



Field Day attendees listen to Dr. J. Bryan Unruh speak about the newly sprigged USGA specification putting green.

Just Where IS Milton, Anyway?

The Not-So-New Guy's Perspective on Building a Great Turf Program

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By now, the news of the expansion of the University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences turfgrass program in Milton is old. However, I frequently come across people who are not fully aware of what is going on in that "other" part of Florida.

The turfgrass program is part of a new off-campus teaching program located in Milton, a small suburb east of Pensacola. This program is the result of an idea that surfaced back in 1985 with Pensacola Junior College's Milton Campus Provost, Doug Worley, former state House of Representatives Speaker Bo Johnson, and PJC's natural resource department head, Logan Fink.

The idea involved bringing courses available only at UF to the Panhandle so that students could pursue a bachelor's degree without having to go to Gainesville. Students would obtain prerequisite courses at PJC and the University of West Florida in Pensacola would provide several elective courses.

The Legislature first considered the issue in 1988, approved funding in 1990, and the first classes were taught in 1992.

Today, five additions complement fac-

ulty already at UF's West Florida Research and Education Center north of Pensacola to offer degrees in turfgrass science, environmental horticulture, and natural resource conservation.

Besides the on-campus faculty, distance learning systems such as live satellite television, two-way interactive compressed video, and Internet-based correspondence courses are used to link students to faculty.

Expanding the Mission

In an era of tighter budgets and shrinking financial resources, UF justifies this type of program by expecting faculty to



develop research and/or extension programs in the Florida panhandle that will further the University's and IFAS' missions to "develop knowledge in agricultural, human, and natural resources and to make that knowledge accessible to sustain and enhance the quality of human life."

It is because of this expectation that the UF Turfgrass Field Laboratory at the WFREC was constructed. Located about 30 miles northeast of Pensacola, the Turfgrass Field Laboratory now has nine acres of turfgrass plots.

The initial phase of construction encompassed about four acres that consisted of two 14,000 square-foot putting greens, one built to USGA specifications and the other "push-up."

In addition to evaluating different bermudagrass cultivars, plans for these greens include overseeding studies, verticut/topdress frequency studies, and fertilizer source studies.

Large plots of centipedegrass, carpetgrass, Pensacola and Argentine bahiagrass, Tifway bermudagrass, FloraTeX™ bermudagrass, and St. Augustinegrass have also been planted.

The second phase of construction which was completed this past fall also encompasses four acres. However, plot sizes are much larger and the area is designated for turfgrass weed science and pathology work.

In addition to the field plots, a 2,800 square-foot maintenance facility has been constructed which houses equipment storage, office space, and a laboratory teaching area.

Much of the nine acres already developed has research projects in place.

Cooperative efforts have been made with UF turfgrass breeders Drs. Al Dudek, Russell Nagata, and Brian Scully.

They are currently evaluating nearly 200 germplasm accessions of bermudagrass and St. Augustinegrass at this northwest Florida location.

In addition to the collaboration of faculty in Florida's university system, we have forged relationships with the University of Georgia, Texas A&M, and Auburn University.

Presently, we are evaluating new releases from Georgia for Drs. Wayne Hanna and Ronnie Duncan. These include TifBlair centipedegrass and TifEagle (TW- 72) and Tift94 bermudagrasses and the Seashore Paspalums.

We are also evaluating four new zoysiagrasses from Dr. Milt Engelke's breeding program at Texas A&M for their efficacy in Florida. Two National Turfgrass Evaluation Program cultivar trials — buffalograss and zoysiagrass — are also being conducted.

Built on Relationships

Amazingly, the growth and success of the Milton program have exceeded even the greatest hopes and expectations. In retrospect, the success of the Milton program can largely be attributed to great relationships forged with the Gulf Coast Chapter, GCSA, as well as many individual superintendents and industry representatives.

I vividly remember when shortly after arriving in Florida, I was in my new office unpacking boxes upon boxes of books and files when my secretary indicated that a Jeff Ball of Panama Country Club, Lynn Haven, was on the telephone.

After introductions, Jeff proceeded to lay out his vision for the turfgrass industry in Florida and he made the statement, "Blow your horn because the cavalry (Gulf Coast turfgrass industry) is on its way."

Jeff has been instrumental in helping build this program, earning him the esteemed title, "wheel greaser."

Jeff's leadership and vision made him a natural choice to represent the University of Florida at the National Leadership Seminar in Washington, D.C. hosted by the National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges. At this conference, Jeff participated in the development of strategies for future land use

stewardship opportunities. Two other superintendents, Ron Wright, CGCS and Mark Richard, CGCS have both been active in helping to build a top-notch program.

In a similar situation, several weeks after my coming to Florida, the Board of Directors of the Gulf Coast Chapter, GCSA invited me to their meeting and asked how we could become partners in promoting the turfgrass industry.

The superintendents' organization has

been an invaluable avenue by which I have met many people. Furthermore, this contact has provided me the opportunity to see and hear first hand the research needs and desires of turfgrass managers working on the Gulf Coast.

