



Meet the Man With the Plan

After 25 Years of Service to Turf Industry, Benham 'Retires' to FTGA

BY JOEL JACKSON, CGCS

Who is Don Benham and what is he doing here? Maybe you haven't met him yet, but you must have seen his name in the *Florida Turf Digest* as the new director of public

relations hired last year to help the FTGA strengthen ties with IFAS and to raise funds for turf research. But why Don Benham?

Benham recently had sold his company, Benham Chemical Company in Michigan, and retired to Sarasota with his wife Ruth. His unique qualifications include 25 years of working with the Michigan Turfgrass Association and Michigan State University doing the very

same thing. It is a stroke of luck and perfect timing to be able to bring Benham on board to assist the FTGA grow stronger and more effective.

Everyone who serves as a volunteer board member of an association knows that it is often very difficult to devote quality time to pursuing the goals of a professional association when you have to take care of your primary business. Now the FTGA has someone who can

Don Benham

FTGA Director of Public Relations

Originally from: Born and raised in Detroit.

Family: Wife: Ruth Kurtz, since 1992; first wife: Norma died 1989; son: David works for Anderson Consulting, married to Paula Dietz. Paula was Michigan's first turf extension agent. Lives in Novi, Mich. Two children, Erica and Catherine; son: Keith, banker, two children, Christopher, and Kelly; daughter: Carol Albo, computer security specialist. Lives in Union Lake, Mich.

Education: two years Adrian College, two years Wayne State University majored in economics.

Military Service: Served in U.S. Army in Korea 1952-1954.

Business experience/Employment history: Sold hospitalization insurance for five years, chemicals for 12 years. In 1972 joined with Lawn Equipment Corp. and Gordon LaFontaine to form L&E Chemicals. 1979 Started Benham Chemical Corporation. Sold Benham Chemical Corporation March 1998.

Professional affiliations/Memberships: Belong to: GCSAA; Greater Detroit GCSA; Western Michigan and Mid Michigan GCSA; Metropolitan Detroit Landscape Association; Michigan Turfgrass Association; Ohio Turfgrass Association; O. J. Noer Association.

Turfgrass Industry Involvement: Greens chairman, Edgewood Country Club 14 years; greens chairman St. Ives Golf Club 3 years; board of directors Edgewood Country Club 5 years, served all chair positions including president; board of directors, Michigan Turfgrass Association - 3 years; Worked on committees with Turfgrass Association and University professors at Michigan State University for 25 years.

People in the turf business who have influenced/helped you succeed: I have been helped by Frank Forier, Gordon LaFontaine, Dr. Joe Vargas, Dr. Paul Rieke and many golf superintendents and other people from the industry and golf associations to numerous to try to



Don Benham, director of public relations for the Florida Turfgrass Association and his wife Ruth at the FGCSA Reception at the 1999 GCSAA Conference. Photo by Joel Jackson.

mention for fear of missing names. The business of golf has been full of people with helping hands.

Hobbies/interests: Golf and tennis are my main hobbies.

Goals for FTGA: My primary goal for the FTGA is to form a strong partnership with the University of Florida; making the FTGA the umbrella group for all of the allied associations in turf as well as the golf industry; supplying the university with the funds needed for a strong research program on an annual basis that they can count on for long range plans as well as short term cash.

spend that time building relationships and gaining trust of the entire network of the turf industry in Florida.

Benham's first order of business has been to get to know all the people involved in the FTGA from the board members, the office staff and the administrators and faculty of the University of Florida's IFAS operations. He has made it a point to learn the chain of command and the mission and goals of all parties concerned. And at the same time always looking for the common ground on which they all can stand and build a better working relationship.

