



# A Fast Five Years!

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Just about five years ago my life was changed by a phone call! Dr. Craig Grau, Chair of the Department of Plant Pathology, phoned and asked me to collaborate with Dr. Julie Meyer in the creation of a specific diagnostic laboratory for turfgrass diseases. Neither Dr. Grau nor I knew that this would continue until Dr. Geunhwa Jung joins our department as the turfgrass pathologist in February 2000.

I've had a great time! We organized the Turfgrass Disease Diagnostic Lab (the TDDL), which had its first summer of operation in 1995. Many of you will remember that long, hot summer. All of us appreciated the fine job Steve Millett did (Soon to be Dr. Steve Millett!). He got the TDDL off to a great start.

The next call that changed my life was from David Smith. He invited me to play golf with him and Andy Kronwall at the superintendents meeting in May 1996. My first response, was, "no, I've never even held a golf

club." Dave is a very persistent fellow and a couple of weeks later, there I was out on the course with Dave, Andy, and Tom Schwab. It rained and rained, but I got the golf bug bad that day. Together with my wife, Martha, and my son and daughter-in-law, I took a few lessons; and now getting out to play golf with the family is always on my mind. Even as I'm writing this in the old capital of Brazil, Salvador, I'm wondering if it will be warm enough to get a round in when I return on Thanksgiving Day. Two family vacations have been organized around playing golf at Gateway Golf Course (Todd Renke), Plum Lake Golf Course (Bob Brooker), and Trout Lake Golf & Country Club (Dan Barrett). Thanks, Dave, for getting me on the course.

I'm certain that each of you remember your first national GCSAA meeting. Mine was in Orlando, Florida! Wow, what a difference between this meeting and the one for the professional society, the American

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Phytopathological Society. An inspirational speech by Lou Holtz got us off to a great start, then all the technical sessions gave me much to ponder, and the trade show - who could forget the trade show! Tom Schwab was my guide and we picked up a Jacobsen 75th anniversary cap, which I always take with me on my international trips. It is with me now. But the highlight for me was the two-day session on golf course design by Cornish and Graves. I still dream of building a course for kids at our farm, which is 3 miles west of University Ridge Golf Course. Thanks, WTA for sending me to the meeting!

In the summer of 1996, Steve Millett devoted most of his time to his Ph.D. research, and Gary Gaard, with help from Steve and me, held down the fort - the TDDL. It became evident that we needed a trained person with turfgrass pathology experience. Again, the WTA came to the rescue. The concept of contracts was born, and with this support, Jeffrey "Jeff" Gregos was hired. Jeff had just finished four years of study in the turfgrass program at Penn State, but more importantly, he had worked in the turfgrass pathology pro-

gram for four years with Patricia Saunders. He arrived in the middle of October 1996, and by the end of the month he had established five snow mold fungi trials ranging from eastern Wisconsin to the Wisconsin/Michigan border. He hit the turf running and has kept going full speed ahead. I'm always trying to catch up; and long ago, I gave up trying to get ahead! After getting the snow mold trials finished in the fall, he turned his enthusiasm towards securing the resources to construct a 20,000 ft. sq. research green at the O.J. Noer Facility. I still cannot believe that this got done during the spring of 1997. It took multiple resources: i) Greens Mix of Waupaca Wisconsin donated 40 truck loads of a sand-peat mix, ii) WTA contributed money, iii) Blackhawk Country Club, Madison donated the use of a soil shredder, iv) Randy Smith and Jeff Gregos labored many, many hours getting the job done, v) North Shore Country Club contributed irrigation supplies, vi) West Madison Agricultural Research Station provided a huge tractor and loader plus soil shredder, vii) TDDL contributed money, viii) the NOER staff provided assistance, ix)

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Old's Seed Company donated bentgrass seed, and x) soil plugs with annual bluegrass seed were donated by Blackhawk Country Club, Madison. This example of teamwork and shared vision is one of the reasons that I've enjoyed my time spent with the turfgrass industry. This has become the green for dollar spot and anthracnose fungicide trials, and many other studies. But Jeff didn't stop here; another 5,000 ft. sq. green was established in 1999, a colonial bentgrass fairway for brown patch studies was established a couple of times, and then the "killer plastic greenhouse" was constructed for evaluation of chemicals for management of pythium blight. Also a long-term sod trial was established in the summer of 1997 and necrotic ring spot showed up this summer, right on schedule. This expanded effort by the TDDL has greatly added to the information available for Field Day, the winter Turfgrass Expo, articles for the Grass Roots, and most importantly to help you as superintendents to make better decisions. A special thanks to all who have made this possible.

