



He Likes People, Not Bugs

by Lori Ward Bocher

With his striking appearance and way with words, Chuck Koval might have made it in Washington. Or Hollywood. But he never left Wisconsin. Why?

He's held two different administrative positions at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. But Chuck Koval is glad to be back in the Department of Entomology. Why?

There's no single answer to the above questions. But, based on my visit with Chuck Koval, I think it might be because being an Extension entomologist gives him the opportunity to do what he likes best—helping people. And Chuck Koval has always been one to seize the right opportunity.

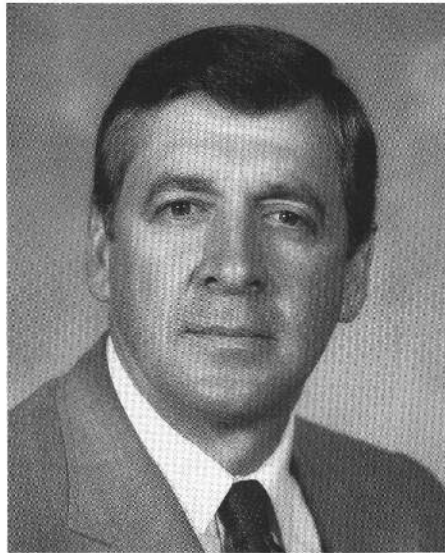
Some would think that there weren't a lot of opportunities for a farm boy growing up in Ino, Wisconsin, in Bayfield County. But just a short drive away in Ashland is Northland College, a small liberal arts school that Koval attended for one year. Then he married and returned to the family dairy operation.

His new wife quickly sensed that he should be back in college. Three weeks after fall classes had started, she called and asked if he still could enroll. Not only did they let him enroll, but they gave him financial assistance, too. "If it hadn't been for Northland, I never would have gone to college," Koval admitted.

Koval graduated from Northland in 1960 with a biology major and hopes of becoming a teacher. But he couldn't find the right job. "When I was offered teaching jobs in locations that I didn't want to go to, I decided I could make more money being a dairy farmer in Bayfield County," he recalled.

But he didn't return to the farm. "I went on for my masters with the idea of being better prepared to teach in a specialized area and to reach a livable salary," he explained. "If I was going to do anything with further education, it was going to be in areas in which I wanted to work."

At the suggestion of one of his pro-



fessors, Koval decided to pursue a degree in entomology. He applied, and was accepted, at Michigan State, Florida State and Wisconsin. "If you're sitting in a small house along Highway 2 in Bayfield County in January and you get the campus information from Florida State, it looks awfully appealing," Koval recalled. "And I would have been working in turf research there. But at that point in my life I couldn't imagine that there would be a need to research turf."

Another factor kept him from going to Florida State or Michigan State. "My wife and I found that we didn't have enough money to get out of state," he pointed out. "So we opted to come to Madison because it was affordable. And if we needed to retreat to the farm, we could always get there on one full tank of gas." Wisconsin retained its native son.

After earning his MS in entomology, Koval's major professor offered him a chance to go on for a PhD by studying the cereal leaf beetle, a new insect problem in the midwest. "I really hadn't planned on doing that at the time, but it was a tremendous opportunity for me," he said. "I was asked to go over to Michigan to gain some knowledge and work on the cereal leaf beetle so

that, when it got to Wisconsin, we would be prepared."

And that's what he did for the next three years. "I will always be complimentary of my major professor for giving me that opportunity," Koval pointed out. "Coming from a small liberal arts school in northern Wisconsin to a major research university, I didn't have exposure to a lot of the things you need to conduct research. My major professor was most helpful to me."

In 1965, as he was finishing up the field portion of his research, the entomology department asked him if he would be willing to serve as an interim Extension entomologist while another professor was on assignment in Africa. "I thought, tremendous. That would be a great opportunity," he recalled.

And so he was quickly immersed into the world of Dutch elm disease and pesticide issues that were at the forefront during those years. He also entered the turf arena for the first time. "It was a very active period for a new person who hadn't worked in those areas before," he said. It was so active that he had to take a month off in 1966 to write his thesis and take his finals.

After two years, the entomology department asked him to remain in the interim position one more year. "I agreed, but told them I would be looking for other opportunities in the meantime. I had learned all I could in this job," Koval said.

It was then that he came very close to taking a job in industry—a position to oversee entomological research with a major pesticide company in California. "The February day I was to fly to California for an interview, there was a major midwestern snowstorm," he recalled. "I couldn't get a plane out of Madison or Chicago. Things were pretty well closed down.

"As I sat at my kitchen table, I said, 'I don't need this at this stage in my life. If I want to go into industry, I can do that at some other point in my life. Right now I would prefer to pursue an Extension orientated career with an applied research component to it.'" Once again, Wisconsin retained its native son—with a little help from the weather.