Now Benham is moving into phase two: fund raising. After many years of successfully building up a multi-million dollar business, and helping the Michigan Turfgrass Association build up a self-sustaining research funding program, Benham is unveiling a modest, but pro-active campaign to get all stakeholders in the turf industry involved in a plan of regular funding, that is neither

Pioneering the Way Chemicals are Sold

Operating from an office consisting of a telephone, a card table and a lamp borrowed from his daughter's dresser, Benham set out to overcome the skepticism of major chemical manufacturers toward his unique proposition: namely, that Benham Chemical could do a better job for them if it had the option of placing their products where they could best be used in that ' marketplace—in other words, representing them and their competitors.

By 1984 he had succeeded, to the point where other chemical companies adopted his idea.

Today Benham Chemical Corporation is generally credited with pioneering this change in the way chemicals are now sold to the Green Industry in Michigan. Offering customers the right product for their needs is the heart of Benham Chemical Corporation..."

*Credit: Katie Elsila
A Patch of Green, Sept/Oct 1993
Michigan and Border Cities GCSA*

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expensive nor burdensome. The key is that it involves individuals and makes them part of the solution.

I have taken excerpts from two articles written about Don and his business practices. They are revealing of the character, determination, and vision of this quiet but persistent gentleman who will not give in to negativity.

He merely keeps searching and offering alternatives until he finds a way to succeed. The publications have much to say about Benham's business savvy

I found many parallels in these articles to the way Don approaches his new position with the FTGA, and I have seen evi-

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dence of some early successes in building relationships with people. I have had the privilege of sharing a few hours in discussion with Don since we have both taken on these supporting roles with the FTGA and the Florida GCSA. I have tried to give him a sense of the history of our associations. In return, Don has explained how so many of

speech, and his involvement and love for the turf business. His unique history in the business provides him with a perspective that embraces every allied association in the FTGA. We are very fortunate to have him working with all of us to become more effective. And that's what Don Benham is doing here!

the things we are dealing with are the very same issues that Michigan faced not long ago. The good thing is there is a light at the end of the tunnel for everybody if we work together. Stay positive. Start small and build slowly.

I have been impressed by Don's sincerity, honesty of thought and

Benham Founded Company With a Bold Plan

His idea was bold; to sell products from every major chemical manufacturer. What he had going for him was 18 years experience in the chemical business (he had headed L & E Chemicals of the Long Equipment Corp.) and faith he could build a business based on the idea of service.

But, he had to convince the large chemical manufacturers he could serve them too, even though he would also be handling products from their competitors. Benham, a large man with sharp blue eyes and streaks of silver in his hair, is a good businessman. He's also persuasive.

This August, Benham Chemical Co. celebrated its fifth year in business, its sales and office staff has grown from two to seven people, and the young company is anticipating a dollar sales volume of \$3 million during 1984. Benham and his close-knit staff have built the company to the point that it receives annual recognition.

Benham credits several factors for the success of his company, not the least of which was his initial decision to sell service as well as products.

"Everybody is out trying to sell chemicals cheaper," Benham said. "Of course we want to be competitive, but we want to sell the proper chemical for the proper job and for a proper profit. We are not always the cheapest place. We feel that service to the customer is more important than price and we feel most of our customers realize this. It takes time sometimes to convince people that they need service. Golf course superintendents recognize they need the service, but many lawn care customers take awhile to realize it. We

didn't build this business because we could sell it cheaper." Several major changes have occurred in the chemical business in the past five years and one of the most notable has been the rapid growth of the still relatively young lawn care industry.

"Our biggest increases in sales came from the lawn care market," Benham said. "I didn't expect it to be that strong." Initially 95 percent of Benham's business was generated from golf courses, and although that continues to be a big part of his business (about 50 percent), the lawn care industry has literally taken off. What is remarkable, he feels, is that it occurred during the worst economic period in the Detroit/Toledo area since the Depression.

"We grew during those periods when the industry went kaput, Benham said. The company met its first-year \$550,000 sales goal and has made "significant increases" each year since. "We passed my five-year projection in the second year," he added. In more recent years he's been more accurate in predicting sales.

