



Noon luncheon at 1983 Wisconsin Golf Turf Symposium.

WISCONSIN GOLF TURF SYMPOSIUM: How It All Began...



By Charles G. Wilson

Grand things sometimes result from the smallest of happenings. Such was the case with the Wisconsin Golf Turf Symposium. The idea of a turfgrass conference devoted to a single subject had been incubating in the minds of Wilson, Latham and Welch for some time, but it took a huge "bar bill" to precipitate the matter.

The GCSAA Turfgrass Conference and Show was held in San Diego in 1962. At the show, as had long been the custom, the Milorganite folks sponsored a dinner for golf course superintendents from the greater Milwaukee area, where they were distributors as well as the manufacturers of Milorganite. Dinner at the hotel was delayed from the appointed hour. Drinks were being served in

the public bar adjacent to the dining room, and as it later turned out, to a great many people who were not even associated with our party.

Concurrently, Wisconsin attendance at the GCSAA annual meeting was changing. Instead of only three or four golf clubs from Metro Milwaukee, other cities' superintendents were attending, and it was becoming a family affair. It was embarrassing to invite only Milwaukee area superintendents when other good Milorganite customers were also there, yet, we were constrained by budget limitations to do so.

Another factor influenced our thinking. In the late 1950's the WGCSA and ourselves approached the University of Wisconsin with a request to reactivate the long dormant annual Wisconsin Turfgrass Conference. At that time Dr. Jim Love of the Soils Department seemed to be the only university professor involved in turfgrass research. Thus, we requested that Jim's department chair the event. This happened, and the following year Horticulture and Agronomy decided to get into the act with sponsorship on a rotating basis. Only one other conference was held at Madison, and then the UW Extension took on the responsibility and put the conference on the road with regional one day sessions that continue to be held each year. Attendance at these has come mainly from non-golf

interests.

With this as background, plus the aforementioned "bar bill", Wilson approached his boss, the late Ray Leary, with a proposal to hold a one day educational conference in Milwaukee and dispense with the historic dinner for Milwaukee area superintendents at the National meeting. At this educational conference we could invite all of our local (as distributor) customers, and since we would handle the program could keep under the San Diego expense and still throw in a free lunch for the attendees.

These Milorganite Sessions were so successful that the old embarrassing question of "why wasn't I invited?" again came up. Interestingly it was posed by WGCSA officials from Milwaukee on behalf of their fellow superintendents out in the state.

To continue the history, Wilson, Latham and Welch met with Charlie Shiley, Les and Ron Verhaalen and John Stampful at Ozaukee Country Club to discuss the possibility of enlarging the attendance and format of what was to become the Wisconsin Golf Turf Symposium. It was there decided that with Sewerage Commission approval the Milorganite Sales Department would change their financial participation to paying travel and living expenses of the invited speakers, and that a registration fee would be charged

to cover meals and incidental expenses. The format was also changed to a one and one half day symposium because of anticipated attendance from outside the state.

And, possibly most important of all, any monies collected in excess of expenses would be donated to the O. J. Noer Research Foundation, Inc. by the WGCSA who would be responsible for collecting the registration fees.

The Wisconsin Golf Turf Symposium has attracted International recognition. Several Canadian superintendents attend each year. George Kendall, a regular attendee from Winnipeg until he retired, came by bus each year, and, at his own expense.

Overall attendance has fluctuated depending on theme subject popularity, but not that much. In only one year did we fall short of funds to meet expenses, and the weather was thought to be responsible, at least in part.

The Wisconsin Golf Course Superintendents Association has donated over \$12,000 to the O. J. Noer Research Foundation, Inc., mainly from Symposia income. A wide and interesting array of subject matter has been covered over the years:

YEAR	SUBJECT
1966	Winter Injury
1967	The Physical Nature of Soils
1968	Poa Annua
1969	Satisfying the Golfer
1970	The Chemical Nature of Soil
1971	Where Are We Going In Turfgrass Management?
1972	Recycling Golf Course Wastes
*1973	Thatch
1974	Water Movement in Soils
1975	A New Deal For An Old Course
1976	Living With Poa Annua
1977	Keeping Your Head On Straight
1978	Fast Grass
1979	Better Golf Turf Through Research
*1980	Sand On And In Golf Greens
*1981	Management Requirements For Sand Greens and Sand Top-dressed Greens
1982	Getting To The Roots Of The Matter
*1983	The Facts And Fallacies Of Poa Annua Management
	* Proceedings Published

All but two of the Symposiums have been held at the Hotel Pfister in Milwaukee. Their facilities are outstanding, and the meeting room is the perfect size for the average attendance. In 1966, the Symposium was held at the Hilton Inn and the Marc Plaza Hotel was used in 1979.

Not included in the "official"

Symposia were meetings held in 1964 and 1965. These were invitational for Milwaukee area Golf Course Superintendents. The topic of the 1964 gathering was 'IRRIGATION — METHODS & MATERIAL.' "SOIL FERTILITY PROGRAMMING" was covered thoroughly in 1965.

A roster of Symposium speakers is included in this issue of the GRASSROOTS. A few other notes about this group are in order. The USGA has been extremely supportive of the Symposium. They have been on the speaking platform every year of the Symposium except for 1972, 1974 and 1975; and during those years they were in the audience. We have had almost fifty Golf Course Superintendents on the program. The program has included the National Golf Foundation, golf professionals, club general managers, golf course builders and golf course architects (Robert Trent Jones and Pete Dye included). We have heard from the leaders of golf course equipment manufacturers, pesticide companies and distributors. We have listened to the remarks of Green Committee chairmen, GCSAA Officers and Directors and GCSAA Headquarters Staff members. We have been addressed by industry writers, editors and publishers. Educators and researchers in the turfgrass industry have always welcomed the opportunity to speak from the Symposium, and the following colleges and universities have been represented:

University of Wisconsin —

Madison

University of Wisconsin — Milwaukee

Purdue University

Michigan State University

University of Minnesota

Ohio State University

University of Illinois

Iowa State University

University of Missouri

Kansas State University

Cornell University

University of Massachusetts

University of Connecticut

University of Rhode Island

University of Maine

Rutgers University

Pennsylvania State University

Mississippi State University

University of Georgia

Virginia Polytechnic Institute

and State University

Texas A & M University

University of Florida

University of California — Davis

Over thirty states and four Canadian provinces have been represented at these Symposia. The all time favorite subject has dealt with "Sand Topdressing."

A lot of hard work on the part of Wisconsin Golf Course Superintendents and the Milorganite Sales Department has gone into making the Symposium successful. Obviously, none of the success could have been possible without the multi-varied expertise of our speakers. Attendance continues to be good, so although one can never be certain of the future, it is expected that the Wisconsin Golf Turf Symposium will continue for many years to come.

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