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# NOVEMBER 2005

Volume 59 No. 6

### FRONT COVER

The 484-yard, par-5 16th hole at Itasca Country Club, where Scott and Dawn Speiden host the MAGCS Fall Dinner Dance on November 19.

(Photo by Jim Trzinski Golf Course Photography)

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The Midwest Association of Golf Course Superintendents (MAGCS), founded December 24, 1926, is a professional organization whose goals include preservation and dissemination of scientific and practical knowledge pertaining to golf turf maintenance.

We endeavor to increase efficiency and economic performance while improving and enhancing the individual and collective prestige of the members.

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## ON COURSE WITH THE PRESIDENT

Phil Zeinert, CGCS Elgin Country Club

# Thank You— Now It's YOUR Turn!

*I am honored and privileged to have served as president of the MAGCS. Thank you to everyone for your participation in this Association. The combination of willing and dedicated volunteers, staff and leaders ensures prosperity for an Association that our members value so much. Each and every year, MAGCS members meet and usually exceed golfer expectations in the greater Chicagoland area. In my opinion, there is no better place for golfers to enjoy a round of golf.*

*Please do not  
hesitate to  
volunteer your  
time, thoughts and  
expertise by serving  
on one of the  
many committees.  
More volunteers  
equal more success.*

But meeting golfer expectations this past season was no easy task. The relentless heat and lack of moisture made everyone's job a bit more challenging, to say the least. With the advancements in irrigation design and technology, many of us were better able to deal with drought conditions similar to those experienced during 1988. However, I still found myself spending numerous hours soil-probing for moisture content. It seemed as if every Sunday was hot, dry and windy, cutting into family time in a big way.

Many of us are busy with winterizing irrigation systems, making snow-mold applications and preparing budgets for 2006. The MAGCS has some seasonality to its operations as well. The most notable is formation of the various committees for the year ahead. A significant majority of the volunteer work gets done when our jobs are less time-consuming, during the winter months. Please do not hesitate to volunteer your time, thoughts and expertise by serving on one of the many committees. I have been involved with several boards of directors away from the golf industry. The successful entities I served with enjoyed ample volunteers serving on their committees. The same is true with regards to the MAGCS. More volunteers equal more success.

A big thank-you goes to all the GCSAA volunteers and staff for facilitating relocation of the Golf Industry Show from New Orleans, first to Houston, then finally to Atlanta. And I wanted to share something I did differently this year prior to signing up for education. This year, I decided to assess myself utilizing the professional development resource found on the GCSAA Web site. It took me approximately five hours to complete. I logged on for 30 to 45 minutes at a time, so I spent just over a week on this. Once I'd completed the assessment, a **gap analysis** indicated my needs and the associated **resources** to help meet those needs. The resources included not only GCSAA educational offerings such as seminars, but also educational offerings via Webcasting and informational study guides and books, as well as leads to finding educational offerings through local colleges. In addition to assessment and gap analysis, I received a **development action plan**. The plan will record which educational offerings I chose with corresponding target completion dates. All in all, the PDR allows a person to take charge of his or her own career. I would encourage everyone to complete the assessment if you have not already done so.

A huge thank-you also goes to my staff and members at Elgin Country Club for letting me serve and spend time with the MAGCS. My assistant, Mike Joerns, has always picked up any loose ends—thank you! And once again, thank you to all those who make the MAGCS work: executive director Luke Cella, *On Course* editor Cathy Miles Ralston and *On Course* contributing editor John Gurke. The Board of Directors and the numerous volunteers on the various committees deserve enormous gratitude as well. Once again, more volunteers mean more value from MAGCS. Please make some time in YOUR schedule and support the MAGCS!





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# Increasing Our Membership

*One of the duties of the MAGCS Membership Committee is to increase the membership of our Association. With the help of our executive director, Luke Cella, the Membership Committee has come up with a few strategies to address this goal and recruit new members. First, we should look at some numbers. Taking our cue from Tim Anderson, a fellow Board member and former Membership Committee chair, we used the publication Chicagoland Golfer and noted 371 golf courses listed in their directory. As of our Board meeting on September 13, we tallied 235 Class A members and 52 superintendent members for a total of 287. Now, our membership in 2002 for Class A/B members was 224, so we have increased our numbers over a three-year period, but there are obviously still some facilities in the area that do not sponsor their superintendent or facility as a member of the MAGCS.*

