

## Budget Dollars for 2014

By Bruce Schweiger, Turfgrass Diagnostic Lab Manager, O.J. Noer Turfgrass Research and Education Facility

Winter has been in Wisconsin with a vengeance for months. By the time you read this we could be within week or months of snow melt. That is what makes Wisconsin interesting. The time between snow mold applications and spring snow melt is when we all do most of our planning and define the ways we are going to spend our budgets. Many of you have submitted your budget and they have been either approved or are waiting for final membership re-newels.

How to spend the leaner budgets every year is a task that no one takes lightly. Every year there are new demands and new options for spending your budget, replacement equipment, latest equipment technology, new chemistries, irrigation software and hardware, or just more staff. Having been through this process many times I realize that there are many requests for your budget dollars. I would like to add another area where your budget dollars could be spent. Ok so, that was too many word to get to, why not be a Turfgrass Diagnostic Lab (TDL) Contract member?

The question is why should you spend your budget dollars to be a TDL Contract Member? I could show you the math on what it would cost to spray 25 acres of fairways with a mix of chlorothalonil and Tebuconazole, or what you could save with a proper identification of Brown Patch (*Rhizoctonia Solani*) so you do not make that *Pythium* spp. application, but Dr. Koch and Mr. Abler have so eloquently done that for years. I always looked at my contract in a different way and hope you will too.

It is late June and a golfer, board member, committee chair or supervisor comes up to you and says, "My lawn care company was out last week and now I have tan streaks in

my yard! What is it? Can you come by and tell me what they did wrong? I want my money back!" OK so we have all heard this or something similar or, "My yard looks bad can I bring you a sample to look at?" Now what do you do? Do you get involved between the lawn care company and the individual? Do you go look at the lawn? Do you tell them you don't have time? Many of you are shaking your heads and can remember these situations and some are even counting how many times a season this happens. The good news is they consider you their personal expert. We all know this can end with one of three scenarios, one you go see the problem and are the hero; two you go and tell them something they don't want to hear and third you do nothing. The first option is a perfect and you are their hero, but scenario two and three can be problematic. People will always remember if you are wrong, perceived wrong or they do not feel you are on their side. As Superintendents we all know that your job consists of multiple talents, agronomy, supervision, and most important public relations.


It is the Public Relations part of your job where the TDL can be of assistance. What would your member or golfer think if you offered to send that sample the University of Wisconsin Plant Pathology Department to the TDL for diagnosis? They could bring the sample to you, no time away from your work, either of you could send it in to the lab with the paperwork. When it arrives at the lab we will make the diagnosis and the proper recommendations. This becomes a win win for all parties involved. Just think of the conversation around the clubhouse after you share your professional expertise. The perception around the course, even to city, would be you are the MAN.

the TDL for accurate disease diagnosis on the course thus saving chemical costs, labor and best of all putting the least amount of chemical inputs into the environment. The TDL contract can be one of the best public relationships investments you can make. The contract is also an insurance policy for the future. Maybe this year you don't need it but sometime down the road it could come in real handy. Just like your automobile, homeowners and health insurance we all have it but hope we will never use it, but if we need it isn't nice that it is there and then the investment will seem very minimal.

The nice thing about TDL Contracts is they are sold in \$100.00 increments, so how much coverage do you need? For each \$100.00 you can submit one sample that year and receive a written report for your records. Without a contract the professional diagnosis and written report is a \$150.00. With each \$100.00 in TDL contract membership you can save \$50.00. One long time contract member says he keeps all the reports in a binder for future reference and to show his Green Chair and board the care he is taking of their facility. As a TDL Contract member you receive bi-weekly updates from the TDL on what we have been seeing in the lab or hearing about around the state, or forecast when we see a weather pattern that we think could cause some issues. This bi-weekly service is for contract members only!

A very successful Superintendent once taught me, and I paraphrase, "that with every year as a Superintendent you offend at least 4-6 people without even knowing it. Over time, let say 20 year you may have offended 80-120 people and they all could be board members or committee chairs." My point is, why take the chance that the favor or good deed you do today could create one of those unhappy people?

The TDL is one of the few turf specialized labs in the country and it is right here in your backyard. Let us be a service to you to enhance your course and your public relations campaign.

Think Spring! Keep an eye out for our Snow Mold Field Day this spring. 



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An added benefit is that you would still have the service for your own needs at the course. The next year you can discuss how you have used