



Northern Great Lakes Research Station

By Dean Musbach

Now that the O.J. Noer Turfgrass Research and Education Facility is reality, some much needed turf research can begin. Wisconsin GCSA's commitment to build a variety of putting greens at the Noer Facility will benefit all superintendents. Many turf problems will be solved in years to come, except those associated with winter.

The Noer Facility is an excellent facility, but solutions to winter problems cannot be completely addressed there because of logistics. Although winter affects everyone in Wisconsin, the severity of winter in southern Wisconsin varies greatly from year to year.

Snow mold research in Madison is difficult because snow cover doesn't consistently persist throughout the winter. Likewise, Pythium research in Minocqua is difficult because the conditions for development also do not occur on a regular basis. If real progress is to be made on winter-related turf problems, the research needs to be performed where severe conditions exist. I believe the time has come to establish a permanent research facility in northern Wisconsin.

Northern Great Lakes GCSA began the groundwork for establishing a research facility two years ago when Minnesota announced that the use of mercury would be banned in 1994. Superintendents in the north began to worry that Michigan and Wisconsin would follow suit.

For those who don't know, Northern Great Lakes is a superintendent association with about 85 members from Northern Wisconsin and Upper Michigan. I am serving my third one-year term as president. The primary purpose of this association is education, but the success of the annual symposium has allowed the group to contribute to turf research during the past four years.

The board of directors contacted Dr. Gayle Worf of the University of Wisconsin-Madison about establishing turf plots in Eagle River and Antigo, and in the fall of 1990, plots were established. This was an important first

step, but snow mold control wasn't the only concern of superintendents. Ice damage was also a concern that superintendents wanted to explore on a broader scale. This was when the vision of a northern research station affiliated with the UW-Madison was conceived. During 1991, the board and I actively promoted this vision to northern superintendents.

In spring of 1992, Fred Fabian of Northwood Golf Course was scanning the newspaper when he ran across an interesting advertisement. Brian Bowen, the manager of the University of Wisconsin-Madison potato research facility in Rhinelander, was looking for ways to diversify research that would benefit the local community. Fred made contact and arranged a meeting between Brian and some Northern Great Lakes board members. The meeting was very positive, but Brian was unsure about the political implications within the potato research program. Because Dr. Worf and Dr. Newman had recently retired, we could not proceed until the UW-Madison hired replacements for them.

In June of 1992, I made contact with Dr. Frank Rossi, from Michigan State, about speaking at NGL's July meeting. Frank told me that he was scheduled for an interview in Madison, so I briefly explained what NGLGCSA was attempting to do. He was enthusiastic about the possibilities of a northern research station, and he said if hired he would certainly explore this project further. Needless to say, I was pulling for Frank!

UW-Madison made the right decision hiring Dr. Rossi. His energy has invigorated Northern Great Lakes GCSA, Wisconsin GCSA, and Wisconsin Turfgrass Association. Turf managers in Wisconsin and the entire Great Lakes Region will benefit for years to come.

Dr. Rossi and Dr. Chuck Koval were featured speakers at NGL's August meeting. Frank told the members attending that he supported our idea of a field research facility and that he

would begin working on the internal politics. Since then, NGL board has been in constant contact with the UW-Madison staff about this project.

Last December, the WTA Board was made aware of this project and in theory they support it. The WTA said it needed more details on the size and scope of the facility before it could make any commitments.

In March, 1993, Fred Fabian and Dr. Rossi addressed Dr. Marsh Finner the Director of Agriculture Research Stations, Philip Dunigan the Assistant Director, and Dr. Richard Lawer, the Assistant Dean and Director of Wisconsin Agriculture Experiment Stations, about our intentions and requirements to establish turf research at the Rhinelander Station. The requests were as follows:

1. A written commitment to guarantee long term use of land for turf research, and a first option to purchase in the event that the potato research station closes.

2. Allowed to construct a building containing equipment storage, classroom, restroom facilities and possible lodging for visiting professors or research assistants.

3. Availability to a quality water source.

The ball is in their court now, but if this option fails then we will attempt to develop this project at an independent site.

This project is a large commitment and Northern Great Lakes cannot do this alone. Once a detailed plan is complete, it will be submitted to Wisconsin Turfgrass Association and Wisconsin GCSA for study. I believe this project merits support, and I urge the WTA and this association to support it.

Currently, NGLGCSA is exploring methods of fund raising. The time has come to begin soliciting research funds from the people who benefit from research the most—**golfers**. Dr. Rossi, John Beck, a superintendent in Norway, Michigan, and I are scheduled to address the Upper Peninsula

Golf Association at their Fall Business Meeting. Our intentions are to explain the project, win the association's support, and assist in the development of a fund raising program that they can administer. If this is successful then we will consider approaching the Wisconsin State Golf Association with a similar program.

As golf course superintendents, we are losing tools for maintaining turfgrass. At the same time, golfers continue to want more. If we are to meet this challenge, we will be depending on research to solve many of our problems.

In the north, golfers used to accept dead grass in the spring, but just like everywhere else, golfers in the north want better conditions throughout the season. The only way that we can meet this challenge is through research. This is why northern superintendents feel a northern research facility is needed. There is a need for more extensive snow mold trials, development of winter hardy/snow mold resistant turfgrass varieties, and an in-depth study of how different cultural programs affect winter survival of turfgrass.

The O.J. Noer Facility is a great facility that will benefit all turfgrass managers, but because of its location in southern Wisconsin, it is inadequate for expanded winter turf research. A northern extension of the Noer Facility is a viable alternative for research.

In the past, superintendent associations, turf associations and green industry suppliers have been the primary supporters of turfgrass research and this should continue. But I believe the time has come to solicit research funds from golfers, the people who benefit most from turf research.

Help make Northern Great Lakes Research Station a reality. This project is an enormous undertaking and any comments, recommendations or suggestions are welcomed. 🌿

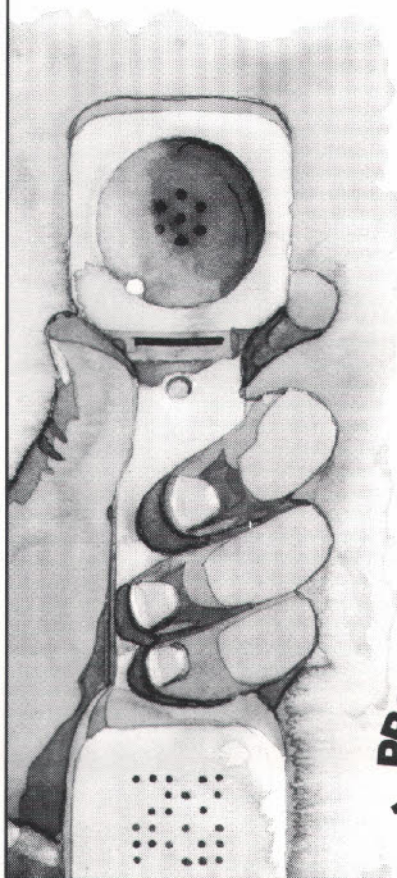
A Note of Apology:

The proof scan of the cover drawing for the March/April issue of *THE GRASS ROOTS* was accidentally used by the printer instead of the halftone version. The proof version that was used did not do justice to the fine drawing of Vince Noltner that was done for the issue by Jennifer Eberhardt.

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