*Adding a Facility Membership, and extending membership to members of TETA, are two ways the ranks of MAGCS could grow in the future.*

To help extend our outreach, the Membership Committee has proposed a new class of membership. The class would be called a Facility Membership (or Class F—the current Class F would change to Class I). The different angle behind this new class of membership would be allowing a facility, rather than an individual, to attain MAGCS membership. A facility applying for this membership class cannot have a regular member (Class A or SM). Again applying the count of 371 golf courses, if we look at numbers for Class C (assistants, 124 members) and Class D (employees of golf course superintendents, seven members) memberships, we total only 131 members, much less than 50% of 371. These numbers alone indicate that there is some room for improvement. If fully half of these facilities had their assistants as members, we could increase the Class C membership by 61!

The other area where we are looking to increase our membership is by including the members of TETA (Turf Equipment Technicians Association) in our Association. The technician would have a dual membership, one in TETA, the other in MAGCS as a Class D member, thus increasing our membership in Class D. The committee, as well as the Board of Directors and our executive director, feel there are numerous positives to having the technicians join our Association. They would have more exposure to superintendents, and vice versa; they would contribute editorial content in *On Course*; and they could be invited to our monthly meetings. MAGCS would benefit by increasing our membership, adding new advertisers for *On Course*, and affirming our support of TETA as one of the most valuable resources we have as superintendents.

Clearly, we have opportunities to improve our membership numbers, and with the input of Luke Cella, we are moving in a positive direction.



## Editor's Desk

*On Course* still needs you!

We won first place in GCSAA's 2004 Chapter Publications Contest in no small measure because of our strong editorial content, the vast majority of which is original material submitted by our members. Member-authored articles dropped off slightly in 2005. Yes, it was a challenging year and many were too busy and exhausted to even think about writing an article. If you didn't have the time or energy this year, please consider participating in 2006—by writing an article, joining Brad Anderson's "Midwest Breezes" team or simply reporting an idea or project to John Gurke, Brad Anderson or myself. Thank you in advance for sharing your expertise and talent with *On Course* and the entire MAGCS membership!

—Cathy Miles Ralston, Editor





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# "Illinois Bentgrass:" 100 + 12 Years in the Making!

*The "Illinois bentgrass" that emerged from efforts to develop a superior bentgrass for the game of golf that is highly adapted to Illinois conditions and management.*

*It has long been my understanding that to make a lasting difference in the performance of turf, you must work toward making genetic changes in the plant. You can only accomplish so much through cultural or chemical management. In other words, the potential of a grass plant to form a quality turf is more dependent on its genetic constitution than on a turf manager's ability, tools or budget.*



In the article "Looking for Novel Turfgrasses" that appeared in the October 2005 issue of *On Course*, the famous Dr. R. Kane and I described how new turfgrasses are produced. One of the methods is "Mother Nature," or time to naturally select better turfgrasses. But what constitutes "better turf?" In my opinion, turf should be adapted for a given climatic area, such that it can withstand the various stresses that it will face there. In Illinois, for example, bentgrass must face extremes of temperature (-40° to 120°F), drought, disease, and golf turf management and use. With this philosophy in mind, my wife, Tess, a botanist and grass specialist, Mr. Shelby Henning, a turfgrass pathologist, and I started to identify old turfs (circa 80-100 years) that we could scout for Illinois-adapted bentgrasses.

During the early 1990s, we worked with other experienced turfgrass breeders, including Professors Reed Funk and Bill Meyer (Rutgers University) and Mr. Gerhard Klooster (Barenbrug-Holland). Bill and Gerhard traveled to Illinois and worked with our team, teaching us how to recognize new or different clones of turfgrasses, and how to process the plants. Once we were trained, we ventured out on our own and visited many golf courses,

*(continued on page 8)*



cemeteries, parks and roadways, collecting clones of bentgrasses.

## What Is a Clone?

A clone is a plant that is identical to its mother plant. Clones spread vegetatively, forming a patch of uniform turf. Turf clones are recognized by their color, texture or some unusual trait, and also by the fact that they develop as a round patch or clump of grass. You all have seen patches or clumps of Kentucky31 tall fescue; this is a vegetative clone. This means that it has increased its diameter by vegetatively forming new plants, which are called tillers. In the case of bentgrass, bluegrass and zoysiagrass, a clone grows by stolons, rhizomes, and stolons and rhizomes, respectively.

