



Thanks to his efforts, the grass is always greener

By Lori Ward Bocher

Some people dream that the grass will be greener on the retirement side of life. But the grass will be the same color for Dr. Robert Newman because he plans to make green grass an integral part of his retirement, just as it has been an important part of his 30-year career with the University of Wisconsin.

"I have a lot of respect for the grass plant," he said. "I don't like to tear it up. That's one of the reasons I don't golf."

That respect for the grass plant will keep Bob active in the turfgrass industry even though he officially retired from the UW-Madison horticulture department in August of 1991.

"I really don't have any plans for retirement," he admitted. "I'll stay involved in turf. I would like to make some slide sets in turf identification of plants. If the sod growers or somebody else has some project, I might volunteer to help them out."

In addition, he is teaching the turf management course at the UW until his replacement is hired. And he spends few days each week at the O.J. Noer Turfgrass Research and Education Facility.

He mentioned photography as a hobby he'd like to spend more time with now that he's retired. But then he admitted that most of his picture taking revolves around plants and plant problems.

So it shouldn't be surprising to learn how he and his wife, Diane, might use the travel vouchers given to them as a retirement gift by the WTA and the WGCSA. "We've been thinking of going to the Pacific Northwest and then driving down to northern California," he explained. "I've been invited several times to go out to Oregon and Washington where the bulk of the grass seed is grown. It would be kind of interesting to see that."

Born in 1928, Bob's interest in crops began on the family farm near Kenosha. "It was mainly a dairy farm, but we also grew sugar beets, strawberries, raspberries," he recalled. After graduating from Kenosha High School in 1946, he



Bob Newman at his retirement party.

worked as a foreman on a large truck farm near Kenosha.

"Then the Korean War started and I was drafted into the Army, went to Korea, and got shot at for a year," he continued. "It gave me a million dollars worth of experience, but I wouldn't have paid a penny for one million more."

His service duty ended in 1952, and he was married in 1953. Then he made his first move to Madison—to study agricultural education at the UW where he received his B.S. degree in 1957.

"I was introduced to the world of turfgrass when I went to work for Northrup King in northern Illinois," he recalled. After three years with Northrup King, in 1960 he took a job with the UW on the Ashland Agricultural Research Station. While there, he did some research in turf weed control. "I had to have a masters degree for the job at Ashland, so I went back to school.

"Then I did the stupidest thing I've ever done in my life," Bob continued. "They told me I could work a full-time job in the horticulture department and go to graduate school at the same time, which I did. Eventually, I got a Ph.D. in agronomy."

Even though his degree was in agronomy, Bob was hired by the horticulture department specifically to work with tobacco. "But I couldn't figure out how I could work full time in tobacco, so I started doing turfgrass work because it needed to be done," he explained.

Through the years, he found lots of work that need to be done. He taught a turfgrass management course on campus. He helped organize the Wisconsin turfgrass conferences. "And for the last dozen years or so I was the permanent chairman of the turfgrass conference committee," he pointed out.

"When federal and state laws started requiring certification for pesticide applicators, all the training was done by Extension and I was the chairman of that committee," he continued.

"And I taught Short Course," he added. "At first I taught during the regular Short Course session, but then I changed it to a one-week turfgrass course between semesters, when no one's around campus. That way I could attract people working in turf."

For many years, Bob was chairman of the horticulture department's experimental farm committee. As such, he was responsible for the department's 160-acre research plot, 12 greenhouses and complete line of machinery at the Arlington Agricultural Research Station. "Everything that went wrong up there was somehow my fault," he joked. "It was kind of a committee. But it was very enjoyable. I did most of my turf work at the experimental station, so I was up there a lot.

"And I was always interested in taxonomy," he continued. "It got to the point where I was identifying plants from all the junk that people sent to the department. If nobody else wanted to do it, I would figure out what it was."

Bob's work in the turfgrass industry did not center around golf courses. "The main area I work in is weed control, and golf courses don't have major problems there," he said, adding that golf course problems revolve around diseases. "I worked quite a lot with sod growers. They used to have some pretty severe weed problems.

"I also spent a fair amount of time with the City of Madison school system to try to keep their high school football fields in shape," he continued.

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Even though he didn't spend a lot of time on golf courses, he appreciates their beauty. "I'm not much of a golfer," he admitted. "But I enjoy the beauty that is created by a golf course in the midst of streets and noise. You get onto a golf course and it's peaceful, quiet and enjoyable.

"Wisconsin is one of the premiere places to build golf courses," he believes. "The state has so much beauty in it—so much water, so many lakes and rivers, wooded areas with conifers as well as broadleaf trees. And, with our rolling topography, you don't have to move as much earth."

But there's one thing he doesn't like about golf courses. "It bothers me that the grass is being cut so exceedingly short that it puts it under a great deal of stress," he pointed out. "And this stress shows up especially in the form of various diseases. Then it requires a fair amount of pesticide application. The superintendent has his hands tied because, at the moment, everybody wants

fast golf greens. I would like to see golf played on turf that is cut a little bit higher so there isn't as much stress on the grass."

As a member of the UW golf course committee, Bob was closely involved with the planning of the University Ridge Golf Course. "I think Bobby Jones did a remarkable job," he said. "I hope that someday they can build the unique driving range, shaped like a terraced bowl, that has been designed." He also hopes that they'll be able to build the "executive nine" course, a second 18-hole course and a more substantial club house.

When asked if he had any final message to pass on to Wisconsin's golf course superintendents through this *Personality Profile* column, Bob Newman replied: "Don't be ashamed of *Poa annua* bluegrass." He explained how Wisconsin superintendents who attend national meetings are embarrassed to admit they have it on their courses. He doesn't believe in all the schemes and chemicals that have claimed to get rid

of it. And he doesn't think *Poa annua* is so bad in the first place.

"Arnold Palmer once said something to the effect that "there's no better lie for a golf ball than a good, tight *Poa annua* fairway," Bob said. "And besides, 999 golfers out of a thousand have no idea what they're standing on as long as it looks nice."

Bob's wife, Diane, is also known to those in the turf industry. "She has helped a great deal with the turf conferences—has kept up the mailing list for years," Bob pointed out. "And she has put together information for sod growers."

Diane is retired from her job as a technical typist and secretary at the UW Medical School. The Newmans have three sons: Karl, a doctor in Cincinnati; William, who works for McDonnell-Douglas in St. Louis; and Walter, who works with a Lutheran home for the elderly in St. Paul.

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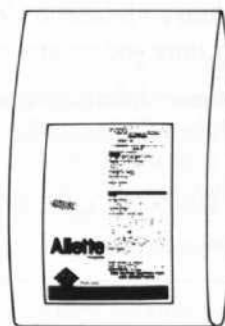
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