



Symposium Moves Forward in 2001

By **Monroe S. Miller**, Golf Course Superintendent, Blackhawk Country Club

I cannot recall ever looking forward to a Wisconsin Golf Turf Symposium more than I did to the 2001 edition of this almost sacred educational event among Wisconsin golf course superintendents. And, like most of those I have visited with, I most surely was not disappointed.

Two things excited me – the venue and the program. The American Club in Kohler is Wisconsin's only five-star hotel, and we had the chance to enjoy the entirely pleasant facility at an almost unbelievable price. Rarely ever will any of us experience such quality in service and facilities and great food. A/V equipment worked like it was supposed to, chairs were comfortable, rooms were elegant and the selection of restaurants was singular.

The program, *Emerging Problems and Pests*, attracted a roster of excellent speakers, most we know and one we met for the first time.

Dr. Peter Dernoeden made his first trip to the Symposium whereas all of the other lecturers had made previous appearances: Stan Zontek, Jeff Carlson, Mark Kuhns, Clark Throssell, Chris Williamson, John Stier and Bob Vavrek. Our WGCSA panel members were superb – Mike Lee, Gordy Waddington and Jerry Kershasky all know what they are talking about.

Stan returned to Wisconsin to recognize his honorary membership in the WGCSA – “to give something back to Wisconsin.” The keynote speaker sets the stage for the other Symposium speakers, and Stan spoke of the larger trends in dealing with new golf turf prob-

lems. His key points from my notes were these:

1. We are entering into a period of extremes in weather – drought, flooding, heat (1999 was the warmest year in the last century) and cold. We are learning to manage golf turf in these extremes and clearly we need the healthiest turf possible to be successful in the extremes.

2. The management bar is rising in golf turf. Even the rough needs to be perfect these days. Green speed is in the forefront of golf demands, and all across the country courses are required to provide speeds in the 9' – 10' range.

3. New stress problems are becoming common very quickly: mechanical stress, disease problems (bentgrass dead spot, anthracnose, bacterial wilt, gray leaf spot, fairy ring), earthworms, hyperoides weevil, water quality, nematodes, algae, moss, et al.

4. People problems are beginning to affect almost all golf courses –

finding quality help, adequate pay and benefits for employees, and even more frequent and severe vandalism.

As always, Stan complemented his lecture with some great slides that amplified his message.

Dr. Dernoeden focused his lecture on three diseases – basal rot anthracnose, bacterial wilt, and bentgrass dead spot.



First time Symposium speaker Dr. Peter Dernoeden, a faculty member at the University of Maryland.



Bob Vavrek does yeoman work for the Symposium – committee member, panelist and speaker.



Mark Kuhns travelled to Kohler for The Baltusrol Golf Club in New Jersey to discuss his aggressive tree removal program.



GCSAA Director of Research (and former Purdue professor) Clark Throssell.



Wisconsin's Dr. Chris Williamson talked about the status of Japanese beetles and gypsy moths in our state.

Anthracnose was first described in the 1950s in England, and today it is on its way to becoming one of golf turf's most severe diseases. It is found in both *Poa annua* and bentgrass, but it most serious on *P. annua*, especially when the later plants have been weakened. The disease is aggravated by low cutting heights, double cutting, low levels of nitrogen, grooming, top-dressing, rolling, and vertical mowing. In other words, all of the practices we use to satisfy green speed for players work to encourage the



Kris Pinkerton received a past president's plaque from a grateful WGCSA membership.

disease. Weather extremes have been detrimental as well.

Preventing an outbreak involves the use of Daconil along with a penetrant fungicide, syringing rather than night-time watering, avoiding any severe management procedures, spoon feeding fertilizer, and moving traffic around by cup placement. *This disease may be uncontrollable with fungicides only.* The implication clearly is we will have to do some serious communication with our players should we experience a severe outbreak of anthracnose.

Bacterial wilt is familiar to golf course superintendents of my generation. It was found in C-15 bentgrass about 20-25 years ago in Chicago and diagnosed by Dr. Joe Vargas of Michigan State. The electron photomicrographs of plugged vascular bundles were spectacular. It is back, and conditions that encourage anthracnose do the same for bacterial wilt. And, of all things, it is spread by mowing.

