

Gary R. Gaard, 1941-2014

By Dr. Paul Koch & Dr. Douglass Maxwell, Department of Pathology, University of Wisconsin – Madison

Editors Note: Gary Gaard passed away on February 27, 2014 at 72 years of age. Gary was a frequent attendee at WGCSA and WTA meetings and spoke on attracting bluebirds.

Gary Gaard was born and raised in Eau Claire, WI and attended the University of Wisconsin-River Falls, where he majored in agriculture. After his graduation in 1963, he joined the Department of Plant Pathology in the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences at the University of Wisconsin. During his early career he provided technical support to the virologists in the Department and skillfully managed the electron microscope facility for many years. The electron microscope was a new tool that allowed scientists to observe plant viruses, the minute details of fungal cells, and the physical relationship between pathogens and their hosts. Gary also provided training and support for many Ph.D. students.

One of these students wrote, "I have many good memories of Gary. He was a bit crusty and didn't take any nonsense, but did a lot of instruction and troubleshooting without any fanfare." Eventually descriptive research was superseded by molecular approaches, and the electron microscope facility was closed. Gary then provided administrative assistance to the Departmental Chair until 1995 when he joined the turfgrass program to assist Dr. Douglas Maxwell who was assigned to take over this program after the sudden departure of the turfgrass pathologist. Gary was a key member of the new TDDL (Turfgrass Disease Diagnostic Lab) along with Steve Millett. Gary handled all the homeowner samples and participated in the rating and management of the snow mold plots. Dr. Maxwell still remembers the spring of 1995 when the crew (Gary, Steve and Doug) went to Gateway Lodge at Land O' Lakes

and saw for the first time the destructive nature of the snow molds. Gary provided assistance to others who have come and gone: Jeff Gregos, Steve Abler, and Dr. Geunhwa Jung.

During the latter years of his career at UW, Gary developed a strong interest in assisting golf course superintendents with the knowledge and means to obtain Audubon Certification. His love of wildlife eventually turned to bluebird management. Gary retired in 2004 but continued providing management of bluebird trails on several golf courses. His article in *The Grass Roots* in the Nov/Dec 2010 issue is a handy reference for those who might want to consider starting or maintaining a bluebird trail.

During Gary's retirement he worked part-time as a naturalist at University Ridge Golf Course, where he interacted often with superintendent Jerry Kershasky.



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WISCONSIN PATHOLOGY REPORT


Jerry provided the following account of Gary's activities at University Ridge: "Gary Gaard was much more to us at University Ridge than a bluebird expert. He was our resident ecological restoration adviser, a go-to person to restore the natural systems of native prairie, wetland and oak savanna on the University Ridge property. Gary had a thorough understanding of the property at University Ridge from research into what this part of southern Wisconsin had been prior to European settlement.

He had a vision of restoring the open front 9 of the Ridge into a prairie and wetland, and the back 9 into an oak savanna. Gary had taken native and invasive plant inventories and had started to control the invasive species by mechanical cutting and herbicide applications. Last year he

mentored an intern from the UW Ecology Department, Dallas Lewallen, the UW football team starting center, on restoring the overall property to its original habitats. This was an interesting duo to watch, Gary at 5' 8" and 155 lbs and Dallas at 6' 4" and 325 lbs, with Gary coaching and pointing out how to go about what at times seemed to be an insurmountable task of restoration."

Jerry continued, saying "Gary introduced me to Dane County Naturalist, Wayne Pauly, who toured the property with us and pointed out that what Gary was doing and planning was the right course to take to restore the property. Wayne and Gary also suggested controlled burns for the prairie, wetland and the oak savanna. At this time I did not know you could burn an oak savanna and

have them survive and thrive. Gary connected with Jim Elleson of Quercus Land Stewardship who conducted our first burn on the oak areas we had thinned out surrounding the back 9 greens. Gary was devoted to the task of restoring the University Ridge property, educating us on what was here before Europeans arrived and why it would be ecologically helpful to return it as nearly as possible to that state. I think you could say Gary was Land Grant Extension work at its best. All of us at University Ridge will miss his friendship, naturalist knowledge and can-do attitude!"

The University Ridge Golf Course is not only a demonstration of what can be done to enhance the natural beauty of a course, but also is a lasting legacy to Gary Gaard who so loved nature. 



Gary Gaard discussing bluebird management to interested onlookers at the OJ Noer Turfgrass Research Facility.