring. That's why they have a January deadline to make sure they have enough funds to get going, at least two-thirds or three-fourths of the total.

They have some pledges from the industry of about \$65,000 or \$70,000 from nonprofit organizations. We're working with some of the bigger suppliers and equipment companies, but we haven't gotten anything firm yet. Still, we're confident it's going to happen.

LM: Tell us about the messaging.

KM: Their intention is to showcase the science USDA is conducting now and what's been done in the past. The exhibit is going to stand on the science. The Crop Science Society of America, where the turfgrass scientists have a home, has agreed to review statements made and certify that they're scientifically valid. We've got a lot of science on our side and if something's not backed up, they won't use it.

The exhibit won't be just throwing a bunch of grass down and labeling it. It's got to be interesting, visually and content-wise, to attract people. It's going to be there for four years and it isn't just about the physical exhibit. It's a whole initiative of programs and demonstrations that feed off the exhibit.



PHOTOS: KEVIN MORRIS (LEFT), U.S. NATIONAL ARBORETUM