

The Next Chapter

By Dr. Paul Koch, Department of Pathology, University of Wisconsin - Madison

More so than most years, 2013 was a year of change for the University of Wisconsin's turfgrass program. We saw the departure of Dr. Jim Kerns, angst over whether his or Dr. John Stier's positions would be filled, questions over the future of the program, and even a change at the Turfgrass Diagnostic Lab as Bruce Schweiger was brought on to manage the day-to-day operations. As we close the book on 2013 and look towards 2014, I think it's safe to say

we can stop thinking whether our program will survive, and focus now on how it can thrive. Though this is not news to many of you, I am happy to report that I have accepted the position of Turfgrass Pathologist in the Department of Plant Pathology at the University of Wisconsin - Madison. I am immensely grateful for the opportunity to remain in Wisconsin and serve the turfgrass industry, and it is my great honor to step into the role that has been filled in the past so ably by Drs Worf, Maxwell, Jung, and Kerns (Figures 1-3). I look forward to working with all of you for many years to come, and am excited about the direction our program and our industry is headed.

Which begs the question, where are we headed? Will I be Kerns 2.0? Sadly, no, my golf game just isn't good enough (just kidding Jim). There will be differences, however, if only because the position is structured differently than the one Jim filled so well. In contrast to past turf pathologist positions here at UW, my position will have a teaching component, responsible for teaching the introductory and advanced turfgrass classes taught in the past by Dr. Stier. While I look forward to teaching these classes, it will likely limit the time available to make site visits and give seminars, especially during the fall months when class is in session.

This, however, does not mean you will be underserved. Most of my position remains based in extension, meaning that the majority of my time will still be focused on interacting with you. In fact, both Bruce and I are developing new platforms to stay connected with you at all times whether you like it or not. Despite being massively technologically challenged, both of us have joined Twitter® (my handle is @uwpaul and Bruce's is @BruceTdlbruce) and are tiptoeing our way into the social media waters. Bruce and I will also be developing Facebook® pages for both the TDL and Turf Pathology in the coming months and periodic blog posts posted on the TDL website discussing issues pertinent to turfgrass managers. In addition, look for the development of a more mobile-friendly TDL website (tdl.wisc.edu) and hopefully the development of a TDL 'app' for your mobile device in the months ahead.

As important as connections are, the foundation of any faculty position at the University of Wisconsin lies with its research. With the support of you in the industry, we have been able to conduct research investigating rust development on Kentucky bluegrass, pesticide fate on golf course turfgrass, the impact of winter covers on snow mold development, and the ability of bentgrass seed to serve as a source of dollar spot inoculum. Moving forward, we will continue to be responsive to the needs of the industry and will rely on direct and indirect communications with you for developing research studies in the future.



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With that said, my experience managing the TDL for 8 years has made me aware of how little we really know about certain diseases important to us as turf managers in Wisconsin. Diseases such as take-all patch, necrotic ring spot, and gray/speckled snow mold will all receive renewed attention so that we can more efficiently manage these diseases in the future. In addition, we will continue to conduct research focusing on the environmental impacts on pesticide efficacy to ensure that every pesticide application made is effective to its full ability.

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With all this talk about where we're going, it's important to take a quick moment to discuss how we got here. With a low undergraduate enrollment, turfgrass faculty positions at UW (or any university for that matter) are not ones that are automatically refilled by universities looking to make the biggest impact with the fewest dollars. So it is no exaggera-

tion to say that this position would not have been refilled without the support provided by the Wisconsin Turfgrass Association, the Wisconsin Sod Producers Association, the Wisconsin Golf Course Superintendents Association, the Northern Great Lakes Golf Course Superintendents Association, and numerous other individuals and organizations who wrote letters of support to the college urging the position be refilled quickly. If you have doubted the usefulness of these organizations, or wonder what benefits you truly get from them, this is a perfect example the power these organizations have to initiate positive change for the industry. I, for one, am grateful for all they have done in working to get this position refilled in such a timely manner.

Let me close my first *The Grass Roots* article as turf pathologist by expressing my immense personal gratitude to all of you for your support over the past 8 years. As a 22-year-old kid with only a summer's worth of diagnostic experience, it took a couple years to be comfortable providing you with confident diagnoses. Your patience and continued support allowed me to grow personally and professionally, and I believe has pre-



The author Dr. Paul Koch speaking at the 2013 Wisconsin Turfgrass Research Day

pared me to take over as the turfgrass pathologist. In addition, the level of support I received from the industry for my candidacy for the turf pathologist position was humbling and overwhelming. I feel forever indebted to you in the turf industry for providing such support both now and in the past, and I will work my tail off to make sure we provide you the support you need to do your job. The UW turf team is now in place for years to come, and I can't wait to see what we can accomplish with your support. Time to get to work. 



Figure 1: The modern history of turf pathology at UW can be traced back to Dr. Gayle Worf (middle) in the 1980's doing much of the early work on necrotic ring spot. Dr. Doug Maxwell (left) and Dr. Steve Millett (right) conducted turf pathology research on gray snow mold in the 1990's and also started the Turfgrass Diagnostic Lab.



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Figure 2: Dr. Geunhwa Jung brought conducted genetic-based research on gray snow mold and dollar spot in the early 2000's, and also convinced me to come to graduate school and manage the Turfgrass Diagnostic Lab. In hindsight, I'm glad I followed his advice.



Figure 3: Most recently, Dr. Jim Kerns brought an applied aspect to the position and a great ability to communicate with the industry. As my major advisor, I learned an immense amount from Jim.

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