



Welcome Dr. Kerns

By David Brandenburg, Golf Course Manager, Rolling Meadows Golf Course.

Wisconsin's golf and turf industry is happy to welcome Dr. Jim Kerns as he takes the position of Turfgrass Pathologist to the Department of Plant Pathology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. It is hard to believe it has been almost two years since the Wisconsin turfgrass industry has had a turfgrass pathologist on staff. Dr. Kerns joins us from North Carolina State University where he shown his research abilities in work with Pythium Root Dysfunction.

From the couple times I have met Jim it is clear he will get along well with the Wisconsin turfgrass industry. With a clear passion for his work, a great personality and smooth communication skills Jim is easy to talk to and learn from.

Jim was born in Wheaton, IL just outside of Chicago and yes he is a Chicago Cubs fan so I was very happy. We shared a couple Wiggly Field stories and Jim talked of participating in the Cubs kids' camp and having a student summer weekday ticket package that allowed Jim and his brother to attend many games at the friendly confines.

His father is an engineer and mother was a registered nurse leading the family to spend a little time in Texas before moving to North Carolina for high school. Similar to many of us, Jim selected North Carolina State University because of its proximity to home and in state tuition. At North Carolina Jim majored in Agronomy with plans to become a golf course superintendent or athletic field manager.

However, working with Dr. Charles Peacock and Dr. Tom Ruffy revealed an interest in research and teaching, and as a result, he decided to pursue a Master of Science degree under Dr. Don Vietor and Dr. Richard White at Texas A&M University. Though his work at Texas A&M was primarily in Soil Science, a couple of classes in Plant Pathology showed Jim where his true interests lie, and Jim returned to NC State upon completion of his M.S. degree to pursue a doctorate under renowned turfgrass pathologist Dr. Lane Tredway.

Under Dr. Tredway, Jim took on the unenviable task of researching the little known Pythium Root Dysfunction. The research has brought to light the etiology, epidemiology, and management of this troublesome disease. Dr. Tredway and Dr. Kerns co-wrote an article in the July/August 2005 USGA Green Section Record titled Defining the Nature of Creeping Bentgrass Roots Diseases that describes some of his research.



Jim and his wife are house hunting in the Madison area if you have any tips for him. Their free time includes many outdoor activities including golf, biking, hiking and visiting state parks. Jim already had his Wisconsin State Park permit for this year. They also like to visit museums, so even when he is not researching turf diseases he is still learning.

Although Dr. Kerns is still getting to know his way around his new surroundings, his goals include advancing the Noer Center Turfgrass Diagnostic Lab and studying dollar spot epidemiology. He hopes to allow us to reduce chemical inputs while achieving effective control of disease problems.

Jim agreed with my statement that the Noer Center and the Turfgrass Diagnostic Lab are tremendous resources for turf managers in the midwest. We also agreed that Paul Koch has done an excellent job as lab manager and the various aspects of his work without having a turf pathologist to assist him during this time.

The same as many of our golf clubs are tightening belts and crunching budgets, the University system is no different. Credit for Jim's hire needs to be given to the Wisconsin Turfgrass Association. Requests from university departments for new or replacement faculty positions are often delayed for years for financial reasons. To speed up this process the WTA offered to fund the first year of salary and benefits for the new position at a cost that totals nearly \$100,000! Couple this with the fact that the WTA recently funded Dr. Doug Soldat's first year as a professor in Soil Science and the WTA has certainly turned heads within the university with their relentless support. Be sure to support the WTA and its educational and fundraising events.

Welcome to Wisconsin Dr. Kerns! 🌱