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FGCSA Spring Seminar

Education For Us and the Kids that ride the Yellow Bus

BY DARREN DAVIS

*Golf Course Superintendent
Olde Florida Golf Club*

The EGCSA Spring Seminar was held Friday, April 25 at the beautiful, peaceful La Playa Beach Resort in Naples. The event was co-sponsored by the FGCSA and the FTGA. An outstanding lineup of speakers was on hand to give the audience of over 80 a very educational experience.

Six continuing education credits were granted for state pesticide license renewal

and .5 CEU's for GCSAA recertification. The funds raised in this event will once again be used to support local schools in the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program for Schools — a program cosponsored by the GCSAA to help educate the youth on the environment.

The first on the list of speakers was Ken Mangum, CGCS, Atlanta Athletic Club and GCSAA director. The title of his presentation was, "The Golf Course Superintendent as a Professional." Ken informed the audience that he felt there were five areas to determine if you are a professional: attitude, performance, knowledge, image, and polish or "style." Ken began the presentation discussing these five areas.

To help illustrate the first one, attitude, he told a story of two boys who had gone to see a psychologist. The boys were put into separate rooms, each with a two-

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way mirror so the doctor could monitor them.

The first boy was put into a room full of wonderful toys, but instead of playing with the toys, he just sat and looked at them. After 30 minutes the doctor entered and asked the child why was he not playing with the toys. The child responded that he just knew when he started playing with them his mother would come and tell him it was time for dinner and he would have to put everything away.

The second boy was put in a room filled with horse manure. Within minutes of being in the room, horse manure was flying everywhere and he was covered from head to toe. After a few minutes, the doctor entered the room and asked what the child was doing. His response was that, with all of the horse manure in the room he just knew there had to be a horse to play with in there somewhere.

The point was you need to look at your own attitude and determine if you are an optimist or a pessimist.

Ken's presentation made each audience member take a look at him/herself and think how they present themselves and how they are perceived. He stressed that image is everything.

Ken also urged the audience to play golf whenever possible. To stress the need, he told another true story of how he was hired for his current position.

Several years prior to accepting his current job at the Atlanta Athletic Club he had played a round of golf with an

executive from the Goldkist Corporation. At that time the executive offered Ken employment with Goldkist. He declined because of his desire to remain a golf course superintendent.

Several years later Ken received a phone call from the same gentleman who was currently head of a search committee to find a golf course superintendent at the Atlanta Athletic Club.

In a very short period of time, Ken was hired. Ken felt it was certainly due in part to that round of golf several years prior, and how he presented himself at that time. Ken stressed the importance of playing golf, not only to see the golf course from a player's point of view, but equally important, because you never know whom you are going to run into on the course.

Ken ended his presentation with another of his numerous, funny stories that make you do a little soul searching, this one about a drive that Ken and his family took one Sunday afternoon after church.

They got behind a little old lady probably on her way to Sunday dinner after church. She drove a car with a bumper sticker that read, "Honk if you Love Jesus." Ken being a Christian, and a little bit of a jokester, honked his horn in response to the sticker.

The little old lady responded to Ken by extending her middle finger indicating to Ken what she thought of the horn blast. The point Ken was making is that it can take a lifetime to build a reputation, but only a minute to destroy it. So no matter how hard you work at being a

professional, you could blow it very quickly if you are not careful.

The second presentation was by John Piersol, director, Lake City Community College Landscape and Golf Course Operations program. John's presentation was on "Golf and Landscape Education—Where Are We Heading."

John has been at LCCC for 23 years and he gave some of the history behind the program. He stressed that we as industry have a large impact on the direction of the program. John told the audience what he felt makes the AS degree at LCCC unique.

Currently LCCC accepts between 30-32 students and is graduating 27-29 each year. John felt regardless of some of the grumbling in the industry that there will always be a place for a well educated, trained, turf professional.

By the time John's hour presentation was complete he had mesmerized most of the audience and had them saying Rah, Rah, Rah Lake City. He may have even had a few ready to re-enroll at Lake City and go through the program.

Gary Grigg was next on the docket and his presentation was titled "Low Input Management." This was a very timely presentation.

As most would agree, golf course superintendents are going to be required to maintain, or improve, the current standards of golf course maintenance, while at the same time do so with fewer inputs.

Gary felt the two driving forces behind low-input management are, a perceived dwindling of natural resources and

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'The Golf Course Superintendent is going to have to be willing to devote time and effort to understanding the big picture — that is soil, turf, weather and how they relate as a whole.' -Gary Grigg

the need to be environmentally sound. The challenge he felt was for golf course superintendents to maintain the current expectations while at the same time use fewer inputs.

The inputs that Gary felt we would be expected to use less of are things such as water, fertilizer, pesticides, and mowing frequency. Gary felt a key to this approach is to have a proactive plan.

"The Golf Course Superintendent is going to have to be willing to devote time and effort to understanding the big picture — that is soil, turf, weather and how

they relate as a whole," he said.

He challenged the audience to see how far they could go with fewer inputs without reducing quality. Gary felt most of us would be amazed to find out what we could do with less.

Gary agreed with a comment made by John Piersol in an earlier presentation in that the need for quality people will increase in the future, especially those that are well versed at low-input management.

After a short break, Dr. J. M. Vargas was next to speak. It was an honor to have Dr. Vargas, the recipient of this year's

GCSAA Distinguished Service Award. Dr. Vargas has been a professor of botany and plant pathology at Michigan State University for the past 25 years.

