

The Thin Side of Elvis

EVERYTHING ABOUT THE KING IS COLORFUL – EXCEPT HIS LAWN

By Thomas Skernivitz, Managing Editor

At Graceland, blood is thicker than water and turf.

One of the highlights of last month's annual meeting of the Turf and Ornamental Communicators Association (TOCA) was supposed to be a groundskeeper-guided tour of Graceland, the residence and burial site of Elvis Aaron Presley.

Instead, The King's keeper of the green left the building before TOCA members could arrive on what was a Blue Hawaii-like first day of May in Memphis. Apparently, the blood relative of the Presleys felt obliged to cheer on his cousin and Elvis' lone child, Lisa Marie, who was performing downtown at the Beale Street Music Festival.

Perhaps it was for the best. The lushest green on the 13.8-acre property turned out to be the lime-colored shag carpeting that Elvis had planted on his floors, his walls *and* his ceilings. (And you thought eccentric was fried peanut butter-and-banana sandwiches.)

Meanwhile, the outside of Graceland was anything but "Viva Lawn Vegas." The turf was a little on the wispy side, prompting at least one TOCA member to recommend a little less conservation, a little more biostimulant please.

To be fair, most superintendents don't have to deal with 600,000 customers annually, many of whom never heed the "Please Stay Off The Grass"



Bill Klutho, manager of public relations for John Deere, gives a shake of the hips in salute to Elvis upon hearing that The King drove this old John Deere when both were in their heyday. Klutho and other turf professionals toured Graceland during the recent Turf and Ornamental Communicators meeting in Memphis.

signs. And shade is a hindrance, especially in the front yard, which includes plenty of oaks and sycamores, as well as a few dogwoods.

Not that Elvis was too turf-friendly himself. As the owner of Graceland from May 1957 until his death at age

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PHOTO BY: LARRY AYLWARD

A Different Mode Of Action To Control Dollar Spot.

Now That's A Change For The Better.

Quotable

"You go further south and *Poa annua* is a weed in our region. You go further north and it's a desired surface. So we sort of split the middle here with it. If [superintendents] are trying to kill *Poa*, we can figure out how to do that. If they're trying to manage it, we can figure out how to do that too."

— Keith Happ, senior agronomist for the USGA Green Section's Mid-Atlantic Region, on the respect and disrespect that superintendents have for *Poa* in his region.

"This is going to be a crazy summer."

— Scott Nuzum, a greenkeeper at Pinehurst No. 2, on the U.S. Open Championship coming to the course later this month.

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42 on Aug. 16, 1977, he was known to tear up the premises while riding his horses — the backyard includes a stable — and golf cars. He even owned a converted snowmobile that was labeled the "grass mobile."

Graceland officials today pretty much concede their top priority isn't so much maintaining the bermuda-grass, zoysia and fescue as it is the "Jungle Room" and Meditation Garden. Turf is replaced every year after it inevitably goes brown during the brutal Mississippi Delta summer. There is no irrigation system, primarily because there is no map of the electrical wiring that feeds the floodlights that Elvis had attached to nearly every tree in the front yard.

All in all, Graceland is worthy of the extra spotlight. Sure, the lawn might be a little drab, but in typical Elvis flamboyance, everything else on the estate more than makes up for it.

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