## How Does a Clone Form?

When a grass plant has an advantage over the other grass plants surrounding it, it will gradually "push" the other grasses out of the way and dominate the area. The frequency and rate at which clones form depends on a lot of different factors, including grass genetics, management

and climate. The first change required for a clone to form is a genetic change, and these occur very rarely in nature. They develop as a result of a change in the DNA, which can occur in a number of different ways (see "Looking for Novel Turfgrasses"). Not every DNA change is beneficial; nor do all of them last for long or confer an advantage to the plant over its neighbors. However, about one DNA change in a million could be important. Now, add in management (what you do!), and you can see that a plant with new or different DNA will also have to deal with how you treat it and how the local climate affects it. It is estimated to take 80 to 100 years for a clone to develop in a population of grasses.

## How Did We Find "Better" Clones?

First, we identified areas inside and outside of Illinois that we thought were not evaluated for clones in the past 80 to 100 years, and that had not been overseeded or sodded. We collected single plants from thousands of different clones. Just because we col-


*Turf clones are recognized by their color, texture or some unusual trait...*

lected thousands of clones did not mean or guarantee any of them would be useful. However, we tried something a bit different—we collected plants during the most stressful time of the year: June, July and August. What we really wanted to find were plants that could take the heat, disease and stresses delivered to turf, not just the pretty ones. Some of you might recall our team visiting your course or site. After digging up little

(continued on page 10)

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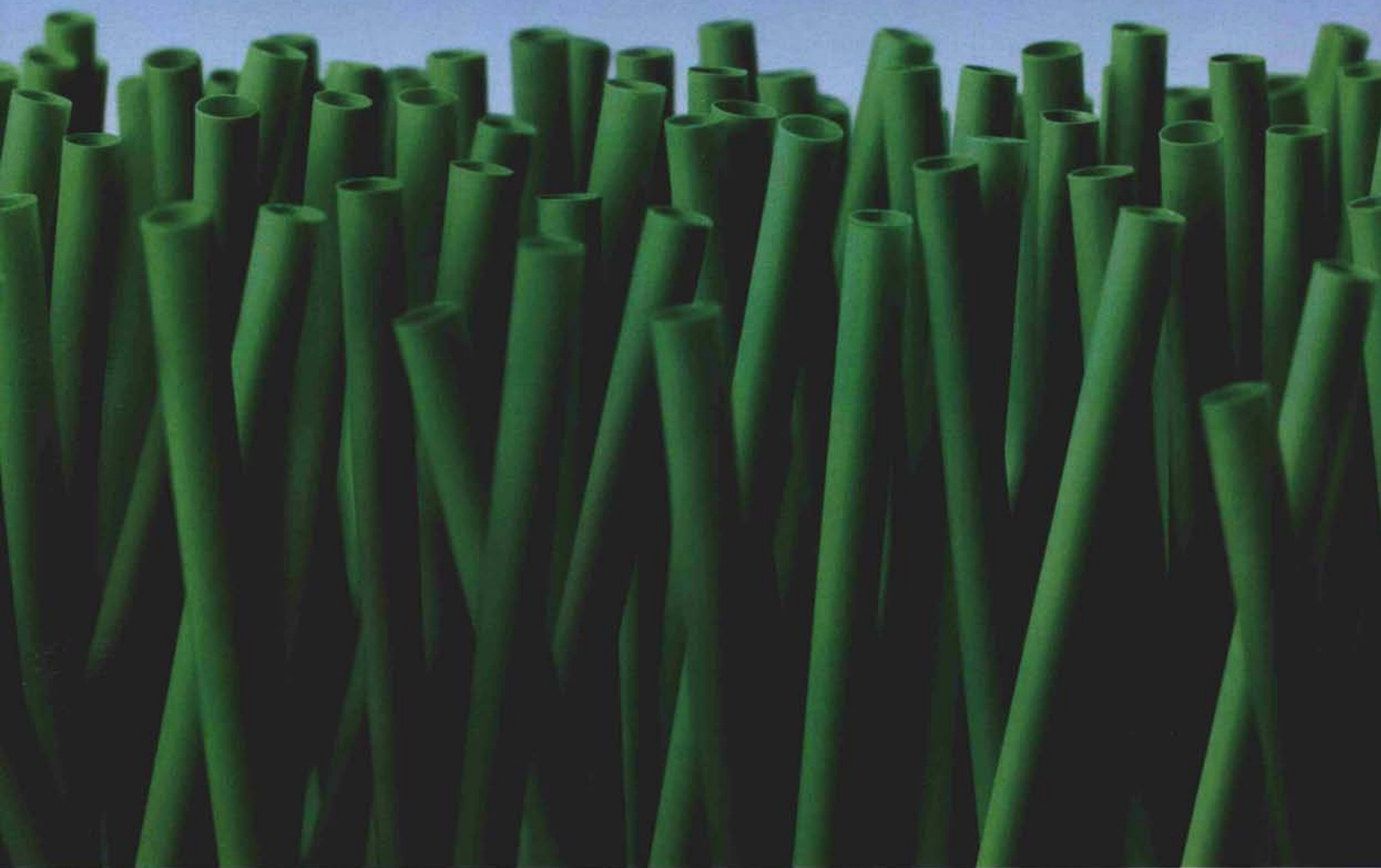
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pieces from clones, we would take the sample, wash off the dirt, separate the grass into individual plants and plant them. Once the plant was big enough to go outside, it was planted into a nursery. That took about one year, and we collected hard for five years. We ended up with thousands of single plants. But were these any better than those being used in Illinois?

