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# ON THE ROAD

By Monroe S. Miller

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Each year I try to attend a state turfgrass conference other than Wisconsin's. There are lots of reasons why I have found these trips to other universities productive. I search about for the program that suits me best and hope I can work out the timing details.

I usually drive and although it has its disadvantages, there is something to be said for the solitude of a long trip. It is good thinking time. Most often I know only a few people at outstate conferences and I am left to concentrate solely on the business at hand.

Each of these meetings I've gone to over the years has been somewhere east of Wisconsin, where growing conditions are similar to ours. I have found they experience problems before we do, for whatever reasons, and sometimes have a lead on solutions. These have been great opportunities to talk to faculty and researchers from far and wide about things that have interested me.

There have been secondary advantages. I have heard speakers who were subsequently invited to our state. I've convinced some to write articles for me. I have made some life-long friends. And I have learned an awful lot.

This year the program at Penn State interested me. Although it is not a symposium, there were several people talking about the devastating winter past and the subsequent winter kill hundreds of golf courses suffered. Paul Heller, Peter Landschoot, Tom Watschke and Stan Zontek were among many other on the program; with that lineup, one could hardly go wrong. It was a sure bet.

Our irrigation system was purged, the intakes were in the pump station and the fungicides were nearly all down. The travelling would be safer than in December through March. It seemed the time was right to take Stan Zontek's advice and attend the conference in State College.

State College, Pennsylvania is about an 850 mile drive from Middleton. And it is a boring drive. However, as Bobby Knight complained when Penn State was admitted to the Big 10, "you can't get there from here." Flying can be as big a hassle as driving.

Sometimes, especially at the end of the golf season, I ache for solitude and really need some quiet thinking time. I need time to assess the past year and to refine plans for next year. That time is hard to come by; this was five or six days all by myself to do just that.

Pennsylvania has its state turfgrass educational programs organized much like we do here in Wisconsin. The meeting I attended was a golf turf meeting, like our Symposium. They also have a western Pennsylvania and an eastern Pennsylvania turfgrass conference, each which covers the entire grass landscape. These compare to our EXPO.

Frankly, I thought the sites of our Wisconsin meetings were as good as you could get. The Hyatt in Milwaukee and the Holiday Inn in Middleton are comfortable, convenient and reasonably priced. It is no secret I resent the near surrender the public in Milwaukee has made to the criminals (Remove all articles from your vehicles or they WILL be stolen is written like a guarantee in the parking ramp). But if you stay in the hotel during nighttime hours, you are safe.



The Nittany Lion Inn—home of the Pennsylvania Golf Turf Conference.

The Pennsylvania Golf Turf Conference is held at the Nittany Lion Inn. It is the kind of place you stay when vacationing in New England. It is classic, comfortable and affordable. The service was excellent and the meeting facilities were simply outstanding. And 650 people were there without taxing the facilities in the slightest.

The dining room features a good menu with fair prices, classical music and a big fireplace at one end. Next to the dining room is the Alumni Fireside Room. The first night I was there I turned on the TV and Joe Paterno was talking about the football team, from the Nittany Lion Inn Alumni Fireside Room, almost right beneath my room!

The town is small; if the school was taken away, there likely wouldn't be anyone left. That amazes me since I am used to a college town that is considerably larger. The upside of its small population is tranquility and a literal quiet that was refreshing. No masses of citizens and students and cars like we see all the time in Madison.

Also amazing to me was the Inn's campus location. As Rob Schultz had said, the basketball arena is out the back door from the NLI, all of a 30 second stroll.

I give Penn State credit for something I have criticized my alma mater for ignoring — the existence of the automobile. There is a new parking ramp conveniently located next door to the NLI. And, as parking ramps go, it is attractive. It is large and provides parking free if you are staying at the Inn or attending a meeting there. It's another 30 second walk from car to the Inn's lobby.

This beautiful fall was a good one to travel to Penn State. The weather was superb and I spent free time walking the campus. The evenings were warm and I had the room window open. Good thing — the marching band practiced across the street from my room and I was treated to a halftime concert. It was a collegiate scene right out of the movies.

I also took a little time to visit the Valentine Turfgrass Research Center. It is a little ways from the NLI, but still conveniently located on the ag campus. It is a nice operation, well cared for and the site of a lot of grass research. However, I realized as I have several other times that our Noer Facility is tough to beat. It was named for the longtime golf course superintendent at Merion Golf Club, Joe Valentine. He was succeeded by his son Richie, a man I had lunch with several

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Headquarters building of the Joseph Valentine Turfgrass Research Center.



Auxiliary buildings at the Valentine Center.



Although the headquarter building is small, the outbuildings are new, clean and modern.



The Penn State Turfgrass Research Center was dedicated to Joe Valentine, long-time superintendent at Merion Golf Club.

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years ago when he was a Symposium speaker.

Stan Zontek was right about almost everything he has told me over the years. Except the Creamery. He has bragged about PSU ice cream and how the Creamery was the training place for Vermont's Ben and Jerry. Obviously, Stan has never enjoyed ice cream from Wisconsin's Babcock Hall. Now THAT is ice cream! The world's best ice cream.

The 1994 educational program put together by Dr. Peter Landschoot was really good. You'll remember Pete from the 1993 Wisconsin Golf Turf Symposium program. The winter damage talks were good, although once again they showed we still don't know what causes it. We focus on recovery, it seems. Mark Kuhns gave a great slide show and lecture on the 1994 U.S. Open at Oakmont, near Arnold Palmer's home of Latrobe.

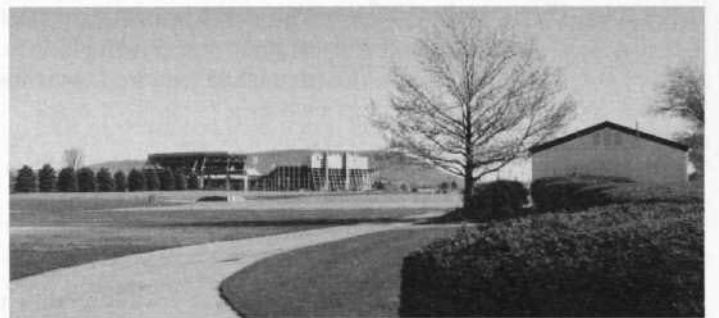
We have to invite Paul Heller to Wisconsin someday; his insect lectures are always good and this year he was in his usual fine form. There were lectures on DED, new golf course construction, non-pathological losses of turf and soil amendments.

Although it was November and I am not terribly interested in pythium, Mike Soika of the PSU plant path department gave a great review of research on pythium that will really help me next summer. I was equally disinterested in the subject presented by one of Al Turgeon's grad students — thatch. I don't have much on my golf course. But when the lecture was over I was really happy I had stayed. I now know what NIRS is, something about its potential and an awareness of its shortcomings.

There were lectures on lightweight rolling, wastewater irrigation, the GCSAA and turfgrass breeding. All were good. I asked Stan to rate the 1994 meeting on a scale of 1 - 10, with 10 as the best. His grade was an 8.5. I think he's pretty close to the mark.

The proof of a meeting's value is how you answer the question "would you go again?"

My answer to this one is an immediate "yes". 🙌



Just beyond the turfgrass plots looms the Penn State football stadium.



What the UW-Madison needs is a king-sized statue of Bucky Badger, like this one of a Nittany Lion!



The story of the Nittany Lion mascot...