But, he continues to seek controlled expansion within his business area. "We have a lot more expansion and a lot more things to do in our own area, but we're actually having to watch a little that we don't grow too much and grow out of our location."

"The manufacturers are getting smarter. They want to see the background of the people selling their products..."

*Credit: Ron Hall
Weeds, Trees & Turf, Sept 1984*



In the Envirotron Glasshouses soil and grow-in fertility projects, herbicide studies, cool season grasses identification and tissue testing correlation experiments were on display during the March Overseeding Field Day. Photo by Buddy Keene.

Overseed Field Day Attracts More Than 150

One of the largest crowds in recent years attended the Overseed Field Day held at the University of Florida campus in Gainesville this past March.

Over 150 golf course superintendents and turf industry representatives toured the G.C. Horn Turfgrass Field Laboratory turf plots and the Envirotron test plots and experiments.

After registration and before the field tours began, the Seven Rivers GCSA held an informal business meeting at the Field Laboratory. The chapter then joined the tour of the turf plots to hear presentations on Dr. Sartain's fertility studies; Dr. Miller's ryegrass response to herbicide residues and grassy weed control with pre-emergent herbicide; Dr



Over 150 attendees gather at the G.C. Horn Turf Plots in Gainesville to view results of fertility and herbicide experiments on cool season grasses and to rate color, quality, and density of various seed applications. Photo by Buddy Keene.



Dudeck's overseeding trial results on 43 seed varieties.

After a short hop back to the main campus, the attendees toured the Envirotron and Envirogreen for updates on projects like: *Poa trivialis* seeding rates; Rubigan pre-emergence program; nematode control products; tissue testing and soil analysis correlation. Following the

glasshouse and lab tours, lunch was served. An optional golf tournament sponsored by the UF Student Turfgrass Club was held at the University G. C.

Editor's Note: Many thanks to Buddy Keene, external VP of the Seven Rivers Chapter for covering this event and taking pictures.



On the Envirogreen located next to the Envirotron, Field Day attendees were able to evaluate *Poa trivialis* seeding rates, Rubigan pre-emergence programs, nematode control products and tissue and soil testing analysis. Photo by Buddy Keene.

TIDINGS FROM THE TC

Turf, Ornamental Faculty Make Great Speakers

IFAS Summer Field Day

Big congratulations to the Milton Research and Education Center for hosting a great University of Florida Turfgrass Field Day in conjunction with their annual Gulf Coast Expo June 23.

A heartfelt thanks to Center Director Donn Shilling, Assistant Professor Bryan Unruh, and Professor Barry Brecke for leading the Milton effort and for extending yeoman-like effort to put on a fine program. The IFAS Field Day was held for the first time at this Northwest Florida location. The University of Florida turfgrass program gets bigger and bigger!

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Dr. Joan Dusky is Interim Center Director of the Ft. Lauderdale Research

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and Education Center (FLREC). She replaces David Buchanan who retired June 30. Dr. Dusky comes our way with plenty of administrative and scientific experience. Moreover, she is quite familiar with

Florida agriculture. As you may know, she is a long time professor of weed science at the University of Florida. Until this appointment, Dr. Dusky was located at the Everglades Research and

Education Center (EREC) in Belle Glade, where she conducted important weed science programs for agricultural crops. Recently, she got involved in weed research for the sod production industry. Join with me in congratulating Joan and wishing her the best of luck in her new job.

Meet the TAWG

The University of Florida Turfgrass Advisory Work Group is composed of department chairs and center directors who have turfgrass program responsibility. Led by Terril Nell, environmental horticulture dept., the TAWG closely advises the turf coordinator and seeks your input about our turf program.

Please invite the TAWG to your programs, meetings, and events. I know they would like to speak to you about the UF turfgrass program and about what is going on in their departments as well, so give them a call for your next

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meeting. Below is a list of the TAWG departments, and phone numbers. Upper IFAS administration is not a part of the TAWG, but I know that they would appreciate an invite as well.

