



Terms of the Vernacular

By Rod Johnson



This issue's message is written at a time normally filled with great expectations of the upcoming GCSAA International Conference and Show. Travel plans have been in order for weeks; early-bird registration was sent almost six months ago.

The events of Mid-January have touched all of us. They have cast a somber shadow over our normally enthusiastic travel plans. At first glance, the glitz and glitter of Las Vegas hardly seems appropriate in the face of war.

Terms of our vernacular have included stimpmer, grain, verticut, blacklap and topdress. Recent environmentally-conscious times have introduced a new vocabulary that includes Haz-Com, SARA, UST and pesticide fate.

On January 16, we were tragically introduced to a new vernacular, the vocabulary of Operation Desert Storm. Overnight, our shop talk went from bedknives and reel stock to scuds and sorties. Our new national vernacular includes AWACs, tomahawks and patriots.

Each and every one of us has been affected by the events in the Middle

East. Conversations with many of you have revealed concerns for those directly involved. Family members, friends, employees and business associates have been pressed into active duty. The events in the Middle East have caused a galvanization of our pride in America.

I find myself joining most Americans and re-evaluating my priorities. If part of Saddam Hussein's apparent hatred for the United States included a plan to psychologically attack us by inducing guilt for conducting business as usual, it's working here.

The problems and frustrations of our industry now seem pale in comparison

to a war being fought on prime-time television. Our concerns about public perception, governmental regulation compliance and golfer demands have taken a step back.

The GCSAA International Conference and Show will be held, business as usual, but not without acknowledgment of the gulf crisis. Numerous editorials have been written citing the need to conduct business as usual. The game of golf, the basis of our industry, has long claimed to be a therapeutic diversion for a staggering number of people. Golf and our profession owe no apologies for their role in society. As professional superintendents, we owe our best efforts to our employers. Our best is enhanced by continued professional enrichment and involvement.

I sincerely hope that this message dates itself poorly, and that our thoughts have turned from Baghdad, Tel Aviv and Dhahran to Pebble Beach, Bay Hill and Augusta. Pray for peace.



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DANDELIONS

By Monroe S. Miller

*“Simple and fresh and fair from
winter’s close emerging,
As if no artifice of fashion, business,
politics had ever been,
Forth from its sunny nook of sheltered
grass—innocent, golden, calm as
the dawn,
The spring’s first dandelion shows its
trustful face.”*

—WALT WHITMAN

Walt Whitman obviously wasn’t a golf course superintendent. He couldn’t have been, not if he penned the lines above, which he called “The First Dandelion”.

I’ve always felt a certain kinship with Mr. Whitman; after all, he wrote the epic “Leaves of Grass”. That piece should be required reading!

There’s a contradiction here that Walt himself probably wasn’t aware of. Maybe that’s because he died in 1892, just about the time golf was getting revved up in America. It’s likely he didn’t play the game, and therefore never confronted a rough area loaded with dandelions gone to seed. The seedhead looks a lot like . . . a golf ball! Imagine that.

It’s pretty hard to manage a golf course and see any virtues in the dandelion. There is the seedhead problem of above. They are as prolific as nearly any other broadleaf weed we have to deal with; it is tough for a player to get a good lie in an area heavily infested with dandelions.

Once those seedheads have matured and the seeds are released, they are great travellers. And they aren’t very fussy about where they land. Dandelion seeds can germinate just about anywhere. They grow and prosper in places where practically nothing else will. We all know that from personal experience.

For those of us who prefer not seeing dandelions in our acres of grass, they present a tough battle and sometimes are nearly impossible to conquer. You cannot pull them out. They are anchored by an incredibly long central tap root that sometimes is as big as a healthy carrot. If you break the plant from the root, the root merely sends up a new plant.

You could, of course, dig them out. But some years, when the dandelion crop is good (or would that be bad?), it would be easier to hook up to a 3-16” bottom plow and turn the entire course over.

So we are pretty much left with herbicide control methods. They do a slick job in selectively taking dandelions out of a grass stand. It’s almost like magic.

There are problems with that, too. Two years ago my lectures about caution around trees—they are broadleaf plants just as surely as dandelions are—were taken to the nth degree. Last spring, when the dandelions reached their full bloom, it looked like someone had taken a giant-sized brush and painted bright gold around the base of every single tree on the golf course! It was awful; we spent a good bit of time cleaning that problem up.