Koval also looked at jobs with other universities, but eventually the UW entomology department was able to create a permanent position for him. "I

(Continued on page 41)

(Continued from page 39)

came close to leaving several times," Koval pointed out. "But I never got across the border fully. I ended up staying here all of these years. And I've been very happy with the opportunities that Wisconsin has provided me." Wisconsin had its native son for good.

Koval's position was in the areas of fruits, turf, ornamentals and greenhouse crops. Then, in 1979, he was asked to become director of the UW Agricultural Research Stations — a position he held from January of 1980 to July of 1983. And in 1983 he was called to be dean of the Cooperative Extension Service; he served as dean until July of 1987.

Why the move into administration? And why the move back out?

"Outside of what I was doing as an Extension entomologist, there were only two positions that held any intrigue for me in the College of Ag and Life Sciences," Koval revealed. "One was to direct the research stations and the other was to direct the Cooperative Extension Service.

"I had the chance to do both," he continued. "With that fulfilled, and with some accomplishments made in both positions, I returned my efforts to Extension entomology and applied research. And that's where I hope to stay."

The administrative bureaucracy was sometimes frustrating for Koval. "I have a very low tolerance for rehashing the same things over and over and over again," he admitted. "You have to take the information that you have at hand, make a decision and move on. You don't have to consult the whole world for everything you do."

Back in the entomology department, Koval is glad to be working directly with producers. "People sometimes think there's something odd about being in entomology," he pointed out. "But I tell them I'm not an admirer of dead bugs. I don't maintain an insect collection in my home or in my office. I've started one at the O.J. Noer Facility for academic reasons. But that's not what I enjoy about entomology. What I enjoy is finding the people who are having problems and trying to bring solutions to those problems. That's where I have fun."

Koval's position is 79 percent Extension, 11 percent research and 10 percent teaching. He teaches Principles of Economic Entomology (351). His research focuses on turf, annual and perennial flowers and shade trees. His Extension work addresses educational needs in turf, urban forestry and greenhouse crops.

Working with golf course superintendents is especially appealing for Koval. "I've never played a round of

golf in my life, and the golf course superintendents probably don't appreciate that," he admitted. "But I started working on golf courses as early as 1965. And I've always had a great admiration for what golf course superintendents are able to do in spite of people who continually put unrealistic demands on them.

"I don't want to minimize the game of golf, but I think people sometimes have unrealistic demands on what is needed to physically roll a ball across an outdoor surface and put it in a hole. They have unrealistic demands on how you can prepare the physical earth surface and biological earth components to make it perfect for them every day in all kinds of adversity."

Koval's admiration has made him eager to work with golf course superintendents. "Their general intelligence, their keen interest in what's going on, their desire to learn...without question, they maintain a progressive attitude," he said. "And I think they will continue to be progressive if we can meet the kinds of challenges that they're throwing at us."

He also admires the way they helped put together the O.J. Noer Facility. "When I came back to entomology in 1987, I was really impressed with their progress in getting a turf research facility going," he recalled. "I'd heard that mentioned in years

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gone by and in other areas. Usually nothing happens. But this group took off and put it in place. It gives me a tremendous desire to be more helpful to that industry."

Moving superintendents up the ladder of integrated pest management is one way Koval wants to focus his help. "Most of our golf course superintendents believe they are practicing integrated pest management," he reported. "But, if it was a ten-rung ladder, they're probably on the third rung, on average. There are some who are up a few more steps, but nobody is at the top yet.

"We're going to have to put into their hands the tools that allow them to move to the top because, at some point in time, they're going to have to file many environmental impact statements for their use of pesticides on a golf course," he continued. "They're going to have to indicate what insects were there, how abundant they were and what was their distribution. Most people are not capable of doing that at this time. Nor do I expect them to be. It's a skill we hope to bring to them so they will be able to answer those questions without any hesitation."

There's a reason why Koval never became a golfer. Early in his career, a faculty colleague was criticized for playing golf even though he was taking vacation time to do it. "I vowed that, if I ever worked with golf course superintendents, I would never play golf," he recalled. "I want it known that, when I'm going to the field to work on a golf course, I'm not going there to play golf. I can safely leave a note at the office that I went out to the golf course and everyone will know the reason why."

Outside of the entomology department and the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, Koval serves the UW in another capacity—as one of 18 members of the UW Athletic Board. Appointed by former Chancellor Donna Shalala, he just completed the second year of his four-year term.