These administrators, chairs, and center directors are very accomplished speakers and what they can share with you is impressive as well as very interesting. Give them a call.

More potential speakers

While we are on the subject, are you looking for turfgrass topics for your upcoming meetings? Look no further. The University of Florida has a great team of turfscientists who are ready, willing, and able to speak to your group.

Want a change of pace? Consider inviting one of our great ornamental and landscape faculty to talk about the latest in plant materials and culture. Give me or any of our faculty a call for speaking engagements. We look forward to your invites.

Visit with us

Don't wait for field days or conferences to stop by. There is plenty of work going on all the time. Come and enjoy. We would love to have you come and visit and get your input. Drop in any time.

Welcome aboard to Gary Pederson as the new research green technician at the FLREC. Gary replaces Marcus Prevatte. Marcus moved on to Indian Creek as an assistant superintendent in February.

New Positions Update

The Turfgrass Disease research/teaching faculty position in Gainesville recently closed for applications. A big list of applications were received. We look forward to filling this key position in the near future.

The FLREC Center Director position attracted 20 candidates. Interviews are being set up. Those interested in attending interviews should contact Dr. Nan Yao-Su, the Center Director Search Com-

mittee Chair for schedules. Dr. Su's phone number is 954-475-8990.

The FLREC extension/teaching entomology faculty position brought in five applications. The Center is attempting to extend the search period to attract more applicants. Please encourage qualified applicants to apply.

The EREC is currently conducting a candidate search to fill a soil teaching faculty position. Again encourage qualified applicants to apply for this important position.

Research Grants/Awards Update

The recent FTGA call for research proposals attracted 18 grant proposals at a cost of more than \$500,000! I have not seen the proposals (except mine) but I am sure that these are significant projects that will help our turf industry and help advance turfgrass science. The sheer cost of the projects shows that more than ever we need your support.

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Turfgrass Base Paper Executive Summary

SITUATION

The turfgrass industry in Florida encompasses 4.4 million acres of managed turf that provides over \$7.3 billion to Florida's economy. Homeowners make up the largest segment with 75% of the total Florida turf acreage maintained at a cost of 3.9 billion dollars annually.

Florida has the most golf courses of any state in the Union with over 1,400 in use. Only two countries (the USA and Japan) have more golf courses than Florida. Over 60 million rounds of golf were played in the state, making golf a major recreational and economic activity in Florida.

More than 53,000 acres of sod were produced annually in Florida in the 1990s making Florida the largest sod production state in the USA, double that of Texas the next largest sod producer. Turfgrasses produced on sod farms are found on golf courses, athletic fields, cemeteries, roadsides, and in the landscape. The turfgrass industry essentially includes and/or impacts all people living in or visiting Florida because nearly all people use it on a daily basis.

CURRENT TRENDS

Many trends are having great impact on the turfgrass industry and will continue to do so in the next decade.

- 1) increased government regulation including the implementation of the Food Quality Protection Act and the resultant loss of chemicals available for pest management;
- 2) the increase in popularity of golf and athletics, the increased requirement for better performance turf venues, the increased use of outside consultants, and the increased competition for players among golf and sport facilities;
- 3) Florida population increases leading to greater use of turfgrass sod;
- (4) aging of the baby-boom generation with migration to Florida for retirement and use of green areas for and recreational activities;
- 5) increased wealth and expendable income for recreational tourist activities;
- 6) sod quality issues including off-type contamination and the proliferation of troublesome perennial hard-to-control weeds, diseases, insects, and other pests as impacted by the changes in global weather which influence both turf management and pest pressure in Florida;
- 7) Environmental issues including water quality and water conservation efforts and impacts of other turfgrass management practices such as agrichemical use on environmental quality and human health; and (8) Labor competition due to low unemployment, and associated communication challenges of a migrant and foreign-based work force concentrated in the large yet low paying job sector in the turf industry.

