



TURF 2000

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"Turf 2000." It sounds like the title GCSAA will call that year's international conference and show, or even a new mower model or the first commercially available transgenic turfgrass. It is going to be a weird feeling writing out a check and dating it 2000. We will probably get sick of hearing Prince's song that goes, "Tonight I'm gonna party like it's 1999!" The new century hype will probably drive us all crazy. The fact of the matter is that the 21st century is fast approaching us and turfies of the world must be prepared to meet the challenges of the new millennium. What will be the key challenges facing superintendents in the next century?

I believe that the key research and educational challenges facing golf course superintendents in the next decade are how to recruit, train and educate superintendents, researchers and educators. Because they are, after all, the secret to success. If superintendents have the best colleagues, researchers and educators on their team, then any obstacle they face can be overcome. Challenges such as nature conservation, occupational hazards, media relations and biotechnology deployment will be easily handled. The key challenge facing superintendents is self-improvement of individuals and the profession through recruiting, training and education.

Recruiting the best personnel involves the ability to identify quality prospects and the enthusiasm and energy to catch their attention. A key question that should be addressed is, "How are superintendents going to convince quality college students, researchers and educators that this profession is the place to be?" Well, here I am, a

non-superintendent, writing about challenges facing superintendents. The Wisconsin turf industry somehow recruited (or put a spell on) a botanist to study snow mold of bentgrass, be active in turfgrass extension programs and help teach the turf leaders of tomorrow. Wisconsin superintendents must be doing something right because there is also a group of young and enthusiastic turfies that are majoring in turfgrass here at UW and at other less fortunate universities across the nation. These young turfies are the leaders of tomorrow and they know the superintendent profession is the place to be, otherwise they wouldn't be working so hard to obtain their degrees.

Training and educating quality recruits is probably the most difficult challenge. The reduction of federal and state support of universities is being felt by turfgrass students, researchers, educators and the industries that demand them. GCSAA reports that 88% of all golf course superintendents have some sort of college training, while 67% have a two- or four-year degree. The bottom

line here is that most superintendents have a college degree and should be concerned about current trends in higher education.

Tuition increases are one reason why more students are working to pay for college now. A recent study shows the percentage of working students has increased from 34% in 1970 to 46% now. This added pressure prevents some from pursuing higher education. A recent survey shows the cost of attending college is rising more than the inflation rate. College costs have moderated in recent years, but tuition and room and board at both private and public schools have soared. The college board survey says that four-year public colleges and universities this year boosted tuition, on average, by six percent for undergraduates. Room and board also went up an average of six percent at four-year public colleges and four-year private schools.

Graduate students are not exempt from this money squeeze. Research assistantships awarded to graduate students at UW in 1996

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start at \$16,632 per year. Tuition for this fall semester totalled \$6,647.95 (that's about \$14,000 per year if you count summer school). Well, that doesn't leave much money for food or rent. Ahhh, the life of a graduate student! Ever heard the saying, "You can't get something for nothing?" Adding insult to injury is the IRS sticking it to the UW about not taking taxes out of our measly assistantships. Of course the IRS won the lawsuit. To compensate for this "potential loss of income," Virginia Hinshaw, Dean of The Graduate School, has ordered an assistantship increase of \$996 per year because, "You (graduate students) are our #1 priority and we are willing to forego support of other programs to meet your needs." Gee, thanks Virginia.

Researchers and educators are also faced with doing more with less money. The competition for the few remaining funding sources has become a cut-throat game that will eventually hinder scientific progress and creativity. The funding sources

aren't there anymore. Universities are now seeking help from the industries that demand quality graduates and research. The Wisconsin Turfgrass Association, the Wisconsin Golf Course Superintendents Association and some select turf professionals have responded by joining with the University of Wisconsin in supporting various extension, research and educational programs. This joint venture has set a precedent that others are looking to as a solution. Hopefully, this ingenious partnership will carve out great rewards for the turf industry of Wisconsin.

Don't get me wrong about the importance of other issues facing superintendents. Environmental issues will be a continuous challenge. Over the last decade, the turfgrass industry has shifted from a heavy reliance on pesticides to an enlightened protection and conservancy of the environment. Where are we going with this environmental emphasis? Are superintendents becoming more like park naturalists? Will the Sierra Club and turf industry team together and build a "Mother

Nature's Golf Course?" Significant changes have and will continue to occur in regards to the industry's protection of the environment. It is vital to our success that there be a clear and long term plan that includes a diversity of viewpoints.

Occupational hazards are also key issues that will challenge superintendents. Does pesticide exposure increase your chances for cancer? What action should be taken to protect superintendents? Should monies be allocated for more health research or should it be spent on safety education? What are the appropriate safety education actions? Energy and monies should be spent emphasizing the protection of humans in the work place ENVIRONMENT.

Through the WGCSA, WTA, GCSAA, and other allied associations, golf course superintendents have made many advancements in recruitment, training and education during the last decade. The pace must be kept because the challenges of tomorrow can only be met if we have high quality colleagues. 🌱



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