

THE MEETING SEASON

By Monroe S. Miller

As I move into my 20th year as a Wisconsin golf course superintendent, I can report that one of the biggest changes I have seen has been the quality and the quantity of educational offerings in our business. There are more and more of them, and they get better and better each year.

Starting with the Symposium, moving through the Wisconsin Turfgrass Association Winter Conference (after the WGCSA fall business meeting) and on to the GCSAA conference and show, the materials presented this year were almost universally excellent.

WGCSA members who happened to attend turf conferences in other states—Michigan, Minnesota, Illinois and Massachusetts, to name ones I have heard about—report a similar high level of quality lectures.

It is, in my view, a reflection of the times we are in. The problems are serious, the issues divisive and the answers elusive. Sound educational programming is the best solution to meet the challenges head on.

To all those responsible for the planning and execution of these great meetings—CONGRATULATIONS!

Although we're in the middle of the educational meeting time, it still seems like the holidays were just yesterday.

It was a wonderful holiday season. Time spent with family, Christmas gifts and relaxation all made it the best time of year.

Books and clothes were what I mostly received for Christmas.

One of the nicest gifts, however, was a visit. On the Friday before Christmas, Jim Love stopped by the shop.

Armed with Christmas stollen, he came looking for some coffee to drink with it. We all happily obliged him.

During winter months, Jim and Nancy and their springer spaniel Shy head to warmer climes, travelling in the RV purchased at retirement. They've been everywhere from St. Augustine to San Diego to Seattle.

I am convinced that on one of their previous trips to Florida, Jim must have found the Ponce de Leon fountain of youth. He looks great!

And it is obvious he is enjoying his retirement. I think the two of them are as busy now as they were in the middle of two very busy careers.

As we visited and reminisced, I couldn't help wondering, "where have the last six years gone?"

Speaking of the Christmas past, we dedicated ourselves, more than ever, to making it an "American" Christmas. We have always been aware of the "Made in USA" label, but we searched harder than ever in 1991 to complete our gift lists with things made by our own citizens.

Now that the new golf season is just around the corner, I'm going to continue, as I have for years, to seek out equipment and supplies we will need for the golf season that carry that same USA label.

As long as the Japanese and other Asian countries are so intransigent when it comes to fair and free trade with the U.S., they won't get my discretionary business.

I hope lots of you agree. Too many of our fellow Americans are hurting economically to not want to help in a very easy and significant way.

The following data and graphic from the Wisconsin Agricultural Statistics Service tell a lot about the moisture status all around Wisconsin for the past five seasons.

The key word is "season". The totals for the year are normally in the low 30s. The stat service defines the season as April through September.

That's close to our golf season, at least in terms of the bulk of rounds played. Several things are obvious. The years of 1987, 1988 and 1989 were extremely dry. I contend that I am still seeing the cumulative effects of those

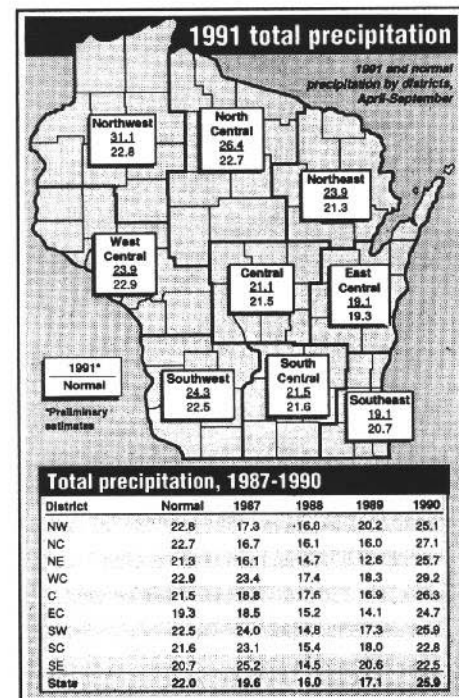
dry years in our trees. The 1990 season is the only one of the last five that was "wet". And the season past was about as close to normal as you will probably see.

Two things are less obvious. First, as always, is the fact that distribution isn't indicated by such tabulated information. Much of the rain we received in 1991 came in buckets and was followed by weeks of painful heat and drought.

Secondly, although the 1991 season was normal, the totals for the year should be well above the annual norm.

We were wallowing in the mud from the last week of October right through the end of the year.

But who can really complain about catch-up moisture, even if it causes some aggravation? Not me.

