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BACKSEAT DRIVER

Congrats to Gary Grigg on yet another evolution in his remarkable life.

Gary Grigg is retiring but he'll never retire.

New Year's Day will mark his official shift from full-time partner, head agronomist and chief evangelist for Grigg Brothers to part-time speaker and author, part-time go-to guy for all things foliar and more-time family man.

He's stepping away to devote more time to his wonderful wife Colleen, the woman who's been his rock for half a century (their 50th anniversary is this April). Now, Gary needs to be there for her as she copes with the early stages of Alzheimer's. He also has a lot of grandchildren to share his fly fishing secrets with.

If you want to know about Gary's remarkable career, hit the rewind button and check out the Q&A we did with him a few years back (CFO* (*Chief Fishing Officer), July 2010, bit.ly/1iTDYzw). Instead, I want to talk about what he's meant to us.

Gary has always been at heart an agronomy nerd. He originally planned to apply that science to the potato business that runs in his family the same way catsup flows through the veins of every Heinz. Instead, he turned his curiosity to turf at a time when few supers had advanced degrees. He helped many around him develop a more scientific approach to their programs.

His experience building facilities gave him a rare perspective on the "bones" of golf courses and he was a voice for agronomic reason in the days when we were churning out hundreds of new courses a year with too little concern for the impact of ego-driven design decisions.

He embraced continuing education early on. He attended what may have been the first-ever GCSAA seminar

that was taught by Dr. Paul Alexander in 1972. He's written dozens and dozens of articles and given countless speeches at conferences. He's been certified forever.

He stepped forward and served on the GCSAA board and stuck with it despite some challenging circumstances. People forget that, on top of everything else, he was a highly effective president of the national.

He's among a very elite group of supers who've successfully created new products. He had lots of help from his team and the PhDs who did basic

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research, but it was Gary's insight into the business that shaped those products and his reputation for integrity that made his colleagues try them.

He's in an even smaller fraternity of turf pros who started successful companies...and maintained their reputations in the process. It's not easy to transition from product user to product developer to product seller, but Gary did it and kept his good name to boot.

He was a piper for research into foliar at a time when many viewed them as snake oil. Gary's single-minded focus on proving that his products worked (and how they worked) was the rising tide that lifted all boats for many plant nutrition companies. A lot of his competitors have Gary to thank for the acceptance of their products in the market today.

He's an organizer who embraced social media early on as a way to share his ideas and help others with turf problems. His "Golf Course Maintenance" group on Facebook is a

non-commercial place for nearly 850 supers from around the world to discuss turf issues candidly and develop common ground.

He's always looking to the future and sees the next 15 years as the era of precision turf management. "Efficiency is going to play a much bigger role in the future," he says over breakfast in Myrtle Beach last month. "Tissue testing will be as important or more important than soil testing (in the future) and new technology is going to come faster than ever."

And he sees Grigg Brothers continuing to thrive under his entrepreneurial brother Mark's leadership and the team of regional agronomists they've built to truly serve as consultants. "We sat down in 1995 and wrote out our (company's) core values: integrity, science-based products, no claims without research and data and hire the best people we could afford. That's worked out pretty well. And oh, by the way, I don't think we've even scratched the surface of foliar feeding yet."

His only regret? Spending so much time away from his family while he was off building courses and traveling the world on behalf of GCSAA and the company. "I missed a lot of time with my kids and Colleen. I'm trying to give that time back to her now."

They've planned the changeover within the company for some time now so most folks aren't likely to notice any difference. But, in between time with family and fishing, Gary will still be around. "I'm going to continue on as a backseat driver," he says.

So, congrats to Gary on yet another evolution in his remarkable life. And, based on nearly 30 years of knowing him, I'd say that – like everything else he's tried – he'll take the art of backseat driving to a whole new level. **GCI**