



# One Hell of a Ride!

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I can tell when spring time is coming in Wisconsin. In general, there is a lull in phone calls for 2 to 3 weeks when everything is still dormant; then the grass pops and all hell breaks loose. The peacefulness feels awkward this year as I know many people may no longer be calling because they probably think I've already left. By the time this piece gets into print I will be on the faculty at Cornell. While I have this short reprieve I will attempt to put words to my feelings, realizing that it seems impossible to do.

I arrived in Wisconsin almost four years ago with a single purpose in mind. My goal was to help make the Wisconsin Turfgrass Program one of the top ten quality turfgrass programs in the country behind the strength of a supportive industry. The stars were aligned, Drs. Newman and Worf left an enduring and supportive legacy—everybody liked those guys. Drs. Kussow and Koval were the experienced and stable voice of reason that I knew I would need. The University, in particular Dr. Larry Binning, had a sense of the potential of the partnerships with the industry. Dr. Meyer and myself brought the new energy and enthusiasm. I took one look at the Noer Facility and thought I died and went to turf heaven. I'll always remember what Dr. Al Turgeon told me when he visited not long after my arrival in Wisconsin. He said, "Frank, you may well have the best turf job in the country".

My first week on staff, I got in the car with Chuck Koval and off we went to Antigo and the Northern Great Lakes Superintendents meeting. It could not have been a better start. I could sense the passion Chuck had as a native Wisconsinite for the UW and his love for Extension. I began to sense the road ahead for the program would be one worth traveling.

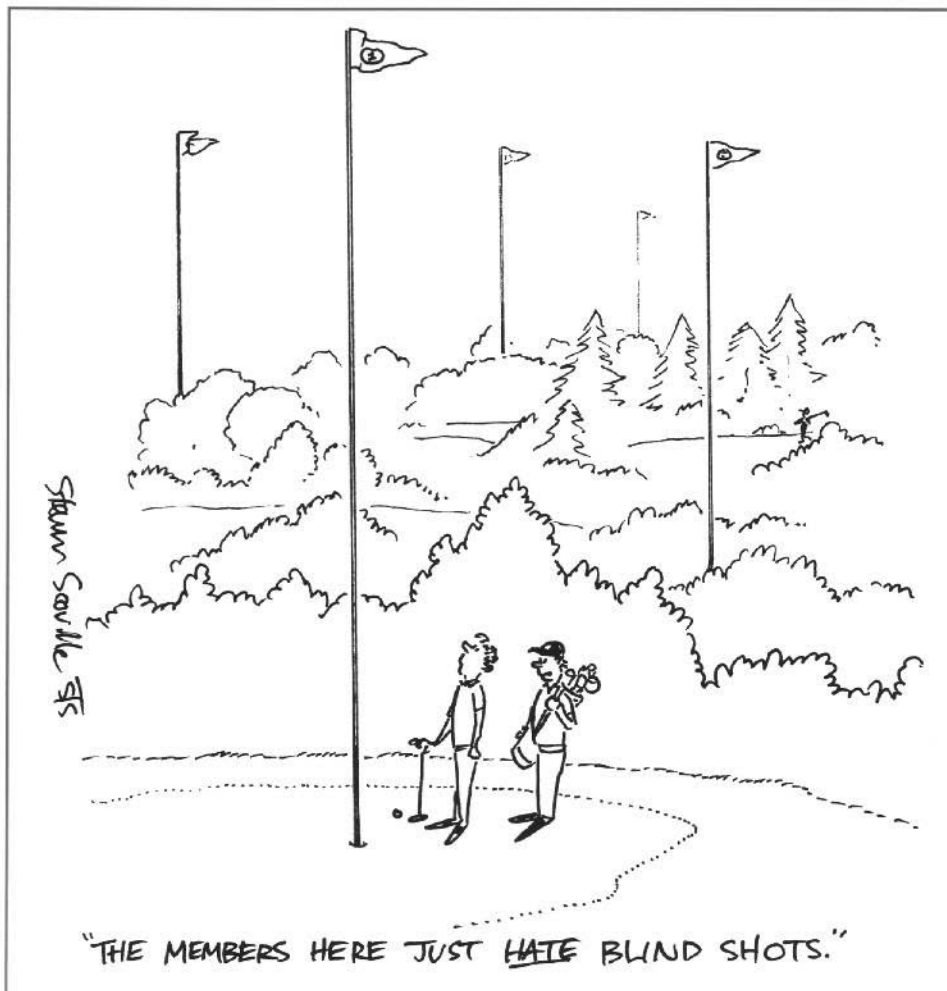
My first Field Day was the first of many growing pains for the program, as Tom Salaiz announced he would