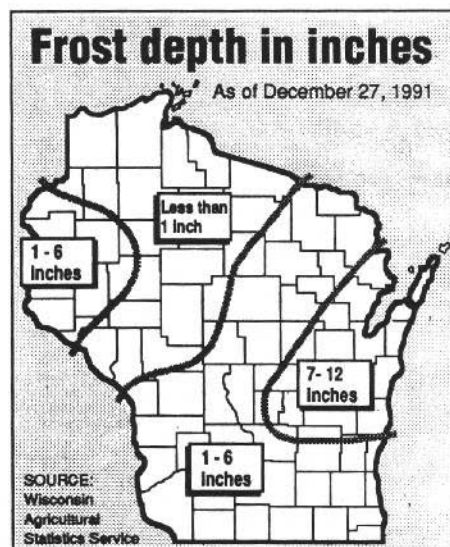
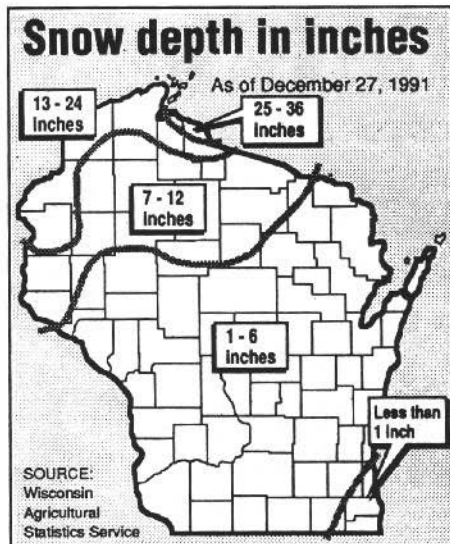


Also included here for your information, again from the Wisconsin Ag Stat Service, are details of frost depth and snow depth at Christmas. They beg the question "can one think springtime thoughts at Christmas time?"

(Continued on page 5)

(Continued from page 3)

Here's a certainty: with a temperature of 52 degrees on February 3, be assured everybody on my crew couldn't help think about anything BUT spring.



Well, the bureaucrats and politicians in this state have justified the lack of respect the public has for them once again.

MONEY magazine editors have sentenced Wisconsin to "Tax Hell" status again this year. The sentence is an annual ranking of states based on tax burdens on a typical household. For us the burden in 1991 was \$7,762.

Wisconsin was the sixth worst state in the U.S. and the District of Columbia. In 1990 we had the dubious distinction of placing fourth, and we secured the eighth place in 1989.

You'd think the message to the public sector would be loud and clear: "You have enough money. Use it wisely, reduce waste, work harder and work

smarter. More money is not your answer. Taxes do not need to be raised."

Yet, the increases in state property tax bills mailed in December were more than **DOUBLE** the rate of inflation. It simply has to stop.

Ultimately, if this course continues, it is your fault and mine. The politicians who promote excessive spending need to be removed from office. Period. If you don't vote, they stay. They spend, You pay. You bellyache. They continue unabated because you aren't concerned enough to turn them out.

It is frustrating and disgusting; one hates to think about it. That is especially true when you realize you are getting poor value for your dollar. Witness the slow slide of the University of Wisconsin System, roads in poor shape, increases in crime, etc. etc.

How long will we wait before we do something?

It wouldn't have taken a genius or a crystal ball to predict that Toro's purchase of Lawn Boy from OMC wouldn't be good for Wisconsin in the long run.

The first thing that happened was that they ceased mower manufacturing in Plymouth/Sheboygan Falls.

Now they are "restructuring" and closing Lawn Boy administrative offices there, affecting about 120 white collar employees.

Part of this restructuring involves the closing of a plant in Mississippi, a move costing that state more jobs than Wisconsin lost.

Who should be surprised by this tragic news—it is the story of life and business in America today. And it's sad, very sad.

I have an interest in big trees that may be more than most Wisconsin golf course superintendents. The reason likely is because we have the Wisconsin champion Shagbark Hickory adjacent to our sixth green.

That interest is heightened whenever the American Forestry Association issues its annual edition of the National Register of Big Trees. This list records the nation's biggest trees, and the list can change significantly from year to year. Storms and other disasters remove some. Others are replaced by new finds.

Wisconsin has four national record trees—none on a golf course as near as I can tell. The record black spruce is in Taylor county, the record white poplar is in Fond du Lac county, the silver maple grows in Columbia County and

the record peachleaf willow is located in West Allis.

Most interesting of all may be the question of "who has the most champion big trees?"

Texas and California have 81 and 74, respectively. That is not really surprising, considering the sheer size of each and the wide swing in climate each state offers.

Could you guess which state had the second highest number (75) of the biggest trees in America?

Frankly, I'd never guess that it would be Michigan. I mean, Wisconsin has only four champs and Minnesota has even fewer with only one. How can a state at a similar northern latitude have so many big trees?

After consideration, however, it is less surprising than at first. Michigan has ample rainfall and a far milder climate than either Wisconsin or Minnesota. They are surrounded on three sides by Great Lakes!

The state has good soils, and many acres of virgin timber. Forests uncut by man are particularly fertile places to search for record size trees.

Although I wouldn't want Michigan's social problems, and for sure don't want anything to do with its poor economic conditions, it is only natural to be envious of the very wide range of plant materials Michigan golf course superintendents have to choose from.