Then there was the phone call from Mike Lee to Jeff during the USGA Women's Open at Blackwolf Run in 1998. Jeff, Martha and I took a trip to Blackwolf Run and Jeff did an on the spot diagnosis. We had brought the microscopes with us, so he searched for signs of

the fungal pathogen, while Martha and I got our first look at a golf tournament. What an exciting day. We were glued to the TV for the next few days until the exciting finish on Monday. Mike, all of us in Wisconsin are proud of what you and your crew did preparing the course for tournament play. The summer of 1998 also saw University Ridge Golf Course on national TV as Jeff Parks and his crew hosted the women's collegiate golf tournament. Congratulations! I'm looking forward to having a Wisconsin golf course get national TV coverage again.

The homeowners field day was started in 1996 when about 400 eager homeowners attended; the next year was a bust, but in the summer of 1999 the attendance was up again. My tasks were always minor, but I did enjoy the opportunity last summer to host the prairie demonstration. It's always fun to meet the public.

Computers have gained a foothold in many parts of our lives. The TDDL hosted two half-day workshops on the Internet and E-mail in association with the winter Turfgrass Expo. Attendance and participation was excellent, and again, this gave me a chance to meet some more turfgrass professionals. Subsequently, Tom Schwab started the NOERNET, which gives me the chance to "eavesdrop" on a "chat room" for superintendents. The TDDL staff started a web site but it has not been very successful, though a few inquiries from overseas have surprised me. I believe this communication mechanism has great potential and I expect it to continue.

For me, the two TDDL summer workshops were enjoyable. I guess this is the teacher in me. We all learned that it is not always easy to diagnose turfgrass health problems. This fall, Jeff and I are teaching the turfgrass special interest area for turf students in Introductory Plant Pathology. An internet take-home exam has been created (<http://www.plantpath.wisc.edu/pp300/cgc/course.htm>). Take a look and see how well you do. Some of you might even recognize an image from your course.

Along with teaching UW faculty have research responsibilities; and for me, this has involved two areas: i) exploration of the use of molecular DNA techniques for the rapid detection of fungal pathogens and ii) serving as the major professor for Steve Millett, who is just finishing the final corrections on his Ph. D. thesis. Steve has become a world expert on the application of molecular DNA approaches for studying the species of the Typhula snow mold fungi. Besides assisting with the initiation of the TDDL, Steve wrote the first successful grant by a Wisconsin Turfgrass team member for funding by the USGA.

As many of you know, I've worn several other hats during this past five years. My international research



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program continued, but I always added the dimension of golf courses to my trips. I'm writing this article in Brazil and have been unsuccessful in finding a course in any of the three cities I have visited including Brasilia the capital. Professional soccer dominates the TV and the sports conversations, here. I was surprised that my colleagues don't even know about golf. Great potential for expansion for the game of golf. I've also served as the Interim Executive Associate Dean for our College and had a chance to help get the turfgrass pathology position opened.

The turfgrass team has changed since 1995. Frank Rossi left for Cornell University and John Stier arrived. Julie Meyer resigned and Geunhwa Jung will start in February. Mike Cassler from Agronomy initiated a breeding program. Chris Williamson started in Entomology. With these new faces around the table in the Gayle Worf Conference Room there is always something new happening.

Other programs associated with Gary Gaard of the TDDL staff are the revitalization of the ice age trail, which passes through the O.J. Noer Facility, and the Wild Life Enhancement program. Recently, Gary has been selected as a member of the board of the

National Bluebird Association, and CALS has featured Gary's efforts with bluebirds on this homepage for the last few months. Gary also handled all homeowner samples and started no-mow fescue plots, which have become part of our field days.

One does not know what the future will hold for me, but I count my associations with the turfgrass industry as a very special time to get to know some extremely hard-working and special people. To all of you, thanks for having faith in me and supporting the activities of the TDDL. It's that time of year to think about New Year's resolutions. I've made mine: I will play 15 different golf courses in 2000 and I wouldn't mind beating my son, once or maybe twice.

Well, it's time to board the plane to Sao Paulo, Brazil and then take a ten hour flight to Chicago and with luck, make it home by noon tomorrow, so that I can spend Thanksgiving with my family, which now includes three granddaughters (ages 2, 2, and 6 weeks).

Thanks to all of you who have made this last five years a special time for me, and best wishes for 2000 and the future growth of the golf industry in the State. ♣



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