The dandelion is usually the first flower to blossom in the spring, preceding even tulips and daffodils. They are also the last to flower during the growing season. I have, in fact, seen dandelion flowers in December on our golf course. No other “flower” in Wisconsin can claim anything close to that for a flowering period.

Some consider such extended flowering a virtue of the dandelion. For us, it is just one more reason why they’re such difficult competition. They are producing seeds for up to ten months out of a year.

Dandelions are kind of interesting though, from an academic view at least. They are members of the Composite family, which makes them relatives of daisies and sunflowers, goldenrods and asters. And of the burdock, which is a truly ugly weed. Composite describes the flowerheads, which are composed of many tiny individual flowers. When you snap off a dandelion blossom, you’re actually picking around 300 dandelion flowers (or florets). A single dandelion can produce many flowerheads at once—someone counted sixteen of them on one plant.

The leaves, which we’ve all seen growing in a circular pattern close to the ground, are the only plant part you see during the first year of a dandelion’s life. They are photosynthesizing all that first year to store carbohydrates for the next year and beyond. This is the time the dandelion is growing that huge taproot.

I know it’s tough if you are a golf course superintendent, but I’d like to suggest a bit of objectivity and ask you to consider the question: Is there, in fact, any virtue in the dandelion?

My answer is “yes”. Start with its intriguing name and the derivation of it. The French “Dent de Lion” is the source and it means “tooth of a lion”.

What other golf course weed offers as much to the palate as the dandelion? Many people use dandelion leaves in salads. They are iron-rich and have the spicy bite of chicory. One pound of dandelion leaves (raw) has 64,500 units of vitamin A, 50 percent more than a pound of carrots!

If you’d like, you can steam dandelion leaves and serve them just like you would spinach or kale.

(Continued on page 5)

*“I know that spring is here when the new grass is pinned to the hillside
with yellow pegs of dandelions.”*

—Arley Clark



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Nearly every amateur winemaker has, at one time or another, aged a batch of heady dandelion wine. Can that be said of plantain or knotweed?

It's tough to argue that the flower-heads aren't beautiful, simply because they are. It's the color—there's no brighter golden yellow. It's the shape—look at one under a hand lens. And when they turn into seed spheres, perfectly round and white, they are individually as delicate as a snowflake.

Maybe another reason it's difficult to conjure up enormous dislike of the dandelion is because they're so much a part of the outdoor life of children.

How many of you remember your mother holding a dandelion under your chin, seeing a reflection and telling you that "you like butter"?

How many times have your own children presented you with a beautiful albeit wilted bouquet of dandelion flowers?

Wasn't it even you who taught your kids to split the top end of the stem with a fingernail and watch it roll up into a curl? Or to cautiously pick a seedhead, hold it to their lips, blow gently and watch the tiny seeds drift around on their parachutes? How about the tale some children believe about blowing

off the down to see what time it is?

Did you ever hear anyone shout, "don't pick those dandelion flowers" to a child? Of course not. No wonder little kids like dandelions!

Could you actually say you don't enjoy this child's verse:

*Dandelion,
You'd make a dandy lion
With your fuzzy yellow ruff.
But when you're old
You're not so bold
You're gone with just one puff!*

Any plantsman, which includes all golf course superintendents, has to respect a plant that seemingly grows, voluntarily, almost anywhere—from sidewalk and street cracks to sand bunkers and forest floors.

One year quite a while ago, when my daughter Christie was three or four years old, she was helping me plant our garden. She heard all the lectures about straight rows, proper planting depth and correct spacing.

She reached into the lawn at the garden edge and plucked a dandelion blossom, asking, "did you plant this flower, Dad?"

"No," I replied. "They grow like that all by themselves. Pretty neat, huh?"

She agreed. It really is.