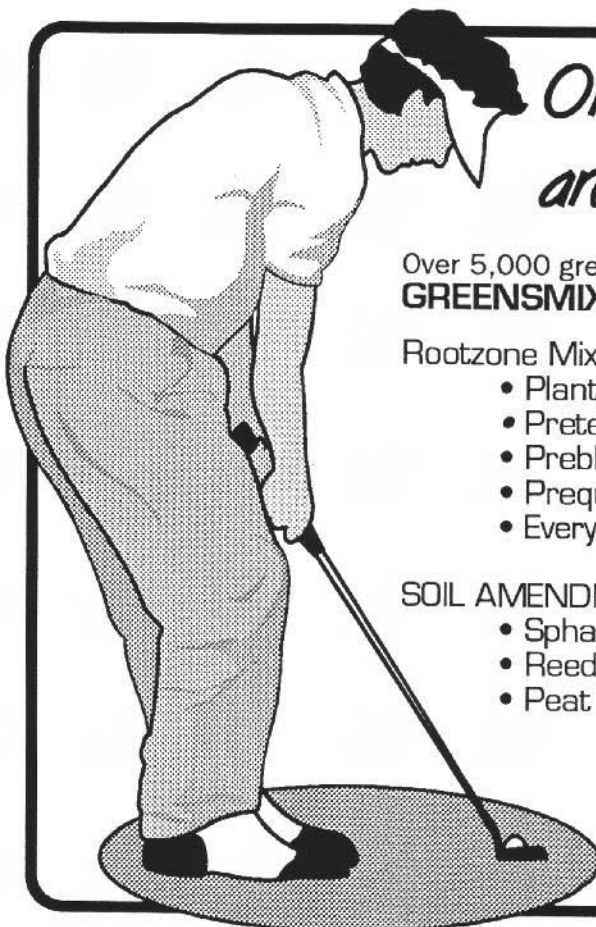
"It's been a very, very time consuming duty," Koval admitted. "But it's also been very enjoyable because we're coming out of some very difficult years. We feel pretty good about building on some of the blocks that we've been putting in place—decisions we've made, the kind of people we want involved and the criteria we have for them. We've made some tremendous strides.

"This year we'll pay off more than \$2 million in debt that was incurred in the previous years," he continued. "And it will be paid off ahead of schedule."

The athletic department has an annual budget of almost \$25 million, Koval pointed out. "And we address issues, such as gender equity, to make sure it's a balanced budget," he added. Wisconsin athletics offers 20 sports. And, for the 1991-1992 school year, a USA Today poll ranked it in the Top 10 for overall athletics — the only school in the Big Ten to earn such an honor.

Koval has seen the university and CALS from many viewpoints, and he sees this as both a plus and a minus. "It tends to broaden my focus when sometimes it ought to be narrower," he said.

"It also creates a frustration because I can see many needs that go unanswered," he continued. "While there's an awful lot of discussion about addressing high priorities, I get a little disturbed at how the priorities might be set at times. I came from the 1960's when research needs were identified collectively in a department and prioritized, then were moved up to a college



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level and prioritized, and then were moved up to the chancellor level and prioritized. From that, budget building occurred.

"It's been a long time since I've seen a priority identified by faculty in the field and moved up through the system as a budget priority," he added. "Now they focus on some broad general areas and everybody tries to comply as best they can to those issues because that's where the funds are."

Koval also hopes that the needs of the citizens continue to be a very high priority for CALS. "I recognize that we are a premier research institution on a national and international level," he said. "Some of the things that our commodity groups might have as priorities don't necessarily fit into those national rankings. We have to realize that our first responsibility is to what's going on in the state of Wisconsin."

And he wants CALS to recognize the vastly changed look and broadened definition of agriculture. "For instance, I view turf production and maintenance as a legitimate area for CALS, and I view it as one of the most

important crops we have in the state," he said. "To many, it's viewed as an amenity in life. We haven't quite put it into perspective.

"Turfgrass and landscape plants can be used to bridge the gap between hard-core production agriculture, which represents less than 2 percent of our population, and the other things Wisconsin has to offer, which are enjoyed by 98 percent of the population," he added. "We have the capability to bring to the urban citizens of Wisconsin some problem-solving needs that they view as important on a day-to-day basis. It is through areas such as turf that we can make a very strong connection between CALS and the people."

Off campus, Koval has many varied interests. "I love to get out skiing much more than I do in the winter," he said, adding that his preference has moved to the Rockies. "I also like to get to the southeast coast of Florida to rejuvenate for a few days when winter seems to be dragging on.

"I enjoy yard work, particularly flowering plants," he continued. "I invest a fair amount of my spare time in the

summer to flowers. I don't do any vegetable work. I need food for the soul more than I do for the physical needs of the body."

Koval also spends some time as the forester for the Village of Shorewood Hills, a volunteer position in which he makes recommendations on tree removal and planting.

Patricia, to whom Koval has been married for 36 years, recently retired as an elementary school teacher. Among her many volunteer duties, she currently is president-elect of the University League, a group (mostly faculty wives) that provides support services to the University.

The Kovals have three children. All are graduates of the University of Wisconsin just like their parents. Michael, 35, has his law degree, is a former FBI agent and presently is a police sergeant in Madison. Dan, 31, is a prosecuting attorney in the state's attorney office in Kane County, Ill. And Mary Louise, 26, recently moved to Ohio State for graduate studies after spending four years in Honolulu teaching the developmentally handicapped.



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