

1996 SYMPOSIUM: Risk Worth The Reward

by Rod Johnson

Planning and making big changes is never without apprehension. A great deal of thought went into this Symposium and inherent changes. The changes included a move to the suburbs, to the Brookfield Marriot. All previous Symposiums, 30 years' worth, had been held at a downtown Milwaukee Hotel. Simple economics made the move a "no brainer". As important as we may think we are, downtown hotels do not share the view of the economic impact of 200 or so golf ball farmers.

Added to the move was a break in the normal turf topic. This year's symposium was appropriately titled, "You Can't See The Trees For The Turf." The topic was well received and extremely well presented by a superb line up of speakers. The note taking was fast and ferocious as 190 plus attendees covered new ground.

Golf course superintendents are guilty from time to time of not seeing the trees for the turf. The turf is our main concern and we seem to have our noses to the ground and eyes on the turf at all times.

A buddy of mine, of whom I will spare the name to spare the pain, is a perfect example of how we view or don't view trees. While diligently going about his turf duties, head down carefully examining every blade of grass, ran his golf car full steam into a tree. This mind you, was in broad daylight, reportedly on a Ladies Day.

Mark Keinert, WGCSA President and no stranger to the Symposium podium, began with a descriptive discussion of the role of trees on Wisconsin golf courses. Mark described trees as "the jewelry of our golf course." His observations hit a bulls eye welcoming attendees while lighting a fire with questions to be answered.

Symposium opening speaker was **Dr. Bruce Allison** of Allison Tree Care, Madison, Wisconsin. Dr. Allison explained scientifically why trees and people need each other. "People seek out trees to build their houses among, with houses built in

wooded settings enjoying an elevated real estate value of 20%. In our love for trees we want to be close to them. Therein often lies the problem. Trees are amazingly capable of recovering from above ground damage but are vulnerable to root system damage.

Dr. John Ball, South Dakota State University, filled the next 90 minutes on Plant Health Care For Golf Course Trees. The time flew by like 5 minutes at the Comedy Cafe. What else would you expect from a tree expert from South Dakota? Dr. Ball used humorous analogies to describe people and trees. He noted phone calls from people demanding to know, "what's killing my trees and what can I spray." Ball stated people and construction kill trees.

Dr. Ball discussed the relationship of shade to turf and the quality and not always the quantity of light passing through trees canopies. "Shade is not shade. Trees and turf are like cats and dogs; they don't get along but we keep putting them together."

Ball introduced a repeated message that trees are often planted too deep. He also presented a starch storage test, potassium iodide based, to evaluate a tree's ability to survive nearby construction as well as a radial trenching method for root aeration of trees in compacted soil areas.

Luncheon speaker, **Melinda Meyers**, was a voice familiar and a face unseen. Melinda is better known to us as the "Plant Doctor" on WTMJ radio. She reinforced discussions of proper plant selection and proper planting techniques. Proper pruning and pruning with a purpose were empathized. Melinda shared humorous stories on plant care calls from the public. She reminded us that in our dealings with people keep in mind their limited plant care knowledge base.

Niel Diboll of Prairie Nursery in Westfield, Wisconsin opened the afternoon session with *Prairie: A Rough Alternative*. "Prairie needs to be viewed not as no maintenance but lower maintenance," according to Diboll. Prairie requires burning or cutting. Fire is nature's way, but a well-timed spring cutting can do the job. Diboll stressed, "A properly planted native prairie will outlive the person doing the planting." He offered great ideas with a slide show to match.

"Taking off" on the 18 holes on a golf course, **Dan Trass** of Ranger Tree Services in Appleton, Wisconsin presented his 18 holes of trees. His 18 holes included: planning for priority tree care and getting rid of hazard trees and hazard conditions. He challenges us to maintain the trees we have. "Don't plant more trees if you



Another large audience at the Symposium.

can't maintain those you have. If you do plant a tree work with a proven species and spend more than 20 minutes planting it."

The highly respected Medinah Country Club Superintendent, **Danny Quast** spoke of Golf Course Tree Programs—the Membership and You. Danny spoke of capital improvement budgets where the largest single line item is for tree purchases with no money set aside to maintain an extensive existing tree inventory. Danny has had an Arborist on staff since 1973, the height of Dutch Elm Disease. Danny showed his wisdom regarding the proper training of mower operators declaring, "one hourly employee can single handedly set your tree program 10 years in one afternoon. Good trees are not an accident."

Randy Miller, forester for Pacific Power in Roseburg, Oregon, wrapped up a full day with Understanding Golf Course Trees. Randy, who was previously employed by Danny Quast at Medinah, continued the thought that people are the most serious pest of trees. A tree's biological system was explained as being perfectly engineered by nature. A "take it home and use it now" tip was the information on the need to clean cut roots after trenching to aid in the tree's recovery.

Day two, which sometime starts out slow, was anything but with **Ron Forse**, Golf Course Architect from Uniontown, Pennsylvania speaking on "To Tree or Not to Tree." Forse observed, "the two most controversial items in master planning improvements to existing courses are women's tees and trees." The famous architects of America's classics including Harry S. Colt, Milwaukee Country Club Architect, have made judgments of trees on golf courses. According to Forse, Colt considered trees "fluky and obnoxious on golf courses."

Forse stated, "In reality we deal with forested inland golf courses. Trees should not restrict the golfer on the tee ball by forcing a hook or slice. Ground features should dictate how a hole is played, not trees." Forse advocates the avoidance of evergreens and the cultivation of groves of quality hardwoods. "There is nothing wrong with a tree intervening with a golf shot as long as it isn't a good shot."



Symposium speaker
Marla Briggs.



USGA Green Section Agronomist Bob
Vavrek.

The Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary System and Enhancing Your Golf Course Wildlife was presented by **Marla Briggs** of Audubon International, Selkirk, New York. Briggs opinionated, "the general public's perception of golf course is of fence to fence highly maintained property, while the truth is it's diversity." Golfers include in their five reasons for playing golf is that it puts them in touch with nature. Briggs encouraged the naturalization of course areas using native plants. Educate golfers that they are playing on a plant. A great first step towards cooperation and coordination with golfers is the Audubon Program.



Session chairman Mike Berwick.

The 1996 Symposium scored excellent marks due in no small part to **Bob Vavrek**, USGA Green Section Agronomist. Bob spearheaded the topic selection and nursed it through a skeptical committee. In his customary Symposium Roundup he gloated on the topic's excellence as judged by the second day attendance and diligent note takers.

Symposium 1996 set marks which will be hard to beat in the future. Rest assured the committee will try. With the continued support of Milorganite, how can we go wrong? Mark your calendars now for November 4 and 5, 1997 at the Brookfield Marriot. Subject T.B.A. ♣