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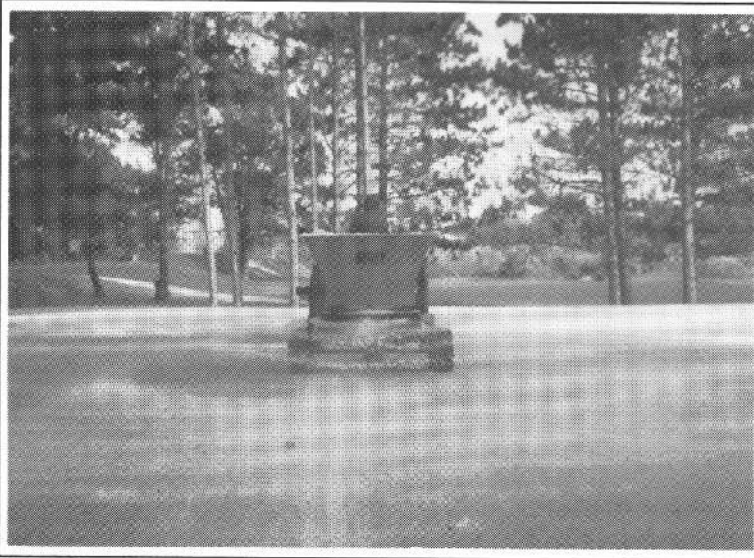
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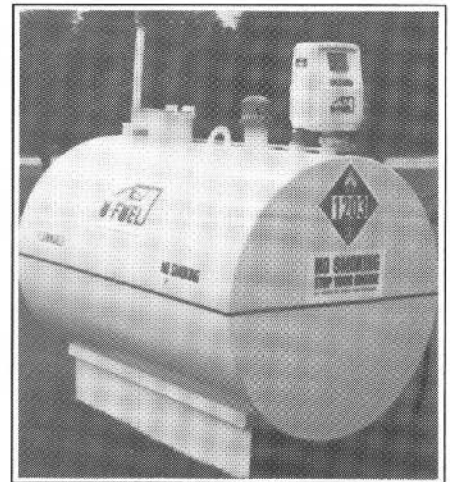
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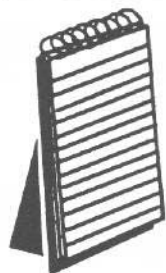


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A Somber Time

By Monroe S. Miller

So much of what goes on in our lives these days pales in significance when compared to all that is happening in the Middle East.

There are a few who argue there isn't such a thing as a good war. This one we are now engaged in is about as close as you'll come to one, from my view.

The fighting isn't about oil or invasions or Palestinians. It is about a horrible person who has to be stopped right now. Sometimes we have to do things like we are now doing.

So I am in full support of President Bush and our military leaders. And I'm really proud of the brave soldiers who are serving there.

Where I live, we're subjected to the rantings of some old, worn out hippies of my generation who are trying to relive the days of the war I had to serve in during the 1960s. They are pretty much being ignored. Frankly, I think they ought to hang their empty heads in shame.

My thoughts are with those so far from home, working to do what is right. So I send prayers for a safe return, advice to keep their heads down, and respect reserved for very few others. When they come home, the applause for them will be deafening.

It's pretty hard not to sense that spring is in the air. Warm and moist air is doing its darnedest to return to Wisconsin, despite the cold air that still has a relatively strong grip.

These opposing forces undoubtedly account for the windy days we have, as well as the wildly variable weather. You know, melt water on low fairways one day and brutal cold the next.

Like a lot of others, I am beginning to feel like Rob Schultz felt two months ago when he closed his SPORTS PAGE article with "The golf season starts again in Wisconsin in four months. I can't wait." Now we can measure the wait for opening day in weeks.

Suddenly, I'm ready for winter to end. The blue moon of the last day of 1990 and the white snow of the last few months interest me little; I'd rather see some green grass and pink blossoms.

And with the obviously longer days, green grass is only around the corner. We will have over 1½ hours more daylight at March's end than we have now at its beginning. The average daily temperature will rise by a good 11 degrees F.

After that we see April, a month we know belongs to golfers. After a long winter pretty much indoors, these people are enticed by the warmer temperatures to the places where we work. Gosh, it's good to see them again! Even the ornery of the ornery is in good spirits in April.

Well, most of the time in April.

There's never a lack of bad news when it comes to taxes in our state.

Lo and behold—the bad news continues. *MONEY* magazine's January issue again listed Wisconsin as a "tax hell" We have the dubious distinction of ranking No. 4 in the unfavorable category in terms of the tax burden on families.

Washington, D.C. was first, followed by New York and Massachusetts. After Wisconsin came Maryland at fifth. Bringing up the last five in the top ten were Hawaii, Utah, Idaho, Minnesota and North Carolina.

And the rankings didn't even include property taxes! I wonder if that little item had been factored in where we would have ranked?

A typical family income of Wisconsin pays \$5,494 per year in taxes.

Of course, the bureaucrats and politicians came crawling out of the woodwork whining about how unfair such a categorization is.

B.S.—facts are facts. And one very evident fact about this state is that the taxes are too damn high.

Remember this the next time an election rolls around and you decide

not to vote because the line at the poll is too long and you don't want to wait for 15 or 20 minutes.

That wait could be time well spent.

