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MOVING FORWARD

Coping when you realize you have more past than future in life?

Autumn has always been my favorite season. Fall color is beautiful, even stunning in some quarters. It is harvest time in the country. From corn and bean fields to apple orchards and pumpkin patches, the rush to get the crop out is everywhere. Late-season baseball, football and early-season basketball games keep us well-entertained.

But late autumn can also be melancholy. Here in the north, the landscape becomes very stark, the days are often gray and noticeably shorter, and we know before long the tough days of winter will be here.

It is an especially sad time this year for turfgrass people in our state. We are a pretty close group – golf course superintendents, sod producers, sport turf managers and lawn care providers. Many of us have worked in more than one area of turfgrass management, something that adds to our familiarity with each other. Our Wisconsin Turfgrass Association, the Wisconsin Green Industry Federation, and the UW – Madison Turf Team do a lot to tie us altogether.

We grieved for one of our colleagues who was overwhelmed by circumstances at his golf course and his life in general and ended it all with his own hand earlier this summer.

Another of our friends, who has been a strong and longtime leader in golf course and turf organizations, succumbed to pancreatic cancer in October. A celebration of his productive life was held at the club he worked. The large crowd assembled there wept when the mournful sound of a bagpiper brought home our loss. We looked on as a maple tree was planted near the clubhouse in his honor.

A past president of one of our state turfgrass associations is struggling with his wife's malignant brain tumor.

And one of my good friends of almost 50 years – we were turfgrass undergrads together – is battling the same. Each of us worked at a private club in our town, golf courses about 15 minutes apart. Two of his sons worked at our course and we helped each other many times over the years.

It was during the Christmas season

These days he finds solace in the here and now, but he also is planning for the unknown future. A trust has been established; the house was readied for sale if it comes to that; frivolous accumulations from years past have gone to charity. His courage is matched by reality. He is moving forward positively.

“Clearly, it helps if you realize that **life is more precious** than anything.”

last year that he invited me for lunch and laid out the details of his illness. He was frank and realistic. The chances for complete recovery weren't the best, but he was going full-speed ahead, undergoing the maximum treatments to push the tumor into remission and give him as much time as possible. His attitude, as he declared so clearly to me, was “moving forward positively.” And he repeated it to me when we last got together.

He is a courageous man. I think of all the years that he and any other golf course superintendent worry almost to a fault about what now seem rather small matters. We spend years trying to meet what are sometimes unreasonable expectations of what often is a small cadre of complainers. I know – it has to be done; it is part of the profession that we love. A serious illness like his puts a different perspective on at least part of the job we have to do.

This man left the golf course somewhat sooner than I did and established himself as a turfgrass entrepreneur. His career shift gave him more time to do the things he enjoyed and things he needed to do. For these last years, he has been in control of his life. Until now.

Life is changing rapidly for him, and I am amazed how he alters and revises the important issues at hand. He is open to what is actually happening to him and his family. He is spending as much time as he can with his wife and sons and their spouses and his grandchildren. They enjoyed a beautiful cruise together, cementing bonds that will last a couple of generations. He owns a piece of property in northern Wisconsin that is used primarily for hunting and logging. They are making plans for the deer season, which is rapidly approaching. Every day he is moving forward positively.

Circumstances that would depress and discourage most of us seem not to have done that to him. I believe a lot of this is due to his religious faith. What else could it be? He seems not obsessed by the worst case because he isn't afraid of it. He is tranquil and serene; faith will do that for you.

I think a lot about how I would handle a fate like his. Clearly, it helps if you realize that life is more precious than anything. On that day when you recognize you have more past than future you push hard for the most you can get from life.

That is what my friend is doing; that is what he means by moving forward positively. **GCI**