



He's been all over the map, but finally found Wisconsin

By Lori Ward Bocher

"Just draw a map," says Kevin Hensler when trying to explain his educational and career path. Kevin, headquartered at the O.J. Noer Facility, is an integrated turf management specialist with the University of Wisconsin-Extension. He's been in this nearly created position for a year now.

Why draw a map? Believe me, it will make it easier to understand the depth and breadth of his life of 43 years. Ready? Draw a line from: the St. Louis area to Southwest Missouri State back to the St. Louis area to the Minneapolis area back to the St. Louis area to Mississippi State University to Penn State University to the University of Arkansas to Tennessee State University and to the University of Wisconsin. Whew!

Ties to St. Louis...

Kevin was born and raised in St. Charles, a suburb of St. Louis. Like so many "Personality Profile" characters before him, his first job was on a golf course. "I was in high school," he recalls. "All my friends were working at the golf course across the road. I wanted to work and hang out with my friends, so that's how I got into golf course work. I worked at golf courses through college, too."

Kevin graduated from high school in 1978. When asked where he went to college and what he majored in, he comes back with his own question: "The first time or the second time? I've got a long, long, long story."

"The first time I started out at Southwest Missouri State (Springfield) working on an accounting degree," he continues. "That lasted a long, long time – about seven years. I had about 200 hours of college credit and a GPA of 1.8 with no hope of ever actually graduating." Guess accounting wasn't his forte.

From there, Kevin did some contractual work for Monsanto. When he married in 1985 he figured it was time to get a permanent job with benefits. "I wanted full-time employment and I wanted to stay in the turfgrass industry because that's what I knew best," he recalls.

So Kevin found an opportunity with a chemical lawn care company, Evergreen Lawns. At first he worked in the St. Louis area, and then he was transferred to the Minneapolis area. "I worked for Evergreen Lawns for about four years, ended up getting divorced, and got back into golf course work in the Twin Cities, and then back in the St. Louis area," Kevin explains.

Second time's a charm...

Somewhere around his 30th birthday, Kevin decided it was time to go back to school. "I realized that I wasn't going to get anywhere in life without a college education," he says. "I decided to get a degree in turfgrass management. I narrowed down my choice of schools to Michigan State and Mississippi State and ended up choosing Mississippi State. I'd already lived in the north, so I wanted to live in the south to see what that was all about."

Kevin started at Mississippi State in 1991. "This time I did much better," he reports. "It took me about three years to get my bachelor's degree in agronomy with a turfgrass emphasis. Then I stuck around another two and a half years to get my masters degree at Mississippi. I worked with soils and sod production and finished in 1997."

*New Course Construction
Renovation and Restoration*

GOLFCREATIONS

Marengo, IL 815.923.1868

"Then I decided to pursue a PhD and went to Penn State to work with Dr. Al Turgeon," he continues. "I worked there for about a year. At that point, things weren't working out the way I had hoped they would. Plus, I was near 40 and decided that at some point I had to get a full-time job. I couldn't stay in school forever."

Maybe not as a student. But he did head to the University of Arkansas where he worked as a research associate for a year. Then he moved to Tennessee State University where he worked as an Extension turfgrass specialist on a regional level. And in January of 2002 he came to Wisconsin for his current position at the O.J. Noer Facility.

With exposure to several different jobs, universities, and geographical locations, Kevin has learned a few things along the way. "I guess the biggest thing I learned is the diversity of abilities that I have," he says. "I've had a lot of good exposure and experience in different fields which has strengthened my knowledge base. I bring a lot of things to the table based on that. And I've worked with turf in different parts of the country. Hopefully I can help others utilize some solutions that haven't been seen in this region but have

worked in other regions."

About his position...

As an ITM Specialist for UW-Extension, Kevin is in a newly created, soft-money position, which means his program has to create its own income by charging user fees. A grant from the UW Graduate School is funding the program for the first year and a half; but after that it must be self-supporting.

"This position was created in response to the NR151 legislation about reducing non-point pollution runoff within the state," Kevin explains. "This legislation covers not only the turf industry, but also agriculture, non-ag sources, and storm water discharge. It's very comprehensive legislation. The turf industry was very concerned about it, so the faculty here got together and applied for the grant to help create this position and address the needs of the turf industry.

"What they envisioned is that I work for the turf-grass industry, helping them be compliant with this legislation and proactive in environmental issues," he continues. "We offer several different packages to the industry ranging in price from \$300 to \$700. I make site visits, evaluate what people are doing, and see if there's any way that we can help them improve upon



Consider Primo MAXX®
the turf's personal trainer.

Get your turf in top shape. Primo MAXX PGR makes turf thicker and stronger. Preparing it for summer's toughest challenges, like heat, drought, and disease. Not to mention everyday wear and tear. So it can be in prime condition all season long.



Contact Jim Shone at 1-708-217-8509 to learn more
about Syngenta products.

Important: Always read and follow label instructions before buying or using this product.
©2002 Syngenta. Syngenta Professional Products, Greensboro, NC 27419. MAXX®, Primo®, and the Syngenta logo
are trademarks of a Syngenta Group Company.

www.syngentaprofessionalproducts.com

what they're doing."

So far, about 25 percent of his work has been with golf courses. The rest has been with school districts (athletic fields) and park and recreation departments. What does he do when he visits a site? "The first thing I do is sit down and talk with the folks and find out what they want from us," he answers. "Since we're dependent upon them for funding, we want to provide what they want from us. That's just good business."