There was an interesting essay in the Monday, December 31, 1990 issue of the New York Times. It was a piece written by a gent named Stewart Edelstein in which he proposed a major overhaul in the calendar we now use.

I was especially interested because of the impact Stewart's proposal would have on the golf season life of a golf course superintendent.

"The calendar is an arbitrary clustering of days," he said. "It's a human invention. . . There is no reason to have 28 days in one month and 31 days in another month. What sense does that make?"

He proposed that each month be made up of four weeks that alternate between seven and eight days. That way there would be two three-day weekends each month, and our current holidays could be scheduled on those extra days.

If you do the arithmetic, you'll discover Edelstein's new calendar only adds up to 360 days. He solves that by calling for a five-day holiday at the end of the year.

"Hang on, there are other problems," you'll say.

Right you are. With 24 three-day weekends and five holidays, each year in this calendar gives us the equivalent of 29 holidays, far more than most employers currently allow. Stew would have employees make up the extra time by working one extra hour three days a week.

"By staggering the extra hour, we could reduce traffic jams and auto pollution," he said.

I'm not so sure that all of his proposals don't add up to just about as much confusion as the calendar we now have.

And although some aspects of it are appealing, can you imagine having a three day weekend every other week? It would be a golfer's dream come true—imagine the events—and a superintendent's nightmare—simultaneous two weekends a month.

Assuming an eight month golf season, that means we would face 16 three-day weekends. In a geographic

(Continued on page 9)



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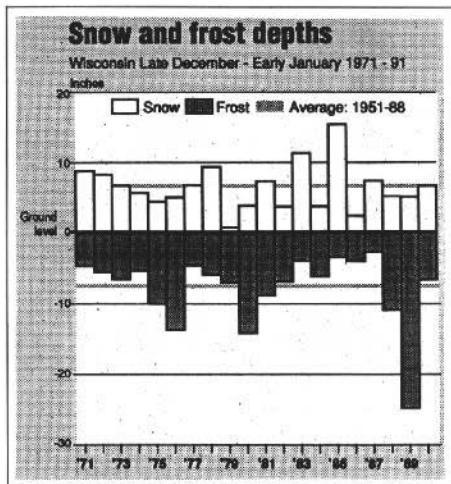
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(Continued from page 7)

region where golf is almost never played (seriously) at the end of the year, we'd be in a perfect position to accept the five-day holiday at the end of the year. I wonder what our colleagues in Florida and other southern states would do about five days of double time pay?

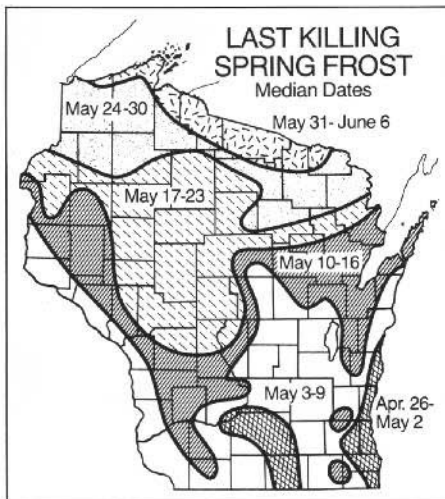
It is a safe bet that this calendar idea won't get much farther than the New York Times article. That may be best.

The Wisconsin Agricultural Statistics Service keeps track of some fascinating things, many of interest to us. The graph below shows the snow and frost depths for the past twenty years at mid-winter. Both appear somewhat "nor-



mal" for the 1990/1991 winter, a relief to nearly everyone. I've observed that golf course superintendents pretty much like normal weather.

For agriculturalists like us, the growing season traditionally begins after the last killing frost in the spring. From the Wisconsin State Climatologist Office comes the following graphic which shows when that median date for all of Wisconsin is. I'd love to map out, over a period of time, the correlation between the last killing frost and opening day. It would appear that opening day precedes the last frost by about a month.



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Robert Schmidt Receives NOR-AM Scholarship

John Turner, sales representative for NOR-AM Chemical Company, presented Robert Schmidt a \$1,000.00 scholarship at the Wisconsin Turfgrass Association Winter Conference held in Oconomowoc on January 8, 1991. Schmidt, a senior in turfgrass management at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, was recognized for his leadership and academic achievement. The annual scholarship assists turfgrass students in meeting their educational needs.



Bob Schmidt (L) accepts NOR-AM Scholarship from John Turner.



