

# COMPUTERS, RUMORS, RESEARCH AND SPRING

By Monroe S. Miller

Let's see. The ice is gone from Lake Mendota, the Brewers are playing baseball in County Stadium, most golf courses are open, and the Masters is on TV this weekend.

It must be spring!

Funny how, at the start of each of the four seasons, most of us declare the season at hand our favorite. Human nature, I'd guess.

The thing that sets spring apart is that there is still the feeling that all things are possible on our golf courses and that the year will for sure be the best ever.

Let's agree to reread these couple of lines again at mid-summer.

Who could have guessed it—a Wisconsin golf course superintendent worried about a "computer virus"?

I am wondering if I was the only one who actually forbid the "booting up" of his IBM on Friday, March 6 for fear the Michelangelo virus would erase a Network 8000 program.

This had to truly mark a sign of the times—me, of all people, sweating out this day of technodoom. Fortunately, that much hyped virus turned out to be a dud.

The projections that millions of IBM PCs would crash was in reality only a couple of thousand—worldwide.

And to my knowledge, none of the 2,000 belonged to golf course superintendents.

One should have known this would be the case, however. Many of the snakes thrown were pitched by people and companies that sell anti-viral software. They stood to make a tidy profit.

The upside to all of the fuss was a greater awareness, especially for amateurs like me, of such possibilities.

Still, I would rather deal with a rogue computer virus than a like infection on turfgrass.

At least there is a solution for a high tech problem like the Michelangelo bug. The same cannot be said for the turf kind.

The weather in recent times really has been goofy. Last year was hot, but not the hottest on record. That may have been because the volcano on Mount Pinatubo in the Philippines blasted tons of ash into the air and the dust veil blacked out some sunlight.

Sometimes, in the past, volcanos have depressed global temperatures for a couple of years. Some computer analyses indicate that the dust from Pinatubo could produce a significant global mean cooling during this year and next. These same models see a return to the much publicized warming trend by the late 1990s.

That all makes sense, until you read that the winter past was the nation's warmest on record, according to the National Climatic Data Center.

The winter season, defined as December, January and February by the NCDC, had an average temperature of 36.87 degrees F. in the 48 contiguous states. That temperature tops the previous record holder, 1953-1954, when the lower 48 states averaged 36.00. Close at third place was the winter of 1933 and 1934 at 35.97.

Meteorologists have kept records for 97 years on such weather matters.

You don't know whether to believe warnings about global warming or not. But something does seem to be happening here.

Others have questioned some of the dire predictions. They think we need data from more years to see if any actual changes in climate are happening.

Here's a real wrench in the gears: the nights have been getting warmer but the daytime temperatures haven't budged much in the last four decades.

This bit of confusing information comes from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Their report on the matter shows that the temperature at hundreds of weather stations across much of the northern hemisphere showed average maximum nighttime temperatures have increased 1.5 degrees F in 40 years. But the average daytime highs have barely changed.

I guess if I had to make a judgement I would prefer the day temperatures remain the same. Life in grass management is easier that way.

Meteorologists, climatologists and others using weather records cannot, to date, put the puzzle together much better than laymen. Let's face it - when it comes to the weather, nobody knows what the hell is going on.

There is no end to the exciting research that goes on at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. My proximity to the campus amplifies the awareness I have of the enormous capacity the UW has to discover new things.

Every once in awhile one of the research projects I read about could potentially affect my life or work.

That was the case last February when a plant geneticist from the UW-Madison presented a paper at the annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

The findings reported at that meeting show scientists are closing in on the genes that determine how plants respond to cold.

The UW-Madison investigators have identified a gene that responds to cold in *Brasaca rapa*, the plant that produces seeds used to make canola oil. The work is a major step forward in understanding the genetics involved in the relationship between cold weather and plants.

There is similar research being done elsewhere in the U.S., and it is being coordinated by the Office of Plant Genome Mapping at the United States Department of Agriculture.

USDA officials predict that by next year researchers will be able to determine the genes and their characteristics. It is less certain when the genes will be manipulated to change the cold hardiness in plants.

Winter hardiness is likely controlled by several genes; identifying and understanding them is complicated and won't happen tomorrow.

