



He comes to first job with lots of experience

By Lori Ward Bocher

He's only 24 years old and he's straight out of college. But Jeff Gregos, the new Associate Research Specialist at the Turf Disease Diagnostic Laboratory, has already worked for two golf courses and a turf research facility, and he's worked on the grounds crew for a U.S. Open tournament. Quite a bit of experience for one his age!

Jeff came to the turf industry in a round-about way. Born in Pittsburgh, Penn., in 1972, he has no agriculture or turf background. "Although I did grow up next to an old tax write-off farm which was turned into a golf course," he adds.

As a Pennsylvania native with three siblings who attended Penn State, he just naturally went there himself after he graduated from high school in 1990. "I didn't have much say in the matter," Jeff laughs.

"When I first started at Penn State, I started in architectural engineering," he explains. "I've come a long way from my initial plans. My sophomore year I started working at the turf research facilities at Penn State because I was considering switching into the landscape contracting major. But I got more interested in turf, so I switched my major to turf." He received his BS degree from Penn State in August of 1996.

It took Jeff a little longer to get through college because of his switch in majors. He also took a semester off to work. "And I'm a typical guy," he admits.

In college, Jeff was involved with the Turf Club, the Agronomy Club, and his fraternity, Delta Sigma Phi, where he served as treasurer for a year. "But most of my free time was spent at the research facilities, if you can call that free time," Jeff adds.

Jeff worked at both the Valentine Turfgrass Research Center and the Landscape Management Research Center under Pat Sanders, a turf pathologist, and George Hamilton,

director of the research facilities and the two-year turf program at Penn State.

He gained field experience by working at two golf courses. "I spent eight months during 1993 at the Chartiers Country Club near Pittsburgh," Jeff points out. "The following year I worked at Oakmount Country Club in the Pittsburgh area. I'd been in touch with them since the previous year because I wanted to work there. I thought it would be an excellent experience."

One of the reasons he knew it would be an excellent work experience was because the U.S. Open was held there in 1994. "It was overwhelming," Jeff relates. "Within three months I made \$11,000, so you can imagine the amount of time we put in. The week before and the week of the open, I worked 110 and 120 hours, respectively."

"It was a fun experience," he continues. "We had 15 interns from Penn State there. So the week of the open we rented campers and set up a little shanty town at the facility because we were working from 4:30 or 5 in the morning to 11:30 at night."

Jeff did a lot of spraying on the course that summer. "We also did a lot of renovation after the open was over," he says. "Roughs were pretty beat up from the gallery. And I worked at lots of odds and ends here and there throughout the summer."

Jeff started at the TDDL on October 14, 1996. "I was looking for a job associated with research," he points out. "The atmosphere in research is a lot different compared to working on a golf course. Research is more laid back, and you get to see how things really work. I've always liked to figure out how things work. My mom tells me that, when I was a kid, I took apart my toys to see how they worked."

At the TDDL, he's one of two diagnosticians. Jeff handles the commer-

cial samples while the other handles samples from home owners. "From what I've seen already, it seems like it's about half and half between commercial and home samples," he points out. "Of the commercial samples, most are from golf courses."

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Jeff's major responsibility is to diagnose the turf samples that are sent in. "We get a 4-1/2 inch plug and some general background, and with that we have to diagnose what the problem is with the turf. We also give treatment recommendations."

He's also responsible for developing educational materials and outreach activities, including a Web page on the Internet. "Hopefully I'll be able to update the Web page frequently, once we get it started," he says (when interviewed in November).

"I'm also handling fungicide evaluation field trials," he continues, adding that he has some snow mold fungicide trials going on now, and he'll have more fungicide evaluations in the coming spring and summer. "And, once we get a new turf pathologist on the UW faculty, I will be that person's half-time help, also."

Having worked at Penn State's turf research facility, Jeff is able to compare it with the O.J. Noer Turfgrass Research and Education Facility. "It's

definitely a young program here," he believes. "Penn State has an older, more established program. The Noer facility is excellent, but I think there's also room for improvement, which will be happening over the next couple of years."

"We're in a tough situation right now," Jeff continues. "We're short two faculty positions (Rossi and Meyer). Once the new people are on board, you'll see a lot more research being done. The facility will grow with that."

Jeff plans to work on a masters degree in plant pathology at the UW while working at the TDDL. Other than that, he's not too sure of his future plans. "I haven't thought that far ahead," says the recent college graduate.

Still single, Jeff is living with his sister in Oconomowoc. "She moved to Wisconsin in June when her husband got a job here," Jeff relates. "So I've been staying with them, which is a great help. I'm able to save some money. I'll probably be looking for

something in the Madison area come spring." The commute from Oconomowoc takes about an hour.

Jeff is the "baby" in a family of two boys and two girls. "And we all got new jobs this year," he adds. His father works for the Urban Redevelopment Authority of Pittsburgh and his mother is a homemaker and works part time at her church.

In his spare time, Jeff likes to cross country ski, and he's hoping to be able to do some of that this winter. He has golfed in the past, but not too much. "I've had pretty hectic summers these past years," he says. "I've always been working the whole summer."

Being a Penn State grad, Jeff follows the Nittany Lions. "If you know anything about Penn Staters, they always bleed blue and white," he admits.

But we can forgive him for that as long as he diagnoses those turf samples correctly. Right? 🍷

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