leaving in December. The momentum and excitement raging from the first Field Day at the Noer Facility would not be contained. I remember feeling sad for losing Tom and for the great ride I knew he was about to miss. I had the same feeling almost a year and a half later when Scott MacKintosh decided to leave. You can imagine how I feel being the one leaving this time. I know I will be missing a hell of a ride.

Tom's departure, then Scott's, allowed Henry Berg, my partner in crime, to demonstrate his ability to manage "the farm". Quickly I learned

the important role that a solid technical staff would play in the long-term success of the program. I looked upon Henry as a father—always willing to lend a hand, sometimes let me learn from my mistakes, and always there when I really needed him.

My first fall and winter brought my travels with Catherine Smejkal. Catherine and I were communicating with Dr. Meyer, still in North Carolina, regarding the snow mold studies. I was eager to learn more about this important area of research. Once again, as with Henry, I began to realize the dedication and heartfelt commitment in



Catherine that would enable our program to achieve excellence. Not only did we lose a gifted staff member, but a fine person, who always seemed to put her own wishes behind the wishes of others. I miss her....

My first year brought many other changes. However, the biggest change probably was the WTA Winter Conference—now known as the EXPO. At the time, I did not fully appreciate the trust that the WTA Board of Directors had given us. The big move to Madison has seemed to work out for the best; however, we still must find a way to reach more people.

The WTA Board meetings were always lively, as we openly debated new directions, revisited ideas that previously seemed unsuccessful, and occasionally dismissed ideas out of hand. The ride never seemed as bumpy as it was in those board meetings where an occasional mean streak would be evident. Still, I can't remember a time when level heads did not prevail. Good thing for shock absorbers!

I've enjoyed seeing new faces join the leadership ranks of the turfgrass industry, such as Chris Wendorff, Bob Erdahl, Wayne Horman and Paul Huggett. These guys represent the progressive and innovative professionals who will help guide the WTA into the next century. Now we need to get a little diversity on the board!

There are few organizations of any kind that I have interacted with that are as professionally run as the Wisconsin Golf Course Superintendents Association (WGCSA). The sense of purpose runs in the members veins. Whether you are speaking with the President or the newest member, the commitment to professionalism is evident. My involvement with the educational and research events has always brought satisfaction. When you know you have a demanding and intelligent audience it forces you to provide a high quality product. This philosophy will always set the turfgrass industry ahead of many other agricultural industries with the high value placed on educational and research efforts.

I have experienced many honors in my short career; however, none compare to being asked to be the Keynote Speaker at the Symposium and then the Luncheon Speaker the following year. To be thought of as someone with something worthwhile to say, by the industry that I have worked in since I was a child, makes all those

long days and long nights worth it.

Wisconsin is a fun place to work in turf, for many reasons that I have stated and some that might not seem so obvious. I've been to the John Deere Horicon Works and the Jacobsen Plant to view state of the art manufacturing processes. Last week I toured the Metropolitan Milwaukee Sewage District, Jones Island Plant, where Milorganite is made. I got the signature of the engineer, Dan Landis, responsible for making Milorganite. Later, I ate a sub with Al Nees and Tisa Overmann while viewing the O.J. Noer slide collection in the basement of the old Blatz Brewery bottle cleaning building.

As a sports fan, I have loved cheering for the Badgers and Packers. I think the Rose Bowl win a few years ago was one of the most exhilarating moments I can remember since the Yankees won the championship in 1978. Still, the one thing about rooting for these teams, especially the Packers, is that they build you up with expectations and then break your heart. How on earth did the Packers lose to the Tampa Bay Bucs at the end of the season last year? Dallas would have had to come to Lambeau—that would have been a game!

Speaking of Lambeau, I have had the privilege of walking on the field several times and visiting the facilities with my class. It's almost like going to church. I do wish the field was in better shape, but green grass in December in northeastern Wisconsin is no small task. I've already ordered the satellite to get the Packer games—I'm hooked!