Finally, for the first time for many of us in the audience, we learned something about *Ophosphaerella agrostis* – spring dead spot in bentgrass or bentgrass dead spot. To date, it is found only on young greens.

Chris Williamson, Extension turfgrass entomologist at the UW – Madison, spoke about two problems far too many of us are becom-

ing familiar with – gypsy moth and Japanese beetles. On our course we had some serious injury from Japanese beetle grubs, even in areas that were treated. Biological and cultural controls will not work with this pest and we are forced to use insecticides for control. This insect was exported to the U.S. from Japan in 1916 and found in Wisconsin in the early 1990s.

Gypsy moths were officially reported in Wisconsin in 1995, despite their introduction into America (Medford, MA) in 1869. Biological and cultural controls have a chance with this insect pest. Dr. Steve Millett is in charge of the Wisconsin gypsy moth program; there is comfort in knowing it is in capable hands.

We have been blessed in Wisconsin with clean water for use on our golf courses, but population pressures may change that. GCSAA's Clark Throssell returned to the Symposium and gave an enlightening lecture on water quality issues, a subject many of us are poorly informed about.

He spoke about salt control, sodium hazards, carbonate/bicarbonate levels, toxic levels of certain ions, and the importance of water sampling.

This was the second year for a revised format that has a full day on the second day of the Symposium. It is started with a

breakfast buffet. Bill Roberts, past president of both the WGCSA and the GCSAA, drove up from his new home in Chicago and told us of changes in his life. He has gone from golf course superintendent to attorney, and Bill traced the path he followed that got him to such a radical career change. For old friends like me, he is still the same articulate, humorous and hard working man we knew when he labored in Stevens Point. He is a little gray at the temples, but who wouldn't be after working through law school while fully employed. He is now an Illinois assistant state's attorney in suburban Chicago. The work is interesting; "you can't make up stories like the ones I see each day," Bill told us.

Bill was introduced by Jeff Spence, sales manager of Milorganite. Jeff has earned our respect for carrying on the Symposium traditions we value so highly. He spoke of comparison between the 1941 and events of 9/11. O.J. Noer had written of WWII and the loss of members to the armed forces, budget reductions and turf maintained in "standby conditions." Jeff's remarks were reassuring.

The educational session for the second day began with a moment of silence in memory of Dick Buetel who passed away from cancer last fall.

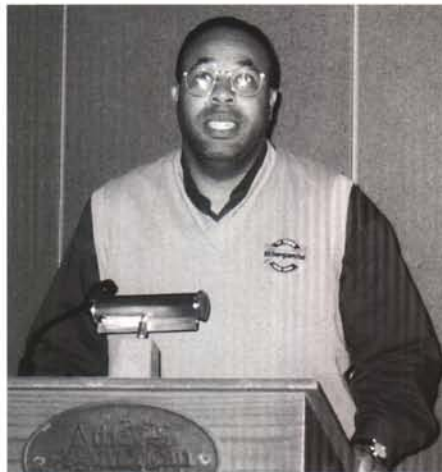
Panelists Stier, Zontek, Vavrek and Dernoeden worked the subject of specialty products (frequently referred to as "snake oils"). It is a tough subject to discuss. There are usually many claims made about these products, substantiated mainly by testimonials and rarely by university research. Bob Vavrek was skeptical of such products and recommended a benefit vs. cost approach. He acknowledged you can sometimes see a benefit but the cost is almost always high.

John Stier's recommendation was a thorough and close scrutiny of scientific data and a study of research statistics. He warned that the number of marginal products might increase due to FFQPA of 1996, which does not mandate any

registration requirements.

Peter Dernoeden suggested requesting data from two or more universities, preferably one that is either local or regional. He strongly expressed that in his opinion it is not possible to manipulate soil microbe activity in greens and suggested higher levels of soil microbe activity isn't always good.

