

Off The Fringe



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curriculum because inter-program cooperation might mire the initial administration. "Our initiative came from the top. Everyone wanted to make the change," he said.

To make room for the new curriculum, students are now only required to take one class each in plant physiology and woody ornamentals instead of two. They can take a second class if they choose.

Prospective students are told of the program demands at the outset. "Students come in knowing it is a long haul to be successful," Fry said. "This business is not playing golf. It's a calling."

He says the new curriculum gives students more versatility in the workplace. "Graduates will be familiar with responsibilities and goals of managers involved in business, hospitality and food service operations at 18-hole golf facilities. They will also be highly employable at nine-hole facilities, where retaining a specialist in each area of course operation is not practical or affordable," he said via e-mail.

One of the goals is employability down the road, not just after graduation, something both Morales and Fry said was a reason for the change.

"As a superintendent trained in this program, you will have the credentials to compete for a position as general manager later in your career," Fry said.

Davis Gourlay is the general manager at Colbert Hills and an adjunct professor at Kansas State. Although he did not attend the school, Fry calls him "the prototype of what many of our students want to be." Gourlay has a bachelor's of science in agronomy but has been a general manager for many years. He's ecstatic about the KSU program.

"The kids coming out have a grasp on finances. They understand it's a business," he said. "They understand the value of a thousand rounds and how that reflects on the revenues and the whole operation." ■

Viva Vargas

MICHIGAN STATE PROFESSOR

(AND ELVIS IMITATOR) WINS

TOP AWARD FROM USGA

Joe Vargas Jr. does a great Elvis Presley impersonation. But he doesn't need to pretend to be a king when it comes to turfgrass science.

Vargas, a renowned turfgrass scientist and professor at Michigan State University in the department of plant pathology for the past 38 years, is the winner of the 2007 Green Section Award by the United States Golf Association (USGA).

The award is given for contributions to golf through work with turfgrass and is determined annually by a distinguished panel of experts in the field of turfgrass research. Vargas will receive the award Feb. 23 at the USGA Green Section Education Conference in Anaheim, Calif., during the Golf Industry Show.

"It was a great surprise when I was told I was going to receive this award," Vargas said in a statement. "No, I actually was shocked. I have gotten a lot of awards, but this one is very special."

Vargas is known to challenge normal turfgrass management practices, such as fungicide rotation for resistance management. "But, everything I've ever introduced has been based on solid research," he said.

Professor Karl Danneberger of Ohio State University, *Golfdom's* science editor and columnist, called Vargas one of the five most widely known turfgrass scientists in the world.

"He is at the forefront of turfgrass diagnosis," Danneberger said. "I do not know of anyone who is better than him in identifying a golf course superintendent's problem on site."



Dr. Joe Vargas (pictured here earlier in his career), winner of the 2007 Green Section Award, has been known for his independent stance on turf issues. "My whole life has been as a maverick," he told *Golfdom* in 2002.

Vargas has published more than 300 articles on turfgrass diseases and related subjects. He's the author of the popular "Management of Turfgrass Diseases" (1993). More recently, he authored "The Turf Problem Solver: Case Studies and Solutions for Environmental, Cultural and Pest Problems" (2005) in collaboration with Dr. Al Turgeon.

A native of Fall River, Mass., Vargas found his career path while a teenager working on the maintenance staff at the Fall River Country Club. He has a bachelor's degree from the University of Rhode Island, a master's degree from Oklahoma State and a doctorate from the University of Minnesota.

The 64-year-old also has no plans to retire.

"Why would I ever retire," he asks. "This is what I enjoy doing. And there is so much more to do. We have to find better ways of managing grasses." ■