DETERMINANTS OF CHANGE

Relevant determinants of change which will likely shape the Florida turfgrass industry include politically-heightened environmental regulations, US and state economies, water quality and quantity issues, labor pool issues, global warming, and the unpredictable nature of change itself. Overall as long as the economy is strong and population demographic projections remain on target, there should be an increased demand for turfgrass venues, and for professional turfgrass management.

Association "Future of Golf" tournament, Steve Pearson, superintendent at the Falls CC and a director of the PBGCSA, presented the FLREC with a check for \$7,500 to support new research on ultradwarf bermudagrasses.

At the April Envirotron Classic, the Seven Rivers Chapter announced that it would be providing financial support of a shade-tolerance research study in the Envirotron to be conducted by Drs. Russell Nagata, EREC and Grady Miller, Gainesville. This is a great precedent for Envirotron funds to support interdisciplinary research. Seven Rivers also announced support of Dr. Jerry Sartain's soil and tissue analysis research. All the scientists extend their deep appreciation.

Turf Faculty Notes

Congratulations to Dr. Lawrence Datnoff, EREC pathologist, on his promotion to professor, beginning this summer 1999.

Our three Florida turf faculty on sabbatical leave are set to return in mid to late summer. I recently heard from Dr. Robin Giblin-Davis, FLREC, so I guess the great white sharks and the crocs from down under haven't gotten him yet.

The Florida First Conference May 20-21 was VP Mike Martin's exciting new approach to focusing on the University of Florida's future role in Florida agriculture. Turfgrass was one of the key groups included as industry sector. Many thanks to Joel Jackson, Ray Carruthers, Mark Jarrell, and Don Benham for representing the turfgrass industry.

JOHN CISAR

Turf Coordinator

FLORIDA FIRST

Focusing IFAS Resources on Solutions for Tomorrow

On May 20th and 21st the University of Florida held a conference in Safety Harbor, Fla to bring together representatives of all the state's agricultural commodities.

The purpose was to discuss the future course that the Institute for Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS) should take to meet the needs of producers, managers and consumers in Florida.

For the golf industry there were some

Pyramid Bermudagrass

very early positive outcomes before the opening gavel was even struck. First and foremost was the naming of turfgrass as one of the eight commodity groups of concern. Turfgrass joined such groups as Animals, Field Crops, Fruit Crops, Vegetable Crops, Environmental Horticulture, Forestry, and the group of Aquaculture, Fisheries and Wildlife.

There were 18 breakout groups from these eight major commodity groups. The turfgrass group included: Drs. John Cisar, Barry Brecke, John Haydu, Jerry Sartain, George Snyder, Everett Emimo, Terril Nell and Bryan Unruh from IFAS. Industry representatives included Ray Carruthers, Sod Growers Association; Greg Tolle, Lawn Maintenance Association; Don Benham, Florida Turfgrass Association; Mark Jarrell, FTGA/FGCSA; and Joel Jackson, FGCSA.

The turf group discussed issues ranging from public awareness and education to timely technology transfer from researcher to end user. We talked about

grass varieties and the need for breeding to pursue more drought- and pest-resistant strains to meet the growing restrictions on chemical use and water availability.

We also talked about facilities and infrastructure of IFAS including the continual process of training new students and hiring faculty that can meet the needs of the turfgrass industry.

It was an eye-opening experience to see and hear the concerns and needs of the various commodities. It gave one a clearer sense of perspective of the mission of IFAS at Florida's land grant University serving a population that is 80 percent urban while 80 percent of the land is in under cultivation or in its natural state. I had a chance to chat with Dr. Mike Martin, the new vice president of IFAS and he is no stranger to the golf industry. His son works on a golf course and he was very aware of the Minnesota GCSA when he was at the University of Minnesota.

In the accompanying sidebar, I have

provided the executive summary of the Turfgrass Base Paper which the turfgrass used to kick-start our discussions. There are some familiar themes and some new thoughts to challenge you as you think about the future of the turfgrass industry in Florida.