If you would like a list of America's biggest trees, send \$2.00 on to: The American Forestry Association, P.O. Box 2000, Washington, D. C.

Nick Christians, a horticulture professor at Iowa State University and well known turfgrass researcher, has discovered what is thought to be the first "natural" herbicide and fertilizer: corn gluten meal.

The product is a protein substance extracted from corn during processing. It interferes with the germination of crabgrass and other weeds. In addition to suppressing weed seed germination, it analyzes ten percent nitrogen!

Dr. Christians points out that the corn by-product is more expensive and less effective than synthetic herbicides, but it could offer homeowners (and others) an alternative for standard herbicides. It will be an option for use in some areas where standard materials are restricted.

The corn meal has been under testing on ISU research plots for more than seven years. Development of the prod-

(Continued on page 7)

(Continued from page 5)

uct is far enough along that it might reach the marketplace in the spring of 1993.

Dr. Christians discovered the fertility and herbicide value of corn gluten meal by accident. He and Dr. Clint Hodges - a past speaker at our Wisconsin Golf Turf Symposium—were using left over corn meal from the ISU dorm food service as a growth medium for microbes used in their research. They noticed it inhibited the germination of weed grasses.

Iowa was an easy place to acquire other corn by-products. After greenhouse testing, they found the key ingredient was the gluten meal.

Christians has been primarily studying effects on crabgrass. However, it has been tested on other grasses and broadleaf weeds and shows some capability of cutting infestations by 50 to 60 percent.

Development has reached the stage where they've taken the meal powder and processed it into pellets which can be easily spread with a fertilizer spreader. Also, they are looking at how it affects root growth and development.

I cannot help but think I would be very interested in trying this product when it reaches the Wisconsin marketplace. It is going to have an appeal to more than just users, and may add a margin of comfort to those who object to the standard products under fire today.

Despite many years of use of hundreds of tons of Milorganite for just about every purpose imaginable on a golf course, applying it as a deterrent to deer never occurred to me.

Although we occasionally see a white tail on our course, they aren't a problem like they are on other golf courses in our area and urban areas in northern parts of the country.

Deer have done severe damage at Nakoma over the years, and could potentially do the same at University Ridge.

Landscape managers, golf course superintendents and others in New England have for a long time been using Milorganite to reduce damage to ornamentals by browsing deer.

A study is underway at Cornell University's Cooperative Extension Service that will try to quantify Milorganite effectiveness at keeping deer away from valuable plants.

The study so far has shown that Milorganite is effective in keeping deer from browsing on Hosta and Taxus species when it is applied around the

plant's base. The rate of application is five pounds per 100 square feet. It is broadcast on the surface around the plant and should be applied one or two times a month and after each snowfall during the winter.

Some other techniques are under examination, too. Hopefully, there will be a significant increase in demand as

a result for this excellent all-Wisconsin product.

That's it. As the meeting season winds down to a close, the spirit starts churning in anticipation for opening day. Now there's a cause for celebration!

The Wisconsin Golf Course Quiz



MORE TRIVIA

By Monroe S. Miller

With each succeeding issue of *THE GRASS ROOTS*, I always end up wondering if I will be able to come up with questions fitting for this feature for another issue.

Somehow, through conversations over the couple of months in between issues, interesting facts and tidbits of information about our business come to light.

For me, these odds and ends and trivia are ingredients that add to the flavor and fun of working in the Wisconsin golf course industry. Is that true for you?

Anyway, here are the quiz questions for issue two of '92.

1. What Wisconsin golf course has seen uninterrupted service from a father and son since 1925?

2. What Wisconsin golf course has an active playing member in the PGA tour and an active playing member in the LPGA tour? (Hint: the PGA player is also on the green committee.)

3. Speaking of green committees, name a former green committee member at a Wisconsin golf course who was an all-American football player at the UW. In addition to his three letters in football, he won three letters in basketball and three in baseball. He also played professional football in the NFL for a lot of years.

4. What organization most likely built the largest shop for an 18-hole golf facility in Wisconsin in the past twenty years?

5. Which of the following crops accounts for the most samples annually in the University of Wisconsin Plant Disease Diagnostic Laboratory?

- A. Corn
- B. Turf
- C. Alfalfa
- D. Oats
- E. Cranberry
- F. Peas
- G. Snap beans
- H. Cherries

- 1. Westmoor Country Club has had Bert Bertram or his father on the golf course staff since construction started in 1925. That is the ultimate in loyal and good service!
- 2. Nakoma Golf Club. Andy North and Sherril Steinhauer are members. North is on the Nakoma green committee.
- 3. Pat Richter has been active on Maple Bluff's green committee for many years. He is now the athletic director at the University of Wisconsin - Madison.
- 4. SENTRYWORLD.
- 5. B. Turf.

ANSWERS