A Course Fit For A King ... And His Pocketbook

By Rob Schultz

Anyone who has waited impatiently for over three hours to tee off at any of Madison's incredibly busy public golf courses can hardly hold back their excitement to when the University of Wisconsin golf course opens this summer.

A great course. Open to the public. Well-conditioned. It's a dream.

Wake up sleepy head. Go back to Odana Hills. Unless you've got a fat wallet, this course is not for you.

That is the message the financially-strapped UW athletic department will be sending when officials there announce their greens fees plan sometime in mid-March.

Unfortunately, that is the wrong message. It'll cost the general public \$29 to play 18 holes during the week and \$35 on weekends. Most golfers will want to take a cart on the hilly, long layout and that will cost another \$9.

Do you think the wife will let you drop \$40—not including the losses from the \$2 Nassau—and play the UW course every Friday afternoon with the boys? Try it and you'll have to get a proctologist to extract your Ping from that funny-looking dark head cover.

UW athletic department officials, some of whom belong to swank joints because their business expenses pay for it, decided that they don't want to compete with the Odana Hills and Yahara Hills courses that attract golfers like Saddam Hussein attracts F-15s.

My question is "Why not compete with Odana Hills and Yahara Hills?" They are, perhaps, two of the world's most ordinary golf courses and they rake in immensely outrageous amounts of money each year. It's so disgusting that it's humorous. Golfers walk down the fairway constantly complaining about the courses' condition—especially at Odana—yet they plop down their \$10 to play it three or four times a week.

Imagine if they had a great course—open to the public and well-conditioned—to play all the time for like, say, \$20. Adios Odana and Yahara. The UW athletic department budget deficit would disappear in a snap.

But the UW doesn't see it that way. Quality is the byword these days at 1440 Monroe St. They want to make the course like 'da Bluff, or Nakoma, or—egad—Arizona Biltmore or Blackwolf Run. These are courses they can afford—or their department pays for—to play.

UW officials fear that it wouldn't be good for the course to be trampled a la Odana. So they jacked the prices for the average golfer so: No. 1, it won't be as busy. No. 2, it can compensate for the lack of traffic.

Unfortunately, the UW is going about it the wrong way. School officials are telling Madison area golfers that they don't understand quality; that they'd prefer to have their course filled with Chicago area golfers.

There is nothing wrong with trying to maintain a quality golf course. The trick is maintaining a quality golf course without upsetting the main client base. That's something the UW is failing to comprehend.

UW officials feel there is a niche for an expensive, quality course in Madison. I feel there is a niche for an affordable, quality course in Madison. The UW's version is easier to set up; just jack the rates. My version is more difficult.

When the UW course opens in late May or early June, it will come full of bells and whistles. There will be free golf balls for everybody who plays it, custom service fit for a king. But the poor servants who have suffered at the likes of Odana Hills for years and are yearning to play a wonderful course on a regular basis, the greens fees at the UW course will serve as huge moat to a castle filled with out-of-state golfers.



Brown Deer Park, one of the state's best daily-fee courses, learned a lesson the hard way.

In the process of a major renovation, Brown Deer was supposed to be closed for the season last Aug. 15 so it could be completely re-seeded with bentgrass.

But Milwaukee County Parks Department director Brigid Sullivan decided to keep the course open through Labor Day weekend to get some extra revenue and the completion of seeding was delayed about three weeks.

Unfortunately, the late seeding didn't fill in the entire course and portions of it must be re-seeded again this spring. This means that instead of opening in April as golfers were told to expect, Brown Deer won't open until June.

So, not only will that move upset Milwaukee area golfers, but the original plan to make some money by delaying the seeding two or three weeks will probably cost them more money because a full two months of revenue will be lost. Also, the Wisconsin PGA, which was supposed to operate the course for the county, pulled out and will not begin operations there until 1992.

"We understood we were taking a gamble... but I would assume that by the first or second week of June we are going to open at the latest," said Greg Youngs, the south regional manager for the Milwaukee County Parks Department who oversees the maintenance of its golf courses.



A new 27-hole golf course? A new practice facility with a bubble over it for year-round use? The completion of an executive 9-hole course addition at Yahara Hills?

Those are all some of the ideas City of Madison planners will be considering in the next few months as part of its future open space plan.

George Austin, the director of planning and development for the city, said a new city golf course—perhaps 18 or 27 holes—would be ideal to create open green space between the cities of Madison and Sun Prairie.

"I can't say it's likely or unlikely," he said. "It's just something we're taking a look at. If we think it's a feasible idea we'll look at potential sites."