In reciprocation, my office lends secretarial support and acts as an information clearinghouse. Centralizing the communication efforts has done great things in strengthening this multi-state superintendents' organization.



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Through these efforts the superintendents have completed the GCSAA affiliation process which further qualifies them, in cooperation with UF, to seek funding opportunities from the GCSAA Foundation.

Gulf Coast Turfgrass Expo and Field Day

Another cooperative effort between UF and the Gulf Coast superintendents is the Gulf Coast Turfgrass Expo and Field Day. The superintendents started this event a year before my arrival.

In its maiden year, the event was primarily a "sit-down" educational event that featured two university turfgrass specialists. In its second year, we expanded the focus of the event to include a tour of the turfgrass research plots at the new UF Turfgrass Field Laboratory at the WFREC.

Attendance was near 70 and people were able to hear Dr. Patricia Cobb, extension entomologist from Auburn University and Dr. Wayne Hanna, turfgrass breeder with the USDA.

After the educational session, attendees were able to see the site on which we were constructing the field laboratory. At that time, the buildings were not built yet and only a few turf plots had been established.

We also invited vendors to participate and several displayed their products and services.

Last year, the event was highly successful with more than 225 people attending. Again, the focus was changed and today, the Gulf Coast Turfgrass Expo & Field Day is a research plot tour at which attendees hear six or seven researchers discuss current field projects and learn how to apply these findings to their day-to-day maintenance regimes.

Industry Support is Vital

Good relationships have also been forged with Jerry Pate Turf Supply, The Toro Company, Stovall Turf and Industrial, Rain Bird Golf Irrigation, Cushman, Tieco Gulf Coast, and Jacobsen.

Chris Kurpuis, Jerry Pate Turf Supply, has led the way in providing literally thousands of dollars worth of Toro equipment as well as working with Toro repre-

sentatives in procuring irrigation equipment for the initial four-acre development.

Similarly, Marty Morris of Stovall Turf and Industrial worked with Leslie Seward of Rain Bird Golf Irrigation to get the irrigation system donated for the second phase of development. Marty also called in a favor from Eric Merkt, ProRain Irrigation Company, to help install the system.

Numerous other vendors have also been extremely gracious in providing the equipment, materials, and supplies needed to maintain this turfgrass field laboratory. There is no doubt that this project would not be where it is today without the tireless efforts of these many people.

Building a Statewide Turfgrass Program

One of the greatest needs in a state as large and diverse as Florida, is a concerted statewide turfgrass teaching, research, and extension program. I believe that one of our greatest assets is a statewide turf program with four turfgrass research facilities spread across the state.

Admittedly, collaboration among locations has been lacking in the past. However, we are seeing great strides being made in forging new partnerships among our faculty at UF.

Our turfgrass breeders in Belle Glade, Drs. Russell Nagata and Brian Scully are great examples of researchers who have taken their program statewide. To better evaluate their new grasses, Russell and Brian have placed their plant materials at several locations throughout the state.

This statewide testing allows them to obtain information concerning differential biotic and abiotic stresses that are found across a state as large as Florida.

Our turfgrass teaching program is another area in which faculty members are collaborating. Unknown to many, Dr. Grady Miller (Gainesville) has very successfully led the turfgrass teaching faculty to develop and implement a Turfgrass Interdisciplinary Science degree program.

Essentially, students entering the turfgrass academic program will now gradu-

ate with a degree in Turfgrass Science, not an Environmental Horticulture degree with a turfgrass option.

This new degree program greatly enhances our ability to tailor the curriculum to meet the changing needs of the turfgrass manager. Furthermore, this mechanism will allow us to better market the degree program to potential students.

Another example of statewide collaboration can be seen in the new extension design team, FL-116, Turfgrasses in Florida.

This team, comprising UF turfgrass specialists and county Extension faculty, has developed specific objectives concerning coordination of the UF turfgrass Extension, Research, and Teaching program to provide the right information to the right people.

The goals that have been set are enthusiastic, yet they represent the broad base of information needed by all segments of the Florida turfgrass industry. Great effort was taken to assure that all aspects of turfgrass management were taken into consideration.

If you are curious, the design team goals and objectives can be seen on the world wide web (<http://www.ifas.ufl.edu/~smpweb/fl116.htm>).

A Challenging Future

These are but a few examples of the many positive steps being taken at UF to build a strong statewide turfgrass program. UF has experienced tremendous success and support at each of the four locations.

However, it is time that we press on and continue moving forward to broaden our collaborative efforts further, both among faculty members and with the supporting industry. As they say, "United we stand, divided we fall!"

In time, many more challenging, yet exciting things will happen.

Let us (UFFaculty and Industry, alike!) not allow the things we *cannot* do, keep us from doing the things we *can* do. It takes a while to get the train moving, but once it is, it is even harder to stop!

Florida has the potential to have the greatest turfgrass Extension, Research, and Teaching program in the world. Bar none! Let's build it!