

A loud response to Silent Spring

By MARK LESLIE

SAN FRANCISCO — Thirty years after the “wake-up call” Rachel Carson’s book gave the nation, the legacy of *Silent Spring* has been environmental sensitivity, scrutiny, accountability, diligence and paperwork, according to Dr. Frank Rossi.

While not endorsing scientific claims Carson made in her milestone manifest, Rossi said it stirred robust debate that has matured into major scientific advances in the chemical and agricultural industries.

The publishing of *Silent Spring*, according to the assistant professor at the University of Wisconsin, marked “the birth of the modern environmental movement. There were some major, major shakeups in the USDA [U.S. Department of Agriculture] after this book. It was loaded with pot shots at the chemical and agricultural industries. They were easy targets. There were a lot of things going on not based on good sound science.”

The fundamental principle of Carson’s book — that the obligation to endure gives the public the right to know — “rides through the environmental discussion that we are having today,” Rossi said. “People have a right to know what impacts their environment, and we have an obligation to tell them. I think we can continue to say we impact the environment in a beneficial way much more than in a negative way. And that’s the message that’s starting to get out.”

While in the past the turfgrass industry had “no impact on environmental regulations, that is less true today,” he said. This is due in part because of the vast range of environmental research in the turf industry and at universities, “some fine leaders are emerging to tell our side of the story,” and “we have grown, changed, become more aware — and people are more aware of us.”

The debate, Rossi said, used to be very one-sided. “We were getting bashed over the head. And we were trying to figure out how to get out from underneath the bashing,” he said. “I think we have come out from underneath [it] and this industry is starting to posture itself as ... a group of environmentalists in its own right.”

The challenge the golf industry faces, he said, is to get primary information in citizens’ hands, divulging results of the environmental research through pamphlets and other media.

Citing surveys that show most of the public have no firm belief one way or the other whether golf courses harm the environment, Rossi said, “Our job as professionals and as educators is to take the complex and make it so people can understand.” Superintendents, he said, should shoulder some of the burden in educating club members and their communities about the ef-

fects of their courses.

On the horizon, “we will continue to see the service industry grow, more trained personnel on your staffs, because you’re going to have a lot more to do as golf course superintendents,” Rossi said. “You’re going to spend as much of your time doing public relations and information dissemination and education as you are growing grass. You will have a competent individual to delegate [maintenance responsibilities] to.”

Wise-use organizations like RISE (Responsible Industry for a Sound Environment) and the American Council on Science and Health will help proactively. The industry should expect to “change our behavior or wait until we’re regulated into it,” Rossi said. “That’s the legacy of *Silent Spring*.”

Otherwise, he warned, environmental activists could push the government into “reverting back to things that are not always rational or logical.”

“Yet the question still remains: Do we really know everything there is to know about what we

use — nutrient-wise, pesticide-wise, energy-wise?” Rossi asked, calling for continued research into the unknowns and adding, “We can’t protect processes we don’t understand.”

Silent Spring’s legacy, then, he told superintendents “means people are more sensitized. If they are more sensitized that means you will be under more scrutiny. If you’re under more scrutiny that means you are going to be more accountable. If you are more accountable that means you are going to have to be more diligent in what you do... If you are more diligent, that

means more paperwork... More paperwork means it takes more time. And you will have less time to do what you’re doing now.”

Saying the earth has limited resources and they need to be shared by all life, Rossi added: “Humans are part of nature and are subject to its laws. We need to cooperate and not dominate. That’s very important. We live in an ecosystem that is essential for all life. That’s a very lofty goal to have that kind of an ethic. But I think it’s a kind of ethic that should be attainable for this industry.”

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