### Turf Evaluation!

The first evaluation was for turf quality. The single bentgrass plants were allowed to grow and spread to form a turf. At the same time, we developed a large single-plant nursery identical to the turf plots, but these were unmowed. This block was to become a polycrossing block. Polycrossing is a very interesting process, wherein each bentgrass plant is allowed to cross with any and all of its neighbors. The seed from the mother plant is then collected, and this becomes the initial seed for developing a variety.

Once the 1,000+ polycrossed plants were harvested, the seed was cleaned and sent to the very capable and experienced hands of Professors Reed Funk and Bill Meyer of Rutgers University. They planted the seed, established bentgrass turfs and evaluated each entry. I soon learned that to be a good plant breeder, you must be very critical and hardcore. It was a bit hard to swallow when they told me that more than 99% of the clones that we had collected were "not worth talking about!" It was a good thing that they were both my friends!

The good news was that they were very impressed with 11 plants of our collection. These 11 plants were polycrossed in various ways and further evaluated in Illinois during the next eight years. Eventually, five plant types were selected and polycrossed within each group. This then formed the basis for the first bentgrass that was seeded, harvested, cleaned and bagged for planting. That was two months ago, September 2005, after a total of 12 years in the making.

I have had the new bentgrass planted in a number of locations in Illinois to further evaluate it. It is very important now that this bentgrass be evaluated as a turf for putting greens, tees and fairways in Illinois. Our orig-

inal aim was to develop a superior bentgrass for the game of golf that is highly adapted to Illinois conditions and management. I am confident that this bentgrass forms a very nice golf turf, is tolerant to the Midwest climate and is disease-resistant. As it should be, the superintendents and sod growers of Illinois will have the final word as to whether this bentgrass is superior to other commercially available bentgrasses.

What will happen to the bentgrass? If it is well-received by the Midwest turf industry, it will be planted out west for production by the Barenbrug USA Corporation and prepared for sale. If it is not good enough, it will be used for additional development work.

What should we name it? Have an idea? Send it to me for consideration at [hwilkins@uiuc.edu](mailto:hwilkins@uiuc.edu)!



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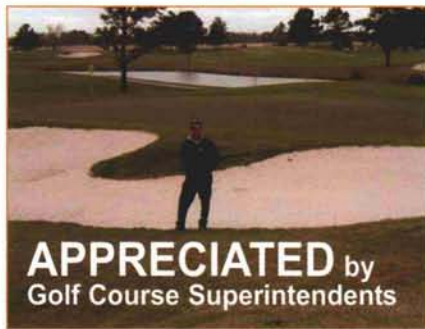
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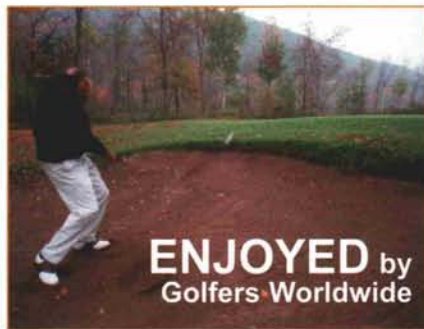
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