



New Year, New EXPO

By **Tom Schwab**, O.J. Noer Turfgrass Research and Education Facility, University of Wisconsin-Madison

The new year brought a revamped WTA Winter EXPO to Wisconsin's turf industry. The show was shortened to one day and the location was moved to the Milwaukee area. The conference took place at the beautiful meeting halls of Boerner Botanical Gardens in Hales Corners on January 14, 2009. The venue was much smaller than past EXPOs, which allowed attendees and vendors to enjoy a more personal setting to network, share ideas, and visit amongst friends. Many vendors helped sponsor the conference this year, which brought the registration price way down. In addition, best of all, the education and trade show were top notch.

The day started out with WTA President Dan Biddick welcoming attendees to the conference. The highlight of his remarks was that WTA hired retired golf course superintendent Monroe Miller to be their executive director. Monroe is so well known throughout the state that many positive effects will come from this newly created position. Following that big announcement came a great educational program beginning with three of the UW-Madison's turf professors.

Dr. Doug Soldat led off with a presentation about whether calcium is an important nutrient in management of turfgrass. He explained how calcium keeps cell walls strong, changes pH, can modify soil structure, and how it could play an important role in helping plants respond to stress. The talk was very in-depth and educational, with the bottom line being Ca is important in turf growth but applications of Ca are unneces-



The new location as seen in the evening

sary because of the abundant supply in soil and precipitation. The exception is in the very rare situation of extremely low pH of < 5, or cases of excessive sodium in the soil. In most all situations, applications of calcium will be rejected by the plant and may only build up on the outside of root surfaces.

Next, Dr. Chris Williamson gave us an update on the Emerald Ash Borer dilemma. Chris is a leading educator on EAB, who has given numerous talks throughout the country about the insect and its potential devastation to all ash trees. He gave us the complete history on the insect and explained how a non-native pest (EAB) attacking a native host (ash trees) is the perfect storm for disaster. This is especially true since ash trees represent 2% of all tree leaf surfaces in the United States. There is an estimated 765 million ash trees in Wisconsin alone that could potentially be killed. On the positive side, if there is a positive side, EAB is a very slow insect to migrate. It naturally moves at most 2 miles per year. The problem occurs when infected ash wood is moved to an uncontaminated area where it can become a new infection site. The main mode of this

transportation is by campers moving firewood. It is recommended to acquire firewood from no more than 50 miles of your campsite, and it is actually illegal to transport firewood from one of our state's EAB quarantine areas.

Dr. John Stier was the next at the microphone. His talk was titled, "Should Rain Gardens Replace Turf for Urban Water Management." He talked about 3 years of research conducted by one of his Graduate students, Jake Schneider, and funded by the Terry and Kathleen Kurth Distinguished Graduate Fellowship. John described the research in a very entertaining and detailed, yet easy to understand manner. The research compared using native prairie plants, which is the plants rain gardens are currently prescribed to use, against using turfgrass as the plant material. The premise of rain gardens is to direct rain water from impervious surfaces, like rooftops, into a bermed off or bowl-shaped holding area made up of prairie plants, which will contain and slow runoff to allow it to recharge the groundwater. The research also compared bermed versus non-bermed rain gardens. The data from John and Jake's study showed that the berm

itself, and not what type of vegetation is within the berm, was the important parameter of rain gardens in decreasing runoff and recharging groundwater.

Greg Lyman, director of environmental programs for the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America, and Chris Gray, director of golf operations at Marvel Golf Club in Kentucky finished off the morning education with two more very interesting talks. Greg's talk, titled "Putting the Green in The Green Industry," pointed out that the golf and green industry are leading the way on water quality protection, water conservation, and sustainability issues. He mentioned ways for us to better publicize the environmental good we are doing. One way is to adapt an environmental plan, which he outlined.

Chris Gray educated us on the who, what, when, where, and why of using vegetable oils and homemade biodiesel as alternative fuel sources. Chris makes his own fuels for his golf course machinery and saves a lot of money in the process. He described the supplies needed to make your own and pointed out some hazards that may be encountered. He also outlined the economics including some modifications you will need to make to your equipment. He warned against using these alternatives in new expensive machines because it may void the warranty, but for his older machinery, it is working very well.