Speaking of the award Vargas said, "It really means a lot, because I work with superintendents and my best friends are golf course superintendents." This attitude was evident in his presentation, "Pesticides—The Rest of the Story."

Dr. Vargas began working on this presentation after he became irritated by the false reporting and partial truths portrayed about golf courses by the media.

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In particular he cited a radio spot he had heard by Paul Harvey denouncing golf courses as void of wildlife. Dr. Vargas showed many slides of wildlife and he explained his views on that subject. Obviously these views differed from Paul Harvey's false comments.

Vargas presented facts such as, "There are two million more song birds in the US than there were in the late 16th century." A fact obtained from the US Fish and Wildlife Federation.

Dr. Vargas also stressed that there is a big difference in the "perception" people have and "reality," a case in point being pesticides. People are quick to jump up and down and scream that we should ban pesticides but in reality the same people are exposed to much more harmful compounds every day.

He blamed this situation partially due to the wording our industry uses to define plant protectants. We refer to them as pesticides yet the medical profession refers to the same chemicals as medicine.

A case in point is Miconazole or Micoazole. Both products are used to control fungus in some very sensitive areas of the human body. However, the chemical is the same one that golf course superintendents use to control fungus and is considered bad by many people.

Why is that? The same holds true for many prescribed antibiotics and other medicines. In fact, the same chemical that is in Quell, a medicine to control head and body lice, is in Lindane.

Would the average homeowner spray

There are two million more song birds in the US (now) than there were in the late 16th century.

Lindane on their head or body? Probably not.

Another good example of this is Ortho Sevin. Again, most people are scared to death of the "pesticide;" however, the same people will probably spray their dog with a "doggie spray" such as Sergeants Flea Spray. Again, it is the same chemical!

Naturally occurring plant toxins was another area that Dr. Vargas discussed.

He explained the naturally occurring method that plants use to defend themselves from pests. They develop natural resistance by incurring natural toxins inside themselves. However, these toxins are not regulated by the EPA.

Dr. Vargas gave the scenario that often a naturally grown "organic" food would be more dangerous than one treated with surface-applied pesticides. At least a surface-applied synthetic pesticide can be removed by washing.

One example he presented the audience with is the use of pepper — something many of us use every day, often to replace salt since we have been told salt is bad for us.

However, did you know that scientist have proven that the toxin in pepper "peperine" can be very toxic? It is a fact that when rats were fed 4 mg of dried pepper a day for 3 months, every rat developed cancerous tumors.

So do we just stop eating? Dr. Vargas was quick to say of course not.

He explained it is "dose that makes the poison." Many of the things we eat daily have LD50 numbers higher than many pesticides golf course superintendents use but it still takes high doses to be harmful.

One of Dr. Vargas' most convincing fact was on the chemical Alar. Many of us remember back a couple years ago when the "Alar" story aired on national television narrated by Meryl Streep.

Having an actor narrate a so-called serious story such as this should have thrown up a red flag, but to many it did not. For those of you who do not remember the story, it was alleged that we should all be concerned about a pesticide used by apple growers known as Alar. The story sent shock waves around the whole country.

However, there was one little fact left out of the story: for Alar to be dangerous, you would have to ingest 28,000 pounds a day for 10 years!

Back to the home state of Florida, the next speaker was University of Florida turfgrass breeder, Brian Scully. Brian explained where the University of Florida turf breeding program has come, and where it is headed. His breeding goal is to produce quality bermudagrass that re-

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quires reduced inputs, has a better adaptation to stress, and has as good or better turf quality.

The final presentation was given by Dr. Jeff Krans, Professor, Department of Agronomy, Mississippi State University. Dr. Krans is a graduate of Michigan State and has been teaching at Mississippi State University for 22 years.

Dr. Krans is also involved with turf breeding and will be releasing his most recent variety this fall known as MS-Supreme.

Dr. Krans began his presentation with an overview of how bermudagrass came to be in America to illustrate how far we have come in turf breeding. Dr. Krans was able to explain in easy-to-understand terms where the new varieties of ultra-dwarf bermudagrass are coming from.

Quite simply, all but one are found dwarf mutations on existing greens. MS-

Supreme is one of 89 selections that were found several years ago. After three or four years of testing these off types, the best — known as MSP40 — was decided upon to be released as MS-Supreme.

Interestingly MS-Supreme was selected from an existing Tifgreen green, whereas Champion and Floradwarf are both mutations found on a Tifdwarf green.

As most of you know, Tifdwarf was a chance mutation found on a Tifgreen green. Therefore, all three of these new ultra-dwarfs are essentially a mutation of Tifgreen.

TW-72, or Tifeagle, is a little different in that it is an induced mutation of Tifway.

Dr. Krans stressed that these grasses may not be for everyone. Regardless he felt that we are truly in a historic time since it has been over 30 years since we have had any new varieties of

bermudagrass for greens released.

The day ended in an open forum panel discussion excellently moderated by Tim Hiers, CGCS, of Colliers Reserve. The moderator and audience probed the panelist both individually, and as a group, on a variety of issues.

Continuing education is obviously vital to remain aware of trends and new items in the turfgrass industry. The EGCSA Spring Seminar once again provided an outstanding lineup of talented speakers that kept the audience entertained the entire day.

As I write this short summation of the days' events I think it finally hit home how much I had learned that day. For those of you that were unable to attend, I urge you to strongly consider a short drive over next year to our little slice of paradise. I can bet you will be a wiser golf course superintendent when you leave.

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