But the potential is what is exciting. Imagine being able to choose a turf that is completely winter hardy and resistant to damage from desiccation and ice damage.

Research like this gives dreaming a sense of reality and possibility to it.

And it is happening right here in Wisconsin.

Since I usually wear the colors of a full fledged traditionalist, each April brings the same question: "Why all the attention over 'Earth Day'? Why is there a need to reinvent the wheel?"

Arbor Day has served our country well for over a hundred years. The day was started on April 10, 1892 in Nebraska. The idea was to devote a certain day of every year to the public planting of trees.

A member of the Nebraska state board of agriculture, who later became the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture, proposed Arbor Day. His name was J. Sterling Norton.

Nebraska made it a legal holiday in 1885. The Arbor Day idea spread to many other states, too.

The plan of making Arbor Day a school festival to capture the enthusiasm of young children was launched in 1882. The National Arbor Day Commission established that the last Friday of each April as the day for observance.

Planting trees to beautify public grounds soon became an occasion to remind young people (and others) of the importance of trees and forests and the need to be active in improving the environment.

It seems too bad that such a wonderful concept seems buried amid the pub-

licity of events like Earth Day, the Releaf Plan and many others.

Golf course superintendents have, again, done an excellent job as community arborists. Golf courses have some of the best collections of woody ornamentals in their communities.

That fact, along with the beauty of the history and the simplicity of Arbor Day, is likely why I regret that Arbor Day seems less important these days.

That's really too bad.

The wrap up here repeats a rumor going around our town. It concerns the person rumored to be the new dean for the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences at the UW-Madison.

Rumor has it that Roger Wyse, associate dean of Rutgers University's agricultural college and head of its experimental farms, is in line to become the CALS dean.

Wyse was offered the job in early April and as these words find paper, the official announcement supposedly could come by the third week in April.

If he accepts the position, the hire would go for final approval before the entire Board of Regents.

As dean of CALS, Wyse would direct a college of 2,000 undergraduates and a budget of about \$92,000,000, a working dairy and ten research farms throughout the state. The research farm network includes the Noer Facility. He would also oversee one of the university's largest graduate schools with 1,200 students.

Apparently Wyse was selected from a list of five candidates developed during the UW's second search for a replacement of Dr. Leo Walsh who

stepped down last spring as dean. Walsh held the job for twelve years.

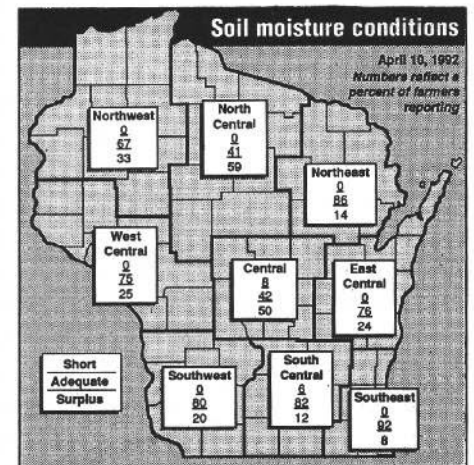
The hiring has been held up, I hear, because the UW is also trying to hire Wyse's wife, Jaleh Daie, a horticulturalist and tenured professor at Rutgers. I'm wondering how a small department like horticulture, which is downsizing like other CALS departments, will find a position for her.

Wyse is noted for research in plant development and CHO formation in plants, mainly sugar beets.

Here's a sure bet: when he gets settled (if he is indeed the person hired) the WGCSA will undoubtedly invite him to the Noer Facility for a meeting.

The Wisconsin Agricultural Statistics Service issued its soil moisture conditions report on April 10th, and a graphic of that report appears here.

Only the central and south central regions of the state are starting out with areas in a moisture shortage status. Let's hope that doesn't get any worse.



# LESCO HAS IT!

**(800) 321-5325**  
**Your Growth Partner**

## Everything you need for professional turf management.

- Fertilizers
- Control Products
- Seed
- Irrigation
- Equipment
- Replacement Parts
- Golf Course Accessories
- Safety Products
- Service Brochures
- Low Voltage Lighting

LESCO, Incorporated—(216) 333-9250  
20005 Lake Road • Rocky River, Ohio 44116