I've been to Aldo Leopold's Shack, north of Baraboo, and had his daughter chat with myself and Monroe about her Dad and Rachel Carson. I've stayed at the Chequamegon Inn on frozen Lake Superior and the Pfister Hotel in downtown Milwaukee. I've walked the halls of the Green Bay

Reformatory; and I have shaken hands with Sen. Russ Feingold. And just last night I met Sen. Bill Bradley from New Jersey. He was in town for a book signing.

I've given presentations in truck stops, hospitals, church basements, at the zoo, on buses, at the airport, in the Memorial Union and even in a Curling Rink! In each place, I've met people who have taught me something, criticized me for something or shared a laugh. The genuine nature of the Midwesterners I have met is something I will always miss. This is a proud and progressive State that still believes in trusting people to do the right thing. I always liked that people did not need to be charged a deposit to recycle their cans—recycling cans is a good thing and everybody should just do it!

As I've developed as a professional, I've learned that each person matures in different ways as they understand and accept their strengths and weaknesses. My biggest weakness is that I can't seem to keep my mouth shut. I have something to say about almost anything; it's my curious nature, I think. Anyhow, at times this makes me a difficult person to interact with. Of course this also made for the rather odd couple that Dr. Kussow and I have been, since my arrival. Wayne has always been on the quiet side, which back in New York is perceived to mean that he is up to something. It took me a little while, but I came to believe that, in fact, Wayne wasn't up to something and just operated with a different style than I did. I thank goodness today for our different styles. As I've matured I've noticed that we complement each other well. We might not always agree and we may talk behind each other's back, but we have always had the shared goal of providing high quality information that serves the citizens of the State—unbiased and uncensored.

*(Continued on page 9)*

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I have been blessed to work at a University and in particular in a Department that is one of the finest in all the world. People come from far and wide to study with our faculty. The history is rich and the most recent leadership provided by people like Larry Binning, Brent McCown, Rick Vierstra, and Mike Sussman has enabled the Department to be the envy of the College. Still, a talented faculty needs a gifted support staff to provide consistent service to its clientele. Judy Barth, Jane Anderson, Sharon Jaekel, Kathy Pries and Karen Denk set a positive tone that seems unflappable (you may have met them at the Field Day registration booth). If something needs to get done, the staff motto is do it legal, act fair and be creative. They must have really liked me because they trusted that I would be willing to break in new staff. I've had more assistants in my 4 years here than Lloyd had in 40 years!

No one person knows the challenges I have faced and can quantify the amount of energy I've given to the program better than my wife Barbara.

I have always loved my work to the point where it became a "cruel mistress". I have this overwhelming desire to solve every problem that the turf manager is facing. The other day, I looked back at an old essay I wrote to get into grad school. I stated that my primary reason for continuing my education was to contribute information to a discipline that would benefit society—I like helping!

My love for Barbara and our two girls is literally indescribable. It is a feeling that comes from weathering the hard times, savoring the peaceful moments, embracing the joy of our children and in our own lives. It's a feeling that comes from commitment to stick it out when it seems that the easy thing to do is run.

Most people have a few relationships before they realize they are ready to settle down. I had my share. At some point I realized that no matter what relationship I was in, whether it is with another human being or the relationship with my career, there are going to be times when I am disgusted and unhappy. Riding those times out to the other side where you find the joy

again is what makes life worth living. I feel it everyday with my family, and I feel it everyday at the UW-Madison.

It feels risky to be so personally revealing in such a public forum, yet, writing for THE GRASS ROOTS has been like writing a letter to the family back home. I trust you guys, and have tried to give of myself so that all of our lives are improved—even if it was just for a laugh.

The feeling of being appreciated for the work that I set out to do is one I will cherish for all my days. When you stood up to clap at the March Business Meeting I can say I have never been so emotionally overwhelmed as a professional. I could not get out of there fast enough to get into the car and cry half the way home to Madison. As always it was a pretty ride from Fond-du-Lac, as it is from Antigo, where it all began for me here in Wisconsin. Still, no ride in any car could compare to the ride I have had as your Extension Turfgrass Specialist. I may be moving back to my home, but a part of me is a Badger Forever. Thanks for the ride..... 🍄



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