Wells, Unruh Awarded FTGA Wreath of Grass

The Florida Turfgrass Association honored Dr. J. Bryan Unruh and the late Thomas R. Wells with the 2009 FTGA Wreath of Grass Awards Sept. 17 during the 57th Annual Conference and Show Awards Luncheon.

The FTGA's highest honor recognizes outstanding service to the turfgrass industry and also to the FTGA.

Wells' award was given posthumously; his wife and son accepted the award, which was presented by Robert Ellis.

Dr. Barry Brecke with the University of Florida presented Unruh his award. "The FTGA is extremely proud to present Tom and Bryan with the 2009 FTGA Wreath of Grass Award," said FTGA President Gregory A. Pheneger. "Tom dedicated his life to turfgrass and the industry has lost a superb advocate."

In 2004-05, Wells was the FTGA president and served on several committees. "Bryan's extensive knowledge and research has been vital to the industry," said Pheneger. "He continues to provide exceptional education." Dr. Unruh is an associate professor of environmental horticulture at the University of Florida on the Milton Campus. He teaches courses in turfgrass culture, landscape and turfgrass management, and golf and sports turf management.

FTGA Immediate Past President Darren Davis with Mrs. Judi Wells and her son, Scott Wells, as they accept the Wreath of Grass Award posthumously dedicated to Tom Wells. Photo provided by Leading Edge Communications.

At the Awards Luncheon, the Florida Turfgrass Research Foundation also announced that six Florida students will receive scholarships for the 2009-2010 academic year. All recipients attend either the University of Florida or Lake City Community College and are preparing for careers as a golf course superintendent or in turfgrass management. These students were selected based on their academic record, leadership capabilities and extra-curricular activities.

Darren Davis, immediate past president of the FTGA congratulates Dr. J. Bryan Unruh from UF/IFAS upon receiving the 2009 Wreath of Grass Award for his continued research and education efforts in turfgrass science and management. Photo provided by Leading Edge Communications.

Lake City Community College

Philip Soukup received the James L. Blackledge Memorial Scholarship awarding $1,500. Soukup is from Oxford, Miss. and plans to pursue a career as a golf course superintendent in Florida with the goal of becoming a certified golf course superintendent at a "top tier" course.

Robert Mitchell received the General Scholarship awarding $1,000. Mitchell is from Mississippi and has worked at three golf courses including FarmLinks GC in Alabama. He plans to become a golf course superintendent in the Southeastern United States.

Travis Crosby received the Hans Schmeisser Memorial Scholarship awarding $1,500. Crosby is from Tallahassee, and aspires to finish his turf degree at Lake City and earn a business degree prior to joining the Florida golf industry full time in pursuit of a career in turf.

University of Florida

Andrew Taylor received the Col. Frank Ward Memorial Scholarship awarding $1,500. Taylor is from Las Vegas, and plans to combine his education in turf and pest management to pursue a career as a golf course superintendent in Florida.

Ivan Vargas Altamirano received the General Scholarship awarding

$1,000. Vargas Altamirano is from Costa Rica and plans to use his education to create a strategic alliance between researchers and other turf professionals working in the similar climates of Florida and Latin America.

Bradley Williams received the Max J. McQuade Memorial Scholarship awarding $1,000. Williams earned a bachelor's degree in soil science from the University of Wisconsin. For the past seven summers, Williams interned at golf courses in Wisconsin and Colorado. Upon graduation, he intends to pursue a career in golf course management in Florida.

Florida Turfgrass Research Foundation Live Auction

The Florida Turfgrass Research Foundation announced that the 2009 Live Auction Fundraiser, held in conjunction with the 57th Annual Conference & Show, raised $4,400 for turfgrass research and student scholarships. Because of participants' support, the FTRF is able to continue funding valuable turfgrass research and supporting turfgrass students who are the industry's future.

USGA Report

Early Season Golfer And Disease Concerns

By John H. Foy

The Florida winter golf season is under way. While play is now increasing, rounds and membership levels are still down at many courses compared to just two years ago. Many courses and clubs throughout the state continue to deal with very challenging times.

With reduced revenues, cuts in operating budgets and capital expenditures have been mandated at essentially all facilities. However, based on Turf Advisory Service visits in late autumn, appropriate and good quality course conditioning for daily play is being provided. Many courses are operating with reduced staff, which has required reductions in grooming and manicuring practices of perimeter areas and hazards. So far, this change has not been noticed by most golfers.

In the central and northern Florida, elimination or reductions in large-acreage winter overseeding programs also has been a common cost-saving measure. Large-acreage overseeding is not an economic, agronomic, or environmentally sustainable course-management practice.

As bermudagrass enters into a semi- to fully-dormant stage, which is the normal response to colder temperatures, quality conditioning can still be provided. Aggressive and ongoing traffic management must be employed when turf is not actively growing, and recovery from wear damage cannot occur, regardless of inputs. While we still have a way

to go, golfers are beginning to understand and accept that green color is not a critical factor in course conditioning and quality.

Unfortunately, however, unrealistic demands and expectations for fast to very fast putting green speeds have been a concern at some courses. In Florida, slow, soft, and wet putting green conditions in the fall was a legitimate concern when establishing a winter overseeding cover on Tifdwarf bermudagrass. This concern was compounded by the fact that putting greens at northern golf courses were in superb condition and were used as a basis of comparison for golfers returning to their Florida courses.

Today with ultradwarf bermudagrass cultivars now being the base turf on putting greens at most Florida courses, winter overseeding is no longer necessary, and thus it is possible to routinely provide a smooth and true ball roll along with putting speeds in the range of 9.5 to 10.5 ft. on the Stimpmeter.

This is certainly appropriate conditioning for the vast majority of golfers. There are always a few who tend to be the most vocal, always demanding faster putting speeds. With more frequent double cutting, or cutting and rolling, faster putting speeds can be maintained. Along with the necessary equipment, additional labor hours and time must be available to routinely conduct these practices, which incurs additional cost.

While the ultradwarf bermudagrass cultivars can tolerate extremely low heights of cut, sufficient leaf surface area must be present during the late summer and fall for sustained growth, photosynthesis, carbohydrate production, and storage. This is critical for properly preparing the base turf to survive the late fall, winter, and spring months. Maintaining slightly elevated heights of cut during the fall is necessary, and once cooler temperatures prevail, putting speeds will increase. If turf health and coverage is compromised or sacrificed early on, producing a full recovery during the winter is not possible.

Recently, putting green disease outbreaks have been another concern in central to southern Florida. Going back to October, rainfall has been well below average; however, the persistence of warm and humid conditions, along with reduced sunlight intensity, resulted in moderate to severe outbreaks of leaf spot disease on putting greens, tees, and fairway areas. While not necessarily desirable, continuation or implementation of fungicide treatments is advised.

Extreme care also needs to be exercised with nitrogen fertilization and supplemental irrigation so as not to further favor disease development. If a disease problem is suspected, submit samples to the University of Florida's Rapid Turfgrass Diagnostic Service. For more information on this tool, access their website at *http://turfpath.ifas.ufl.edu/*.