



A Short History of Illinois Lawn Equipment

Illinois Lawn Equipment was founded October 8, 1954 by Robert G. Johnson. It all began in a small two story building that had been a high school chemistry lab a month earlier. Bob, as he likes to be called, also worked a full time job at the Ford City Aircraft Engine Plant to support himself and his first full time employee. He sold Worthington gang mowers and Jacobsen walking putting green mowers. First year sales were in excess of twelve thousand dollars!

As the years rolled by, he picked up other product lines only after the old established competitors dropped the products or declined to handle them. The growing company had rented all the available empty garages and vacant lots in downtown Orland Park and in August, 1960, Illinois Lawn moved to its second home, south of town, on rural U.S. Route 45.

The early 60's brought long term employees Larry Schmidt, mechanic, Pete Vandercook, salesman, and Wayne Trometer, parts clerk. Those were the days when green mowers sold for \$400.00, gangs \$2,000.00 for a seven gang fairway and, even at those prices, everybody argued about the price. From 1960 to 1970 over 50 new golf courses were built in northern Illinois.

Bob was always a big promoter. Field days would attract over 400 people. They were held in the new building or under a circus tent - because it would always rain! Delicacies served at these events included oysters on the half shell, beer and once, 600 lbs. of "Buried Beef". (Ask him for the recipe).

1969 brought a revolution in the turfgrass industry. Jacobsen introduced the first riding triplex greens mower, the Greens King. Customers stood in amazement as the operator would mow a green in 5 minutes - sitting down! The factory shipped monthly allocations as they could not keep up with demand. While Illinois Lawn was busy trying to keep all these new mowers running, they also had to absorb Steel City Lawn & Garden, Merrillville, Indiana. This made Illinois Lawn a regional distributor. Territory reached to northern Illinois, northwestern Indiana and southwestern Michigan. Jerry Adank came with the acquisition and, after a year in the parts department, went on to become the company's all time leading salesman.

1979 brought the addition of the central Illinois territory when Leon Short & Sons of Peoria closed their doors. This was also the year that Illinois Lawn sold the building on Route 45 to the Red Lobster (across the street from Orland Square) which allowed them the capital to build the new building in the Apple Knoll Industrial Park into which they moved in January, 1980.

Illinois Lawn is a major factor in the regional marketplace today. Having been in business for 32 years and representing many of the top commercial turf equipment lines, it is still a family business. Seven employees are related and the next generation is already learning how to "cut it".

by Rick Johnson

5th Annual Illinois Turfgrass Foundation Combined Golf Day

In combination with Midwest Superintendents Association, Central Superintendents Association and Northwestern Superintendents Association.

PLACE — Eagle Ridge Inn and Resort, Galena, Illinois

DATE — May 19, 1986

TIME — 10:00 a.m. (shotgun start from both courses)

SPONSORS — Tri State Turf & Irrigation and Brayton Chemicals, Inc.

TO BE DONATED — Pro Turf 84 and \$2500 cash
Donations made to Illinois Turfgrass Foundation

Please note: Golf will be limited to the first 200 people. The cost of \$50 includes \$35 for greens fee, cart, dinner and prizes, plus \$15 donation to Illinois Turfgrass Foundation.

A special spouse or friend program will include a tour of Historical Galena and homes.

Special room rate for both Sunday, May 18th and Monday, May 19th. Rates per night: Rooms - \$50, double or single; Homes and Condo, 1 bedroom - \$85, 2 bedrooms - \$100 and 3 bedrooms - \$125.

Extra activities included at the Resort: tennis, swimming, sailing, canoeing, fishing, biking and hiking trails and a physical fitness course.

Please call 815-777-2444 to reserve lodging and golf for this special event.

USGA & GCSAA Donating Funds for Research to U. of I.

Turfgrass research sponsored by the USGA/GCSAA in the Great Lakes Region continues to move forward. In addition to projects now underway in Minnesota and Michigan, a new study will be initiated at the University of Illinois this year. Dr. Henry Wilkinson will receive a three year grant to study Patch Diseases in zoysias. This will provide extremely useful information to golf courses in southern Illinois which are developing fairway and tee turf with this species.

This work will focus national attention on Illinois, because of the widespread interest in zoysiagrass turf all across middle America. For all of us in turf, it illustrates the value of the USGA/GCSAA Research Committee in centralized research planning. Dr. Wilkinson will coordinate his efforts with Dr. Engelke at Texas A&M - Dallas in the development of new zoysia cultivars and Dr. Lucas at North Carolina State who is studying Spring Deadspot disease in bermudagrasses. He will also cooperate with researchers at Cornell in determining any possible connection of this problem with patch diseases in cool season grasses. As with all truly basic research, we anticipate spinoffs in technology, new procedures and overall better understanding of disease-management relationships.

**DUES DEADLINE IS
MARCH 1, 1986!**