

# WE'LL HAVE CHECKS, NOT HATS, IN OUR HANDS'

FTGA begins project  
to raise \$5 million fund  
for turfgrass research

By Larry Kieffer

ORLANDO, Fla.

The 1987 Florida Turfgrass Association Conference and Show in Tampa Oct. 10-13 probably will be remembered most as the launching pad for the organization's ambitious five-year drive to create a \$5 million endowment fund for turf research.

If the effort is successful, with apologies to the late Winston Churchill, never again will such little things have caused so few to do so much for so many.

The "little things" are the two-inch-long mole cricket and the microscopic nematode, which together account for more turf damage than all other causes combined.

The "few" are the members of the FTGA in general, and golf course superintendents in particular. Although golf accounts for less than 10 percent of Florida's \$8 billion turf industry (some claim it's less than five percent), golf course superintendents make up about half the FTGA membership. And they account for nearly 80 percent of all money raised for turf research.

The "many" are Florida's homeowners, who now spend more than \$37 million a year just to repair the damage done by mole crickets. In all, private homeowners account for \$4.2 billion in turf care expenditures and professional lawncare services spend another \$2.5 billion. No figures are available for either the sports turf industry as a whole or the golf industry in particular.

While golf course superintendents may be unsung heroes in the battle against turf problems, by no means are they completely altruistic.

"If we don't solve the mole cricket problem, they will cause the demise of the golf game in Florida," said Bob Yount, newly appointed vice president for development of the Florida Turfgrass Research Foundation, a mechanism created by the FTGA. Yount's job is to raise the \$5 million and administer the proceeds.

The 51-year-old Yount spent the last 10 years in Orlando as a field sales rep for Elanco Products, the turf chemical branch of pharmaceutical giant Eli Lilly. He went to work for Lilly shortly after graduation from Butler University in Indianapolis with degrees in marketing and psychology.

He is well known to Florida's turf professionals who will be the source of his \$5 million war chest. A long-time resident of Arnold Palmer's Bay Hill Club, Yount sports an eight handicap. He was general chairman last year of the Hertz Bay Hill Classic so he knows his way around Florida's golf circles.

Since he is not a professional fundraiser, Yount will rely heavily on advice from Larry Pauley, a consultant with Ford Thompson of Atlanta, a firm hired by the FTGA to help set up the research foundation and raise its endowment.



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"We absolutely have to broaden the base," Yount said. "So far, about 80 percent of the money has been coming from the superintendents. We have to get everybody involved in this—not just the turf industry but golfers as well. Five million dollars is a lot of money."

In the meantime, Yount and Pauley have primed the money pump and already more than \$60,000 has been raised, most of it from a special \$100 "charter membership" offer that will close at the end of the conference and show.

"Those \$100 checks are rolling in," Yount said. "They get a lapel pin and I guess everybody wants to be wearing one at the show." Most of the checks have been from superintendents.

"Don't hold me to the figure, but I'd guess that about 80 percent of the money is from (superintendents)," he said.

After the conference, individuals will be asked to contribute in one of six categories ranging from \$500 "partners" to members of the "president's council," with initiation fees of \$50,000 and up.

Precious minerals is the metaphor for corporate donors. The five categories start at bronze (\$500) and work their way up to diamonds (\$10,000).

Yount expects the five-year drive to start slowly and gather momentum, with more than half the money being raised in the second half of the drive. He didn't give any intermediate goals.

When the full amount is raised, the foundation will be able to bestow more than a \$500,000 annually in research grants.

"And I have a laundry list as long as your arm," he said. "Mole crickets and nematodes are the glamor projects, but we need to look a lot of things like drought stress, turf regulators, warm-season grasses . . . I could go on and on."

He also stressed that the solutions probably will be biological rather than chemical.

"I think in your lifetime and mine, we're going to see the elimination of chemical treatment of turf," Yount said.

The research grants will be decided by five members of the foundation's executive committee, who will take an active, rather than passive role in passing out the money. That is, instead of waiting for researchers to submit grant proposals, they will approach "any institution that does credible research on warm-season turf" with specific proposals.

"Instead of going to those colleges and universities with hat in hand," Yount said, "we'll go with check in hand and say, 'Here's the money. Now this is the job we want done.'" ■

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