



Fred Behnke

Over the years, the MAGCS has taken a leadership role in the environmental arena. Our members have distinguished themselves on a national level in numerous ways. We have produced four different Environmental Steward Award winners (Tim Kelly at Village Links won an unprecedented three times) and at least eight of our members have won regional honors. Peter Leuzinger has established himself as a nationally recognized authority on wildlife habitat enhancement and serves as the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program's regional liaison. Dan Dinelli is doing groundbreaking research on composting methodology and the use of biologicals in "holistic plant management." Peter Voykin was among the vanguard of the wildflower naturalization movement. The list goes on and on, and I apologize to the many not mentioned, but the point illustrated here is clear. MAGCS members have grabbed the environmental torch and are lighting the way for the entire golf world.

Golf course superintendents tend to be "rugged individualists" who spend their careers doing things their way. One of the beautiful aspects of the profession is the fact that each golf course is as unique as the person entrusted with its care and feeding. There is no prototypical golf course superintendent; each of us produces a similar product in a distinctly personalized way. How is it, then, that

among such a diverse profile, so many of us have stepped forward to defend our profession from those who would pigeonhole us with strip miners, whalers and other environmental raptors? The answer is clear: each of us loves the land in our own special way.

Several programs have been established to promote the notion that golf courses are friends of the environment. The Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary System, Adopt-A-School and Backyard Sanctuary programs are excellent ways for you to stand out as well as learn some "new tricks." Look for a series of articles on these programs in this and subsequent issues of *On Course*. The Environmental Steward Award is another way for you to get recognition for your hard work and a great way to share your environmental awareness with others. I would encourage any member to take any of these programs "out for a spin." I guarantee you'll learn something and have fun doing it.

Regionally, the MAGCS is planning to join a consortium of organizations dedicated to forming a "Chicago Wilderness." A group devoted to the preservation of biodiversity in the greater Chicagoland area, the consortium comprises organizations including the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Chicago Botanical Gardens, Brookfield Zoo, The Field Museum, USDA Forest Service, and the Cook and DuPage County Forest Preserve Districts, to name a few. Even the Sierra Club and Nature Conservancy have joined forces with Chicago Wilderness. Interestingly, when I first contacted the Chicago Wilderness office to inquire about the MAGCS joining the team and they learned that we represented the golf course industry, their initial reaction was quite cool: "Oh, I'm not

sure you're not part of the problem." Sadly, more than a decade of work by the GCSAA and our environmental partners has not totally dispelled the illusion that golf courses are toxic to the environment. Obviously, a great deal of work remains to be done on that front. The wonderful data you supplied through the 1997 MAGCS Environmental Survey (completed when Don Ferreri chaired the Environmental Committee) enabled me to show that the more than 18,000 acres of naturalized land on the golf courses represented by the MAGCS could contribute greatly to their objectives. They agreed that perhaps their impression of golf was not based on fact but on what they had heard.

People, I will repeat: there is still a lot of work to be done to sway public opinion away from the idea that golf courses are ecological "killing fields." We need to participate in this type of forum to correct misconceptions and engage in meaningful dialogue with those whose perceptions are colored by uninformed opinions and who listen to people with microphones spewing sensationalistic balderdash.

The 1999 MAGCS Environmental Committee includes Don Ferreri, Tod Hopphan, Chuck Anfield, Greg Martin, Dr. Tom Voigt, Tony Kalina, Luke Cella, Tom Fahey, Tim Kelly and Brian Greene. We stand ready to assist individual members with environmental initiatives they may care to embrace. At the MAGCS, we are blessed with a multitude of members who have been there and done that. Give me a call and I can hook you up with someone who can provide solid, hands-on experience with any number of environmental issues. 