



I am the ITF. RU? Part 1

The Illinois Turfgrass Foundation has made it its mission to realign itself with its allied associations and Universities in 2012. This year the ITF needs to reintroduce itself to the turf industry in Illinois so we better understand the importance of turf research and education in our state for our entire industry, nation wide, and internationally. The ITF is doing this by consistent communication with you and your association through meetings, a new blog (which can be found at www.iturf.org), and written updates in your publications like what you're reading right now.

As the current President of the ITF, I have asked our advisors to share some interesting facts, in their own words, about their programs to help us have a better understanding of who they are and why their program is important to our state and Foundation. The Illinois Turfgrass Foundation wants to make you proud to be supporting our great turfgrass researchers and educators.

This first installment and following writing comes from Ken Diesburg from Southern Illinois University.

"The SIU Turf Program cannot exist at its historical level of production without support from the ITF. For me, ITF funding provided the means for managing a research facility at a level of viability that corporation research agents desired to engage in cooperative research, thus providing even more funding.

Many times throughout my 23-year tenure at SIU, we Illinois turf professors were called by various ITF Boards to communicate our productivity, thus putting a value on the returns for the many monetary grants we have received. Until the break in funding which occurred four years ago, the various Board members always came to the same conclusion that it was justified to support both the University of Illinois and Southern Illinois University turf education and research efforts, recognizing that both of them were proportionately productive. During the same time as the break in university funding, the ITF saw justification in supporting the research efforts of Randy Kane and his successor, Derek Settle, employed and supported by the Chicago District Golf



Association. For 18 years previous to that change we university turf professors enjoyed equal status in the Board's vision. Given the three professors at Champaign—Tom Fermanian, Tom Voigt, and Hank Wilkinson—and one professor at Carbondale, Ken Diesburg, the total funding was divided 75/25. No matter how great or small the funding might be, the positive psychology was always there; we each had comparable value to the Illinois turf industry. Research conducted at both universities applied to turf management issues across the state. Do not underestimate the enormity of this

concept for us. Being employees of the state, and choosing to take a career path of service through teaching and research, our dominant motivation in getting up each morning is to serve our constituency. When the ITF chose to cut support to my program it was devastating; both instantly in my mind and heart, and later in my struggle to keep my turf research trials at a reasonable level, no longer able to hire help, purchase supplies, or maintain equipment. That struggle continues today. Corporate contracts diminished. It is with that sentiment that I am preparing this report. I hope and pray that you will see the value of the SIU Turf Program as comparable; no better and no worse than those of the UI Turf Program and the CDGA Turf Program, and that you will fund each professor and Ph.D. at the same level, no matter how large or small that amount might be.

The SIU Turf Program is the dominant turf-teaching program in the state. Turf research is a significant component of the program comprising 45% of its resources. The program is truly comprehensive: (1) it trains the sons of Illinois to become professional turfgrass managers, the majority of them going back up state as assistant superintendents. There are many SIU graduates in golf course management in northern Illinois as well as throughout the state. (2) The SIU Turf Program conducts turfgrass research and provides training in managing warm-season grasses as well as cool-season grasses. (3) The SIU Turf Program has an even balance between turf research and teaching, serving the turf industry, itself, as well as the Illinois citizens wanting to learn how to devote their careers to it.



replaced by me in 1989. I have remained at SIU for 23 years because of the great teaching and research environment we have here. I am allowed to pursue the avenues of research that I deem critical for the state of Illinois. The results of my research benefit the entire eastern transition zone. My zoysia breeding will benefit the future turf industry of United States from the latitudes of Chicago to northern Florida; everywhere low-input, persistent, playable turf is needed. In this SIU environment, I was allowed to model and expand my undergraduate turf program to match those of other major Midwest turf programs. I used the model I had learned from at Iowa State University with Dr. Nick Christians. The average number of turf

The SIU Turf Program started in 1961 when Dr. James Tweedy, who eventually became the Dean of our College of Agriculture, then a Vice President of SIU, established the turf plots at the SIU Horticulture Farm. In 1965, Dr. Herbert Portz moved from forage to turf teaching and research; a move that was happening at several universities across the country during those years as the turf industry was rapidly growing. When Dr. Portz retired in 1987, Dr. Anna-Marie Pennucci was hired to replace him. She moved on in one year and was

students in the SIU Turf Program has doubled since 1989 from 8 to 20. We send teams to the GCSAA Turf Bowl every year. One of those years, our 'A' team took 5th place against over 90 teams from across the country; surpassed only by the Iowa State team and three Purdue teams. That's pretty good company. All this has been possible through the years because the ITF has realized the value in supporting the SIU Turf Program. Please, don't let it fall during these tough times." **-OC**

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