

Golf's turf tradition rich in research heroes, pioneers

By MIKE KENNA

Turfgrass Science, or Division C-5 of the Crop Science Society of America (CSSA), celebrated its 40th anniversary during the week of Oct. 30 in St. Louis.

More than 200 university faculty, graduate students and professionals from the turfgrass industry honored past pioneers and leaders in turfgrass science. The one-day symposium and evening banquet was just a small part of the regularly scheduled meeting of CSSA, the American Society of Agronomy, and the Soil Science Society of America.

This anniversary honoring the scientists and the wonderful work they have done during the last 40 years, follows the U.S. Golf Association's (USGA) centennial celebration, the USGA Green Section's 75th anniversary and the 69th year of the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America. Golf has very deep roots in turfgrass science and the game has played an instrumental role in shaping the academic programs at universities across the country.

Golf unknowingly discovered the complexity of the links ecosystem as the game traveled inland away from the coastline and south toward the tropics. The grasses and management practices that worked in Scotland were not as transportable as the rules, implements and ball used to play the game.

As our country's turfgrass scientists celebrate, we should take a look back into the history of the game and its impact on turfgrass science. In order to prevent the game from being nothing more than a rich man's sport, a few individuals interested in the advancement of golf believed it was necessary to reduce the high cost of building and maintaining golf courses and to prevent foolish and wasteful maintenance methods. Out of this realization, the idea of the Green Section was formed in 1920 to devote itself to these problems. Seventy-five years later, the Green Section is still pursuing this goal.

In the early years, nearly all of the experimental work with turf was carried out at the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Arlington Farm in Virginia by Drs. C.V. Piper and R.A. Oakley. In a 1925 funding request titled "Cutting the Cost of Golf," it was emphasized that research should be "carried on in different parts of the country, under varying climatic and soil conditions. Cooperation with the state agricultural experiment stations and with their trained investigators is also most desirable. Expansion of this character is extremely important — but additional funds are required."

Dr. Michael Kenna is director of Green Section research for the U.S. Golf Association. He is based in Stillwater, Okla.

By the way, the experiment stations still need the money!

Through the endeavors of the Green Section to educate and share research results, its pioneer scientists had the full cooperation of some of the country's best golf course superintendents and green committee members. Dr. John Monteith Jr., in a 1932 speech, said: "The immediate result of this educational campaign was to lead greenkeeping out of its dark ages of mysticism and bunkum and give it a modern scientific outlook. This

does not mean that all green-keeping before the advent of the Green Section was shrouded in mysticism and bunkum, neither does it mean that it has performed any miracle such as placing all green-keeping ... on a scientific basis."

The education and research activities were the first to address the problems of maintaining a golf course and encouraged an exchange of opinions among early superintendents. The formation of small groups, as well as the organization of

what is now the GCSAA, all occurred within a short time after the Green Section's birth. Golf and turfgrass science were beginning to form the bond that still exists today. And, there is sufficient "mysticism and bunkum" for university scientists and superintendents to dispel.

In 1946, Dr. Fred Grau, then-director of the Green Section, reported in a press release, entitled "Further Progress in the Science of Turf," that the Crops Science Division of the American Society



OFF THE RECORD

of Agronomy was asked to establish a turfgrass section and to appoint a permanent turf committee. Grau said: "This action now establishes a direct link between

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Gary Dempsey, Golf Course Superintendent
New South Wales Golf Club
Sydney, Australia

Mandel Brockington, G.C. Supt.
Diamante Country Club
Hot Springs, Arkansas

TPCs commit to come under Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary umbrella

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did a wonderful job in meeting the criteria," said Wayne White, general manager at Piper Glen. "All in all, we are helping the environment and are more in tune with water and wildlife management on our golf course. Everyone benefits from this."

Only 49 of the more than 15,000 golf courses in the United States have met all the criteria set forth by the ASNY since the golf course program was introduced in 1991. The procedure

begins with a written plan of action, followed by implementation of programs for wildlife habitat management, public/member involvement, Integrated Pest Management, water conservation and water-quality management.

"It was quite an extensive project and our staff put a lot of time and effort into it," said Robert Norton, general manager at River Highlands. "It's not just because we wanted to do it. It was the correct thing to do. Being right next to the Connecticut River

and hosting the largest sporting event in New England [Canon Greater Hartford Open], it is important for us to be as environmentally conscious as we can be."

Previously certified within the network were the TPC at Summerlin in Las Vegas and TPC of Michigan in Dearborn. The other six TPC facilities are expected to be certified by mid-1996.

"The TPC network has always tried to be a leader in the golf and club industry, and that is reflected in our commitment to environmen-

tal excellence through the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program," said Pete Davison, vice president of PGA Tour Golf Course Properties, Inc. "The [Audubon] program gave us a vehicle to solidify what we have been doing all along."

The Cooperative Sanctuary Program began in 1989 and a program for golf courses was introduced two years later.

"You find some who are really enthusiastic about it [certification], going above and beyond to

receive certification," said ASNY staff ecologist Marla Briggs. "The TPCs fit in that category."

"The certification program established a clear set of guidelines," said Cal Roth, the TPC network's national director of golf course maintenance operations.

"Just joining the program gave us ideas and concepts and endorsed what we already were doing. Through the certification program, we have been able to further enhance the environmental aspects of our properties."

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Decatur Country Club
Decatur, Alabama

History's heroes

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the leading agronomic science organizations in the U.S. and the various phases of applied turf management, the Greenkeepers Society of America (now the GCSAA) in particular. Furthermore, it enables scientists to meet on an unbiased common ground for the purpose of integrating their research activities and harmonizing the future development of the national turf program in all its phases."

For the first time, turf achieved recognition as an important national entity. Nine years later, turfgrass science had its own division of the CSSA.

The USGA was fortunate to have scientists like Drs. Piper, Oakley, Monteith and Grau lead the way for the Green Section, greenkeeping and turfgrass science. The accomplishments made by scientists during the last 40 years were achieved, in part, due to the early efforts of these and many other pioneers who were encouraged and supported by the game of golf.

Now, more than ever, golf is needed to help maintain the programs at our universities and agricultural experiment stations. The USGA turfgrass and environmental research programs cannot support these institutions alone.

In the 1931 Golfers Yearbook, Monteith wrote: "No one seriously believes that the golfer's ideal of turf will ever be fully realized, for as the present generation of golfers with modern conception of golf turf passes on to its reward of broad fairways and one-putter greens on the flawless courses of the Great Beyond, new golfers will no doubt replace them with new standards and the never-ending criticisms of playing conditions.

"Nevertheless, the rapidly accumulating knowledge of turf culture is making it possible for clubs to maintain far better turf today than was possible only a few years ago, and the same marked improvement can reasonably be expected in the future. Progress, however, can only be made in any field in direct proportion to the finding and dissemination of new information, new methods and unfailing interest."