JOEL JACKSON, CGCS

FGCSA Director of Communications

GCSAA PUBLICATIONS COMMITTEE

National Committee Service Broadens One's Perspective

Spring is the time for GCSAA committee Meetings. As soon as staff gets back from the International Conference and Show they have just enough time to clear their desks, return calls, follow up on contacts from the conference and show and then prepare agendas and working papers for nearly two months of continuous committee meetings.

I was asked to serve on the publications committee for the second year in a row and



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went to Lawrence this past May to participate. It is always a pleasure to go to our national headquarters for several reasons. Lawrence is a nice college town to visit. Staff is eager to visit with us and hear our input on procedures and problem solving. The various committee members get to hear an update on what's going on and act as additional communication links back to our state and local members.

Steve Mona gave us a "State of the Association" presentation outlining and highlighting progress on current board of directors mandates and the general health of the operation. Mona predicted we may hit 20,000 members by this July if the current membership trends continue. He talked about the "image" campaign going on currently. Ads and inserts in leading golf publications aimed at the general golfing public have garnered good reviews from rank-and-file golfers and other industry leaders. While the content may seem a bit whimsical for practical-minded superintendents, keep in mind that the message is meant for those folks who play golf in flowered shirts and striped pants!

Joe O'Brien did double duty. He gave us a look at the Professional Development Initiative (PDI) also known as Membership Standards. O'Brien took us through the time line from 1996 to the present to show how the program has been researched and discussed and hammered out along the way, with critical inspections at the last two chapter delegates meetings.

This is not something that is coming out of the blue. Nothing is in concrete and the details are still being studied and discussed by committees and the Board of

Directors. The purpose is to formulate a meaningful Class A "brand" that will be a highly respected and marketable designation of professional accomplishment. Certified status will be an additional embellishment on top of the new Class A requirements.

O'Brien then acted as facilitator for the rest of our publication committee business. He does such a masterful job. It is always such a positive learning experience to participate in one of his sessions.

The committee addressed a variety of issues including the mission and role of *Golf Course Management* magazine, *Newsline*, and *Leaderboard*. We expressed our concerns over the size and readability of the magazine with emphasis on the length of the articles and the placement of advertising to help the story flow.

We agreed that the magazine is of excellent quality and content and the issues we were focusing on rated a 2 on a scale of 1-10.

The biggest discussion came on how the *Leaderboard* publication might be better utilized as a tool to reach influential golfers and we even suggested that the name might be changed to reflect that audience. By reducing the amount of the complimentary copies of GCM, which is already underutilized by the members, the committee suggested those resources be put into upgrading the *Leaderboard/Influential Golfer* newsletter into a classier publication.

The recent debut of *Golfdom* and *Superintendent News* as competition for GCM was discussed, but the committee felt that the design and content still offered readers

a variety of choices. The challenge for all of the publications is to convince advertisers that their publication is the one they should choose.

With consideration of advertising, the committee felt that GCSAA should do a better job of explaining that the magazine is the second-leading revenue producer behind the conference and show and that money goes to pay for many of the services and research being conducted to enhance the superintendents' profession. Like I said before, we're a practical lot and we like to be shown the nuts and bolts sometimes.

One other comment: Time after time, as we debated issues or ideas, we would stop and check ourselves and look at the whole spectrum of members from small public courses to the mega complexes. We tried to make sure we were representing the needs and concerns of everyone from coast to coast and border to border. I would encourage every member to fill out a committee interest form and send it in. The experience is worth the investment of your time. It gives you a chance to give a little of yourself and not just your money to a worthy cause, your life's work.

JOEL JACKSON, CGCS
GCSAA Publications Committee

Editor's note: For those of you that don't have a retirement plan with your club, look for the ad for "Golf Retirement Plus" located elsewhere in this issue. GCSAA has joined with the PGA of America and the Club Managers Association of America to provide this opportunity for GCSAA members. Check it out.

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