Jeff Carlson spoke before the Symposium a few years ago when he was the golf course superintendent at the Widow's Walk golf course in Massachusetts, a Mike Hurdzan design. He came this year as superintendent at the Vineyard Golf Club on Martha's Vineyard. It is an all "organic" golf course and he was hired in 1998 to help with the permitting process (Wildlife



Jeff Spence has provided strong leadership in keeping the Symposium traditions intact.



Jeff Carlson, golf course superintendent at the Vineyard Golf Club, an "organic" golf course.

New WGCSA president David Brandenburg and UW-Madison turf-grass pathologist Dr. Geunhwa Jung.



UW-Madison Professor John Stier discussed his view of quick fix products.



Good friends Tom Schwab and Jim Krieger both gave a big "thumbs up" to the American Club.



The distinguished panel of Vavrek, Stier, Dernoeden and Zontek.



Panelist and Kohler host Michael Lee.



"Pure pleasure" was how many of us felt to see and visit with Bill Roberts again.

Grow-In and Consulting). The golf course site is a 225 acre abandoned development that has been argued about for years and finally became a reality, likely due to Jeff Carlson's guidance. He had an instructive and interesting story to tell.

Mark Kuhns' previous appearance as a Symposium speaker was as the golf course superintendent at Oakmont. He returned as the Baltusrol Golf Club superintendent, and he discussed tree removal programs. Shade is a really tough turf problem (trees are tall hardwoods, according to Penn State's Dr. Tom Watschke!) and tree removal can be emotional for golf course players. Mark's advice is to develop a plan that involves participation of the green committee and your golf course architect. He suggested working toward a benchmark of eight hours of sunlight, and giving weight to air movement, game strategy, shade, and to the original look of the golf course.

WGCSA colleagues Lee, Waddington and Kershasky worked as a panel discussing cultural practices and play. Mike talked about the concept of a phantom crew – "never seen and never heard" – with play starting at 7:00 a.m. and staff rolling at 5:00 a.m. He carried

that concept through to green and fairway aerifying.

Jerry addressed the issues surrounding labor and productivity, the critical importance of communication, and the structure of the workday. He has found value in hiring enough summer employees that time off isn't an issue when requested. He explained his program of eight hours of pay for seven uninterrupted hours of work, a program made successful by the facts that productivity drops 50% when golf players are present and the last hour of the day isn't very productive anyway. Jerry has some unique solutions that merit consideration by many of us.

Gordy Waddington is a practical, down-to-earth golf course superintendent who shared his management approach at the Country Club of Wisconsin. He embraces the CCW goal of maximum revenues, which leads him to constantly ask, "how much can we do with less?" He cross trains all of his employees for their maximum value and offered the key message: "be flexible."

The Symposium wouldn't be the same if we didn't have Bob Vavrek, our USGA Green Section agronomist, summing up the lessons learned from the speakers. The



Steve Zontek served well as Symposium keynoter and panel moderator. He is a valued friend of Wisconsin superintendents we do not see often enough.

responsibility requires that Bob keep good notes, and he has the ability to distill the day and a half program into a 45- minute summary. He always does a nice job.

The move to Kohler was a very significant one. I think it will take a couple of more years to determine if location will greatly expand attendance. This year, the season hadn't ended by November 13th, not even in northern Wisconsin. Irrigation systems were not blown out, snow mold materials had not been applied in many cases, and players in some quarters were still expecting some services. Those factors may have affected attendance.

Everybody but one person raved about The American Club; that lonely dissent came from a colleague who wanted windows to look out of. But to a person otherwise, the compliments were rich. Jim Krieger thought the facility was "almost unbelievable. The flowers are even real!" And John Jolin echoed the sentiments of many when he said, "If the Symposium returns to the American Club next year, my wife will come along!"

I'm with John. ♻️



Sheboygan sits on the shore of beautiful Lake Michigan. Shown here is the breakwater and lighthouse. A visit to the city must include a stop at the John Michael Kohler Arts Center.




Veteran WGCSA members Carl Grassl and Roger Bell discuss the Symposium after the Association election.



Green grass in a Sheboygan park should have been either tan or snow covered. It was evidence of a long season.

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