Next came lunch and presentation of turf scholarships, and research donations. The lists of scholarships and donations are mentioned in box below.

Following lunch came an informative trade show that allowed time to meet with commercial suppliers to Wisconsin turf industry and talk about needs for the upcoming season. We are in good hands with all the helpful advice and quality goods from these suppliers. Their contact information is listed page 56 for your information. A special thanks goes to the vendors mentioned on right, who sponsored different segments of EXPO and helped bring the show to you at a greatly discounted price.

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UAP	Workshop Sponsor: "Turfgrass Troubleshooting"

2009 WTA Winter EXPO Scholarships and Research Donors

Scholarship Donor

Bayer Environmental Scholarship
Charles O. Newlin Scholarship
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WGCSA/James R Love Scholarship
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Brendan Dolan \$600

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Stevens Point CC
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Westmoor CC

Recipient

WTA \$548
WTA \$600
WTA \$1,375
Distinguished Graduate Fellowship \$2,500

After the great trade show, came a group of afternoon workshops and roundtable discussions. The workshops included "Turfgrass Troubleshooting" and "Get Your NR 151 Plan Checked." The roundtables included "Dealing with the Economic Downturn" and "Marketing Strategies for Turf Management." Dr. Jim Kerns conducted the workshop on turf troubleshooting in which he described numerous techniques to identify turf decline. Two golf course superintendents, Jim Krieger and Bruce Worzella, commented that Jim is an excellent speaker who gave invaluable turf management information. They both mentioned another point; "We hope he stays in Wisconsin for a long time."

The two-roundtable discussions chaired by USGA Agronomist Bob Vavrek received great reviews from those present. Bruce Schweiger - Reinders, Brian Zimmerman - Milwaukee County Parks, and Dave Brandenburg - Rolling Meadows Golf Course were on the Economic Downturn panel and discussed current challenges in the industry and ideas to survive and improve. Brandenburg discussed how the blanket discounting of green fees was reducing revenue at daily fee clubs while Zimmerman covered using partnerships with vendors and third party groups to improve the bottom line. Schweiger spoke on the challenges vendors are facing during these tight financial times and how the entire golf industry is in the same boat.

The panel on Marketing Strategies for Turf Management with Chris Gray - Marvel Golf Club, Greg Lyman - GCSAA, and Jodi Zirbel - Epic Creative. They gave several techniques to better market yourself, your company, and your industry. The techniques include promoting your accomplishments, especially environmental ones, in local publications. One strategy is to write for your own golf course or



Larry Lennert
describing what
Aquatrols has to
offer for 2009



**Paul Huggett and
Beth Whitehouse**
are happy about
the new EXPO



Bob Vavrek, Bruce Schweiger, Brian Zimmerman and Dave Brandenburg - the expert panel who discussed how they are dealing with the economic downturn

industry newsletter. Another idea to market yourself is to donate a turf consultation to a local charity. One other suggestion is to be more approachable and communicative with your members, even if it is just saying hi to a new member, playing in your golf league, or eating lunch with some of them in the clubhouse. A panel member also mentioned that you should always be listed on your company's website. You could answer member questions about turf management from the site or just be listed as a local expert, which you all are. The panel and audience mentioned so many other tips, and if we just start practicing some of the suggestions, it

will serve our marketing needs well.

Well, that is a wrap of EXPO for 2009. The new location, time, and cost were a big hit. The education presented so many new ideas.

Moreover, the final part of EXPO, Wisconsinizing, was a great way to wind down after this great day of education and concluded a great way to start the new year.

**New EXPO vendor
Burris Equipment's
Jake Volbeer and
Mike Werth**



The sign says it all



Chris Gray from Marvel Golf Club in Kentucky gave two interesting presentations



Facing the camera are Ed Witkowski and Ed Fregien of Pendelton Turf



Joe Churchill of Olds Seed talks shop with Doug DeVries from Reid Municipal



Greg Lyman of GCSAA also gave two informative presentations



John Turner giving useful advice as always

2009 Wisconsin Turfgrass and Greenscape EXPO Trade Show Participants

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