"We're also finishing up the development of a certification program which gives us a whole list of things that we can go through with the facility manager," he continues. "If their facility meets all the criteria on the list, it is certified as an 'Environmentally Friendly Facility.' If they don't meet all the criteria, we address those issues in which they're deficient."

Be environmentally proactive...

At this point, the certification is not required and it carries no legal weight with the DNR or other state agencies; it's not a licensing or permitting program. "Right now the premise that we're working on is that facilities can use this certification as a proactive, public relations-type program," Kevin explains. "With

the certification program, if we can show that 'x' number of people in the golf course industry are certified by the University of Wisconsin ITM program, that will show to environmental groups and legislative people that we are concerned about the environment."

In the program's first year, Kevin was a little disappointed with the number of participants. "That has a lot to do with the NR151 legislation which has been watered down considerably since this position started last January," he explains. "Originally, one of the requirements of the legislation was that each facility had to have an IPM plan on file. The original intent was for me to work with this 'captive audience.' But now that the legislation has been watered down so that it no longer requires an IPM plan on file, we no longer have a captive audience."

"We've had to change our approach because of that. Frankly, the first year we were floundering around a bit, trying to get a new direction," Kevin admits. "I think we've got that together now. We'll be at the Turf Expo in January to present workshops. Hopefully this new approach will start our new year



Proudly Serving the Turf Industry in Wisconsin

Terra's full line of turf industry products includes:

- Herbicides
- Insecticides
- Fertilizer
- Grass Seed
- PGRs
- Fungicides
(Including Thalonil™ 90DF and 4L)
- Colorants
(Including Terramark™ SPI and Terramark Lake Colorant)

**For the products, services and advice you need,
Talk to Terra**



Terra International, Inc. • 3525 Terra Court • Sun Prairie, WI 53590
Conrad Stynchula CGCS • (800) 456-0948 (office) • (608) 235-4999 (mobile)

off on the right foot.”

Kevin also plans to conduct workshops throughout the state in late February and early March. “We want to let the people know what we’re doing. We want to give them ideas on how they can develop their own ITM plan or hire us to come in and do that for them,” he points out.

Can’t know it all...

What needs to be done on turf facilities? In his first year, Kevin found that many turf managers are doing a lot of things right. “But we can always do better with identifying pest damage, identifying the pests, and choosing the best pesticides and fertilizers,” he says. “Basic knowledge in these areas tends to be a weak point for most people. There’s so much information out there, so many things that you need to know, that it’s difficult for turf managers to have a grasp on everything. The biggest thing they need to be able to do is identify the actual problem and know how to best treat it. We think we can help them in this area.”

Kevin gives an example of one client he’s worked with. “We went to the Elmbrook School District where they just spent \$250,000 on a new sand-based football field. We walked that field, as well as their soccer and baseball fields, to find out what they were doing. They weren’t accustomed to the sand-based field; it’s a whole different ballgame compared to managing turf on native soil.

“Hopefully we improved their fertility program as far as timing it to benefit the turf a little bit better,” he continues. “We’ve increased their aerification program which will improve the root system and plant density so that the turf can intercept a lot of the fertilizers and pesticides moving down through the soil profile.”

Kevin finds that golf course superintendents are better able to develop their own ITM programs compared to people in school districts or park departments. “They have a better foundation of knowledge. They’re very organized. They network among each other, getting ideas from other people,” he believes.

And he encourages golf course superintendents to be proactive with environmental issues. “Even though NR151 has been watered down, I think bigger regulations are still to come,” Kevin says. “If we can be as proactive as possible, maybe we can keep overzealous regulations at an arm’s length.”

O.J. Noer Facility is tops...

Having worked at and seen many turf research facilities, Kevin is impressed with the O.J. Noer Facility. “I think it’s a top-notch facility,” he says. “It’s head and shoulders above the facilities that I’ve been to and worked at. We have adequate room to do turf research, and there’s adequate room for expansion. The people here work well with the industry – not

only the golf industry, but the equipment industry as well. We have top-quality equipment here. The facilities, the networking with industry, the support from industry – they’re all great here.”

After his first year in Wisconsin, Kevin has decided that he likes it here. “It was a little hot this summer, though,” he points out. “It felt more like Tennessee. But I like the lay of the land here. I like the four seasons. I like the variety of outdoor activities. And I think Wisconsin has a very active citizenship. That’s what I liked about Minnesota and one of the reasons I wanted to move back north.”

Speaking of outdoor activities, Kevin enjoys hunting and just wandering through the woods and taking pleasure in the out-of-doors with his two dogs. Actually, the dogs belong to his girlfriend back in Tennessee who has 12 more dogs with her. “I’m working on getting her moved up here,” he points out. Kevin lives between Mt. Horeb and Black Earth in the Town of Vermont, not too far from the O.J. Noer Facility.

Now that Kevin has found Wisconsin on the map, let’s hope he doesn’t take any detours for a while. ♣



Everything To Make Your Course Beautiful

**Turf Seed • Fertilizers • Repair Parts
Golf Course Accessories • Equipment**

LESCO®

800 - 321 - 5325

LESCO is a registered trademark and Grow With Us is a trademark of LESCO Technologies, LLC.