

Thank You Dr. Kerns

By Dr. Paul Koch, Turfgrass Diagnostic Lab Manager, O.J. Noer Turfgrass Research and Education Facility &

The first time Dr. Kerns and I spent any significant time together was during his first week as Wisconsin's Turfgrass Pathologist back in the summer of 2008. I had met him during the interview, and had seen him present at academic meetings, but our interactions had been brief.

I knew that he enjoyed golf, and to begin the process of getting to know him I asked Tom Harrison to set up a round of golf for us at Maple Bluff CC. Anyone that knows Jim knows he is a tremendous golfer, anyone that knows me knows that I am not. We arrive at the first tee, and Jim promptly slices his tee shot well onto the adjacent fairway. After explaining how I'm not very good, I proceed to effortlessly hit my tee shot long and straight down the middle of the fairway. "There's my good one for the day" I proclaim with great humor, and we stride off down the first fairway. While he's off looking for his ball in nearby Waukesha County, I hit a little wedge up to the green that bounces once, bounces a second time, trickles for a foot or two and falls into the cup for the first eagle of my entire life. Rather than whooping and running around riding my pitching wedge like a pony though, I felt rather sheepish. I had just spent the past hour explaining to him how I'm not very good, and I chip in for



Dr. Kerns and myself at my Ph.D. graduation in May of 2012. I will forever be grateful to his guidance throughout my Ph.D. pursuit.

eagle on the first hole we play together.

After knocking his ball up near the green, he walks up, surveys the area and asks "Where did you go?" "Um, I think it went in" was my confident reply. "What? What do you mean you think it went in?" replies Dr. Kerns. To which I replied, "well I guess I haven't really looked yet, but I know it's in there, I don't want you to think I'm hustling you." So began a 5 year relationship that saw the development of Dr. Kerns

as one of the foremost turf pathologists in the country, the growth of myself as a scientist and an extension specialist, and together as a team the expansion of the turf pathology program at Wisconsin to one of the most respected in the nation.

I am personally grateful to Jim on many levels. First, he allowed me to stay on as Turfgrass Diagnostic Lab manager AND simultaneously pursue my Ph.D. This is exceedingly rare, and was a significant risk for his young program back in 2008. If I had failed miserably, not only would the most public face of his program (the TDL) fail, but so would his first Ph.D. student. Those would both look bad for him, and I made sure not to point out this fact when discussing the potential Ph.D. pursuit. The successful completion of my Ph.D. though this past summer allowed me to pursue my own research ambitions while still maintaining my close connections with the industry, something that will prove valuable as I scan the horizon near and far for potential employment.

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In addition, Jim has been a valuable mentor on far ranging issues from writing to fundamentals about plant pathology. His guidance on public speaking, however, may be among the most valuable guidance he has provided over the years. Jim is one of the most prolific speakers available on the 'turf circuit' today, and with his help I have improved significantly and will work to continue to improve moving forward. An ability to speak effectively in public is essential as an extension specialist, and any success I have in the future in this area will be largely thanks to Jim.

In addition to my own gratitude, I know all segments of the industry are just as grateful for the services he provided over the last 5 years. Jim has been quick to respond to calls and emails from turf managers of all stripes, and has even found time to make numerous site visits to golf courses, athletic fields, sod farms, and home lawns. One elderly woman in north central Wisconsin even paid him in cookies for driving 3 hours to look at her lawn, something I'm sure the industry in North Carolina would like to know. Jim has initiated numerous research projects that have benefited the state industries; including research into the basic ecology and pathogenicity of the dollar spot and anthracnose pathogens, novel fungicide strategies for reducing overall inputs, and a new characterization of rust pathogens that will greatly aid the sod industry. In addition, with the tireless promotional abilities of Dr. Kerns on the speaking circuit the TDL is quickly becoming known around the country as a fast, accurate, and unbiased source of diagnostic information for turfgrass managers.

Jim arrived at Wisconsin's small turfgrass pathology program in 2008. In just 5 short years, and with the help of numerous students and staff, he managed to transform it into one of the largest and most active turfgrass pathology programs in country. While I am sad to see him leave on December 15th, I am excited for the opportunities



Above: Dr. Kerns grooming future graduate students at a 'Grandparents University' event in 2010.

Below: : Dr. Kerns' speaking abilities has greatly increased the visibility of the UW turf program.



that await him at one of the traditional turfgrass powers at North Carolina State University. I think it's safe to say we will watch his progress closely, and take pride in the fact that one of the most well-known turf pathologists got his start working with the great turf-

grass industry right here in Wisconsin.

Oh and that first golf outing? I double-bogeyed the second hole, he had the lead by the third hole, and I'm not sure I've ever been in front of him since. At least he knew I wasn't hustling him. 