



IN RETROSPECT — AND LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

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My normal goal for THE GRASS ROOTS articles is to provide information that may be of use to someone. As 1996 draws to a close, there are a lot of things on my mind. I want to share these thoughts with you, perhaps provide some information that you need to think about, and indicate where I feel we need to be heading in 1997. I'll try not to ramble, but will probably do so anyway.

The College of Agricultural and Life Sciences continues to struggle financially. With over 95% of the budget tied up in salaries, the only means for overcoming deficits is through personnel reductions. Projections are that between 1995 and 2000, the college will have to eliminate 25 faculty and 37 staff positions. A significant number of these cuts have already been made. What this means is that faculty are not being replaced in "low priority" areas and the faculty positions that remain have to make do with a reduced support staff. Not only does this mean a loss in faculty productivity, but faculty having to perform functions normally handled by support staff. Never did I dream some 25 years ago that I'd be spending hours at the computer and the Xerox machine reproducing class exams, handouts, etc.—not very good use of my time as I see it. What bothers me even more is that this leaves less time to stay current with the technical literature and abreast of what is happening in the turf world. This reduces my value to the industry.

I'm pleased to report that by the time you receive this copy of THE GRASS ROOTS, the Horticulture Department should be on the verge of scheduling interviews with prospective replacements for Frank Rossi. I'm also optimistic that by the end of 1997, approval will have been granted to begin the search for a turf and ornamental plant pathologist. Whether or not we will ever see someone assigned to devote some attention to turfgrass entomology is doubtful. At the moment, the "official" allocation of faculty time to turf instruction, research and extension is 0.1 full-time equivalent (FTE) in instruction, 0.5 FTE in research and 0 FTE in extension. Actually, the 0.5 FTE in research is fictitious—probably about half this time this past year has gone into "public service" to try to compensate somewhat for the lack of faculty extension time. Bringing on board Frank's replacement and a plant pathologist will, by my estimates, give us 0.5 FTE in instruction, about 0.7 FTE in research and about the same in extension. Until this happens, we're simply not in a position to respond as we would like to well-intentioned criticisms of the Summer Field Day and continue all of the outreach activities that have traditionally been undertaken by the turf group.

In this era of downsizing and vanishing resources, communication and cooperation become increasingly important tools for sustaining program momentum, putting forth new

initiatives and getting the most out of what we have. Cooperation cannot take place without communication and this is where I sense a serious void has developed over the past couple of years. The O.J. Noer Turfgrass Research and Education Facility is a tremendous asset to the college, the state and the green industry. Its full potential is far from being realized. Faculty vacancies are but a partial reason. Of equal importance is the lack of sharing and meshing of resources and their focussed application. At this very moment, I do not know what resources the WTA and its member groups, the Ag Experiment Stations and colleagues in other departments have in terms of interests and resources that might be applied toward operation of the Noer Facility.

To launch into another subject area, how many of you saw the bashing that Milorganite took in the November issue of the Milwaukee Magazine or that lawn care in general took in the May/June issue of the *On Wisconsin* magazine? As so often happens, both articles were sadly lack-

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ing in scientific fact, had as their only objective that of alarming the public, and dwelled on the age-old themes of industry and government collusion and coverup. These are the tools of rabid environmentalists who operate in a knowledge vacuum, carefully selecting only that information that suits their purpose and deliberately leaving out that which refutes their claims. Will this type of journalism ever cease and can it be thwarted? Sadly, and with age, I've come to the conclusion that the answer is "No". What we, as members of a proud and vital industry have to do, is forget the fringe groups and forge a concerted effort to educate the public. This will take time and money and its not clear to me where these will come from.

On a more positive note, at least for me, is the fact that some of our outstanding recent graduates such as Josh LePine and Chris Kerkman are having an interesting influence on our colleagues out East. Inquiries are coming in as to whether or not we have others like them looking for employment. It is plain that what is being sought is the Midwest work ethic, politeness and respect for others, reliability, eagerness to learn, and a willingness to take on increasing management responsibilities. I'm telling you this so that you're aware that competition for our graduates is growing!

Having gotten some concerns out in the open, let me wrap this article up with a wish list for 1997.

1. That Frank Rossi's replacement is on board in time for the 1997 research season.

2. That approval for a hiring of a turf and ornamental plant pathologist comes from Ag Hall.

3. That a team of representatives from the UW turf research group, the WTA and its member organizations, Ag Experiment Stations, the Noer Facility and the University Ridge Golf Course can be assembled to begin the arduous task of developing a 5-year plan for turf research and education. In my view, the group needs to lay out needs or objectives, set priorities and goals, delineate responsibilities, and develop an integrated budget that creatively meshes together the multiple resources of the group.

4. Develop an organizational flow chart that clearly delineates authority, responsibility and communication channels with regard to the programs, financing and operation of the O.J. Noer Turfgrass Research and Education Facility.

5. That within the green industry we adopt a broader view with regard to education. It needs to include elementary and secondary students and the adult public as well as college students and members of the profession.

These are some of my hopes for 1997. May they not be merely dreams.

Best wishes to each and every one of for the holidays and in 1997. 🍀

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