



## Gazing in the Mirror: A Year of Ideas

By Dr. Frank S. Rossi  
Department of Horticulture  
University of Wisconsin-Madison

I've thought about this article since Monroe interviewed me about a year ago for this publication. Since then I have been interviewed 4 or 5 times for golf magazines, radio, newspaper, and trade journals. "Simple," you say, "just be yourself." Yet, the challenge is to try to expose aspects of your personality that can be captured by someone who writes every 4th or 5th idea you state and remembers every 10th idea. I feel that when I am interviewed by the public, it reflects on all of us (University and Industry). Being myself isn't always the easiest when you represent a group as diverse and proud as turfgrass professionals, however, the idea is what gets translated. What follows are personal ideas of my first year at UW-Madison.

### The O.J. Noer Idea

My arrival in August, 1992 marked a point in my life that I had dreamed of reaching. An opportunity to be a full-fledged member of a University Turfgrass Faculty with broad-reaching responsibilities. I came to a program that was like a fueled rocket, ready for launch, waiting for the crew to get in position. It has been one of my great joys to work with Wayne, Chuck, and Julie. All have shared their ideas with me openly and freely, and as long as I remain open-minded (see *Remaining Teachable* from the May/June *GRASS-ROOTS*) there is tremendous opportunity for professional and personal growth. Our interaction each week in our travels or at the Noer Facility I believe would be just what O.J. himself would have been proud of.

I have been told by Dr. Don White (University of Minnesota) and Dr. Al Turgeon (Penn State) that I have the best turf job in the country. While I was at the International Turfgrass Research Conference in July I had the pleasure of meeting Dr. Jim Watson (Toro Co.), and he complimented me on some of my articles and work that he heard I was doing. Jim Watson was

a close friend of O.J. Noer and said, "O.J. would have been thrilled about all the good things happening in Wisconsin." I don't know about you, but, for me professionally that is as good as it gets. The only thing that could surpass that would be to know that each and every member of the turfgrass industry in Wisconsin felt a part of what we are doing at the Noer Facility and out through the state.

### The Student Idea

My most favorite of all activities in my job is chatting with a student about careers, dreams, hopes and fears of the future, and their idea of "all this turf stuff". My primary contact with the students is in the Introductory Turf class where for 50 minutes I have a captive audience (well as captive as a college student can be at 7:45 a.m. in the dead of winter). My first class was filled with all the diversity you might expect at a world class institution like UW-Madison. Each student brings ideas and experiences to the class discussion and each is worthy of the chance to express them. As much as I try to create a safe atmosphere for exchanging ideas, many lack the confidence or skill to verbalize their thoughts. This inability to communicate and stifling of ideas goes to the heart of the challenges we face in educating our children. Somewhere many of us learn to take the safe route through education; memorize and regurgitate rather conceptualize and innovate.

Our students are the universities' most precious resource and in turf we have so very few, relative to the many disciplines across the campus. I want our turf students to extend themselves and I have been impressed with their competence as evidenced in the wonderful research projects many of them conduct under Dr. Kussow's direction. We as the turf industry must help the students to understand that the learning does not end in the class! That is only the beginning of the learning ex-

perience, the foundation on which you build your career. The education of a true professional is lifelong and your level of success is determined by your own set of values (personal and professional). My greatest frustration is with the "Image is Everything" mentality pervasive among superintendents and students. You know it: put a tie on, make \$50-\$60K per year and play golf and you are a professional. It upsets me because it lacks respect for good hard work, but, more so because it devalues diversity and ideas!

### The Wisconsin Idea

"The boundaries of the University are the boundaries of the state..." So goes the famous Wisconsin Idea. How does Wisconsin lay claim to an idea that is the idea behind the land grant college and Cooperative Extension missions? What is so special about the Wisconsin Idea? Very simply in my opinion: it is the people!

This past May I had the wonderful opportunity to participate in the 9th Annual Wisconsin Idea Seminar. I read about it in the faculty newspaper, did the footwork to get nominated and then had to tell my Dean what it was he was nominating me for. It was a chance to take a week-long trip through most of the state, stopping at locations that were each a part of the culture that we call Wisconsin (which by the way is an Indian name which describes the Wisconsin River).

I was accompanied by 25 other new and not-so-new faculty from across the University, and it was an opportunity to meet peers that a busy extension faculty person might never have again. To say the least, I was thrilled, except for the fact that the timing was rotten for a faculty member from my discipline, with the grass actively growing. But for the encouragement of Wayne, Chuck and Julie assuring me that to go was the right thing, I might have missed my own birth as a citizen of the state of Wisconsin.



We started on the top floor of the WARF building on campus, headed to the capital, then the Trek bicycle plant in Waterloo, then a picnic lunch at a family owned and operated dairy farm, then one of the many highlights of the trip, a visit to Aldo Leopold's Shack where his daughter Nina read to us from the *Sand County Almanac* as we huddled by the fire while the rain fell.

The next day started at Sentry Insurance where a lively conversation ensued regarding health care reform, then on to UW Center at Marathon County where we visited with the faculty. It was here that I left the seminar to live the Wisconsin Idea. I was invited to speak months earlier at the Greater Milwaukee Country Club Association meeting at South Hills in Fond du Lac. I asked Scott Thompson (golf course superintendent at Green-

wood Hills) to pick me up in Wausau, get me to the airport in Mosinee where I rented a car and drove to Fond du Lac. I had dinner, gave my talk, got back in the car and rejoined the tour that evening in Rhinelander. I even got to spend some time with Fred Fabian at Northwoods Golf Club before I dropped the car off. My colleagues on the trip who do not have extension appointments had the opportunity to see me live the Idea, the same way Wayne Kussow is actively involved in the turf extension program without a formal extension appointment. I love this job!

The rest of the week kept up the grueling pace as we visited the Menominee Indian Reservation, the Green Bay Maximum Security Reformatory, and then to Milwaukee where we visited with Howard Fuller, the embattled

and charismatic Superintendent of Public Schools. I was deeply moved by each professional we met and the amount of time that each took out of a busy schedule to be with us. Our faculty at the UW-Madison is truly considered a vital resource for the state. My cynical side says the University powers-that-be use this as an opportunity to build support for state funding at UW-Madison. Even so, I don't mind.

I learned many interesting facts about our state, none that speak to my sense of nostalgia as much as the fact that Wisconsin is #1 in the USA for the number of people who are born in Wisconsin and stay in Wisconsin (65%). This makes for deep feelings and commitment as well as for great ideas! With a year under my belt I can honestly say I am proud to be a part of the culture and state of Wisconsin. 🍷

## *Trapped in the sand?*



**Hanley's of Sun Prairie  
will get you back on the  
fairways fast, with the  
*all new* Cushman  
Groom Master.**

The Groom Master offers maneuverability with features like hydrostatic drive, a tight turning radius, and 2 or 3 wheel drive. A 16 hp engine, 40 inch blade, 73 1/2 inch rake, and 64 inch cultivator provides the production you need. The versital Groom Master will push, smooth and cultivate sand or soil. Up to 10.5 mph forward speed makes it very transportable.



***Get out of the Sand - Call Hanley's.***

**Power Equipment & Turf Sales**

641 W. Main Street • Sun Prairie, WI 53590

(608) 837-5111 • (608) 257-7815

Toll Free 1-800-279-1422



**CUSHMAN**

Driven to be the best.

Brand New! Bigger Than Ever! Equipment and Education!

**WISCONSIN TURFGRASS AND GREEN INDUSTRY EXPO**

**January 3, 4 & 5, 1994**

Holiday Inn West • Middleton, Wisconsin