



Challenge the Future: Build Bridges and Grow

By Dr. Frank Rossi

By the time you “gaze” at this article the WTA conference and National GCSAA Show will be memories. Many of your thoughts will begin to focus on the information you have gathered in the “off season.” As you ponder some new ideas this winter, mindful of the challenges ahead, think for a moment of the affect of education on your life. It may have been formal in a University classroom, continuing education at conferences, or informal around a superintendent’s meeting.

The golf course superintendent is a rare breed among grounds maintenance personnel. The majority of superintendents have some type of college education or short course degree. Professionalism and camaraderie among superintendents are models for many horticulturists and are the ideal in the turfgrass industry. Throughout the country there are always key individuals like Monroe Miller and Tom Harrison in Wisconsin, Ted Woerle and Clarence Wolfrom in Michigan, and Ted Horton and Sherwood Moore in New York. A common denominator among these individuals is a passionate commitment to continuing education and strength through association.

Wisconsin is the 10th most active turf state in the country, based on a survey of maintenance expenditures, from 1985. This does not include the amount of manufacturing activity at Jacobsen, Toro, John Deere, Ransomes, Simplicity, etc. These numbers suggest that we live in the #1 most active turfgrass state in the country! It follows then that we have the potential to use this economic activity to aspire to high professional standards for the ENTIRE turfgrass industry. Here’s your challenge.

I have attended turfgrass conferences for the last 3 years from Massachusetts to Montana. I can’t believe that a state with the amount of turf activity, the professionalism of the superintendents, and the excitement I

sense when traveling, has a major turfgrass conference that attracts only 350 people. I know the symposium is the premier golf course educational event in the country, I know Reinders has been providing exceptional practical information for 22 years. Don’t you think it’s time our state provided a major turfgrass conference that provides for the educational, technical, economical, and social needs of the entire turfgrass industry in Wisconsin? Don’t you think it’s time Wisconsin leads the nation in educating the forgotten sectors of our industry, the school grounds, athletic fields, sod growers, landscapers, cemeteries, and yes lawn care?

I submit to you that our lack of education in the above sectors, has created the tremendous perception and communication problem the turfgrass industry is facing with the general public. How often have you gone to your child’s school and noticed the poor condition of the athletic fields? Have you ever asked the average lawn care applicator what they were applying, and they spoke in generalities without confidence? These scenarios have and will continue to have an impact on the golf turf management industry. We must make a commitment to challenge the future, and build bridges with our colleagues in the allied sectors of the turfgrass industry.

I know there are challenges to making a unified effort a reality. Economics is often the limiting factor; your town just can’t afford proper maintenance of the field relative to its use. The cemetery can’t afford to send its people to the conference. Yet, if we could demonstrate the impact of proper design, construction, establishment, and maintenance procedures on personal safety and overall well being, our biggest critics would become our staunchest supporters. I challenge you to reach out to the turf managers in

your community and build a coalition; a group that instills pride in our industry, committed to providing education to move this profession to the next level.

We need a major centralized state conference that draws from, and caters to the needs of the entire state, not just Madison and Milwaukee! Our conference should have an entire afternoon session devoted to ground’s maintenance, an afternoon for athletic field managers, and an afternoon where golf course superintendents can listen to speakers from all over the country discuss cutting-edge technology on a variety of topics. Why shouldn’t a state with the strongest turf equipment industry in the country have a trade show like the Detroit Auto Show, where manufacturers come from everywhere to show-off their latest wares and futuristic designs? Most importantly, we need a conference that provides some basic educational needs for the masses in our industry. I believe achieving this goal will ultimately improve the professional perception of our industry, and get the message to our colleagues and the public that we are *genuinely* concerned about the quality of our environment.

I came to Wisconsin because I sensed a great challenge in helping an industry grow. My responsibilities to the University are many and varied, from scholarly endeavors to educating our future horticulturists and serving on committees. Yet, my personal motivations are to nurture the heart and soul of an industry that, in one way or another, affects as many people as farmers. I need your help in reaching every corner of this industry and telling them that there is more to professionalism than wearing a jacket and tie. Just like in life, where success and professionalism are inside jobs, I challenge you to join me as we build bridges and grow our turfgrass industry. 🌱