



Signing Off

By **Stephen Pearson**, Turfgrass Research Specialist, Department of Horticulture

Many of you reading this article may not know me, but I hope that's about to change. Those of you who do recognize my name are probably aware that I work at the O.J. Noer Facility as Professor John Stier's research specialist. Well, my time in the turf industry is drawing to a close. My last day at the Noer will be on April 26th. I would like to take this opportunity to reflect back on my brief career in turf management and in doing so hopefully give you a candid look at the UW-Madison Turfgrass Program.

After I graduated high school in 1995 I took a position at Riverside GC in Janesville, our local public golf course. Like most people just joining a crew I spent the



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first few weeks either weed-wacking or emptying the garbage. After about a month of changing the trimmer string on the weed-whipper that wouldn't start, I was questioning my desire to remain at the course. As it turns out, I stayed and enjoyed the rest of my first summer in the turfgrass industry.

After my first year of college at UW-Madison I came home for the summer. I returned to Riverside to work another season. It was this summer that I had my first encounter with a turfgrass disease. I was mowing tees and par-3 fairways on a triplex machine when I noticed several small white spots on the 4th tee. It so happened that the superintendent was nearby, so I asked him what was going on. He got down on the ground with me and showed me a leaf blade with a bleached out lesion that had an hourglass shape and reddish borders. I had just discovered dollar spot (FYI he sprayed the next day). From that point on, I was fascinated with turfgrass diseases.

I returned to school in the fall still undecided in my



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major. The Dean of the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences (CALS) referred me to Dr. Kussow because of my interest in turfgrass. I spoke with Dr. Kussow about my situation, which I think was quite rare. I had planned on applying to medical school at the end of my studies, but was really interested in turfgrass as well. After Dr. Kussow and I discussed the situation, we decided I might be best suited in the Department of Plant Pathology. That's when I met Dr. Maxwell.

I can't say enough good things about Dr. Maxwell. He helped guide me through my courses and set me up with the job that got me started at the O.J. Noer facility. I started to work for Jeff Gregos in the Turfgrass Diagnostic Lab (TDDL at the time) in March of 1998. The summer before I started at the O.J. Noer Facility I did an internship under Dr. Maxwell at Janesville Country Club. My experiences at the JCC were extremely valuable. Mr. Dan Mosblack was very willing to take the time to explain and show me interesting things. I truly enjoyed my time there under Dan and I appreciate his efforts.

As I stated earlier, I started to work for Jeff Gregos in March of 1998. I wasn't really sure what to think about Jeff at first; but, now that I know him about as well as anyone, he truly is a big part of our program at UW-Madison. I learned more in my first season of working for Jeff at the Noer Facility than I learned in my previous three seasons on a golf course. Despite the 60+ hour weeks Jeff likes to work, I loved the time I spent at the Noer. After I graduated I worked for the new turf pathologist Dr. Geunhwa Jung in his new lab on campus. I worked as an LTE for Dr. Jung while I waited to see if I got accepted into medical school. Things didn't get any clearer when I was put on the waiting list at 3 schools. As a result, I ended up taking the position as Dr. Stier's research specialist.

About two months later I was spraying a research plot at Trout Lake GC when my girlfriend called my cell phone and told me I got into medical school. At first I was ecstatic, but then I thought about my commitment to John. It all worked out in the end because the school granted me a year deferment. I am very excited to start medical school in late August.

After four years with the UW Turf Program I have learned a lot about what they work for. One thing I have noticed in my short career in the turfgrass industry is that almost everyone loves what they are doing. Well, I can speak from experience when I say that those at the University are no different. Each person working on turfgrass here in Madison cares about the industry and those individuals who make it up. Everything we are doing here has the ultimate purpose of helping you "out in the real world" do your jobs better.

The UW Turfgrass Program has come a long way from even the time I became a part of it. I believe that the progress forward is due to the hard work and dedication of the people who make it up. For example, the Noer

Facility has added acres worth of plot space in the last few years and there are plans to expand across the drainage ditch to develop another nine acres. We've not only added land in the past few years but people as well.

The people who make up this group are the heart of the turf program. We should all be proud of the people we have on board here at UW-Madison. Obviously Dr. Kussow has a place in history with the turfgrass industry in Wisconsin. He has been an amazing staple that has held the program together and guided it through all its changes for more than two decades. I think we have several other people, including Dr. Stier and Dr. Casler, who are destined to create their own history here at UW. Both Dr. Jung and Dr. Williamson have been fantastic recent additions. Having specialists like them makes our program one of the best in the country. Other people that the program could not do without are stationed at the O.J. Noer Facility. Tom Schwab, Audra Anderson, and Jeff Gregos are integral parts of making things work smoothly. Everyone in our program takes a lot of pride in the Noer Facility. The hard work and dedication of these individuals show in how the Noer Facility always looks. The golf outing, Summer Field Day, EXPO, and many other events are the hard work of Audra, Tom, and Jeff. Unfortunately, I can't mention everyone who has helped make this program what it is today. I hope you take as much pride in our program as I do. Please continue to support them in their quest to make the turfgrass world a better place.

In closing, I would like to say thank you to everyone who I have worked with in the past few years. I have enjoyed my time in the turfgrass industry and you never know...I may be back someday. ♻



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