

Favorite Varieties

By Monroe S. Miller, (with a little help from Rod Johnson)

I heard an excellent lecture this past winter given by Dr. Rich Hurley. He's the Director of Research for Lofts Seed Inc. and the perfect person to discuss new grass varieties that have reached our marketplace and are now available for our use.

I was listening closely because there seems little doubt that as the NOER Facility matures, it will play a bigger and bigger role in variety trials and evaluations. That is an exciting thought.

I was also paying particularly close attention because I do not stay as current on grass cultivar improvements as I do for, let's say, fungicides. Fungicides spell survival; variety differences are usually less critical.

I was listening closely because there has been such a huge introduction the past few years of different and new cultivars that I am sure I have missed a number of them.

And, as many of you know, Dr. Hurley is an especially good speaker with an easy style and very good slides to go with his lectures.

I have always liked Penncross creeping bentgrass, despite the criticism that it is too aggressive and tends to thatch up too quickly. Both have been minor problems in my experience.

Whenever I choose a specific Kentucky bluegrass, I select Midnight (terrific color) and Nugget (super winter hardiness) or a combination of the two.

On those rare occasions when I use a perennial ryegrass, I use NK 200 because of its supposed winter hardiness. Fortunately, I have resisted putting ryegrass on any important features. That winter hardiness, by the way, didn't hold up in my experience with NK 200.

Rich Hurley asked me why I was using a 40 year old bentgrass selection (Penncross was introduced in 1953). I had my reasons—all good, of course—but he then added there were varieties available with all the Penncross advantages, and more.

I knew that! Pat Zurawski did a variety experiment in our bentgrass nursery a few years ago and reported the results in *THE GRASS ROOTS*. Still, I stayed with the tried and true.

This all got me to thinking about what the favorite bents, blues and ryes being used on Wisconsin golf courses were. I also wondered if my colleagues were any more current on seed cultivars that I am. Sorry guys, you are not!

The following questions were asked by me at the USGA Green Section meeting at Westmoor Country Club and at the WGCSA spring business meeting in Fond du Lac. Rod Johnson asked them of individuals attending the Reinders Turf Conference in Waukesha.

1. Name your favorite bentgrass(es).

Penncross	27
Putter	3
Pennlinks	7
Penway	1
Penneagle	1
SR 1020	7
National	3
Seaside	1
Washington	1
Toronto	1

2. Name your favorite bluegrass(es).

Midnight	8
Nasau	3
Merit	2
Glade	1
Touchdown	6
Nugget	1
Park	2
Baron	4
Adelphi	1
Monopoly	1
Annual (!)	2
Blends - developed by Egon Herrmann, Olds Seed, Northrup King, Lesco, et. al. This was the choice of more than any single variety	10

3. Name your favorite ryegrass(es).

Palmer	4
NK 200	1
Yorktown II	1
Manhattan II	2
Fiesta	3
Citation	2
Derby	1
Pennfine	2
Dead (!)	2
Blends - developed by those previously named, et. al. and also the largest choice	5
NEVER use perennial rye	3

There are several obvious conclusions from this very amateur survey. One is that we know more about the bentgrasses than we do about the blues and ryes. All responses to bentgrass questions were quicker, more specific and required no coaching.

Secondly, there is so much less interest in the blues and ryes that most of us tend to purchase blends including these two species rather than specific varieties. There were some interviewees who couldn't name any specific bluegrass or ryegrass variety.

The reason seems obvious to me—golf course superintendents are more interested in golf course features than in anything else. Those features—greens, tees and fairways—are most often closely cropped and new seeding or reseeding by necessity is bentgrass.

Another clear conclusion is that very few of our members like ryegrass. Some loathe it.

Compliments to the two wise guys who said their favorite ryegrasses were dead, and the other two smart alics who said their favorite bluegrass was annual!

Seems we have an opportunity to use grass varieties to give us an edge in various areas of our operations.

All we have to do is learn a little more. 🍷

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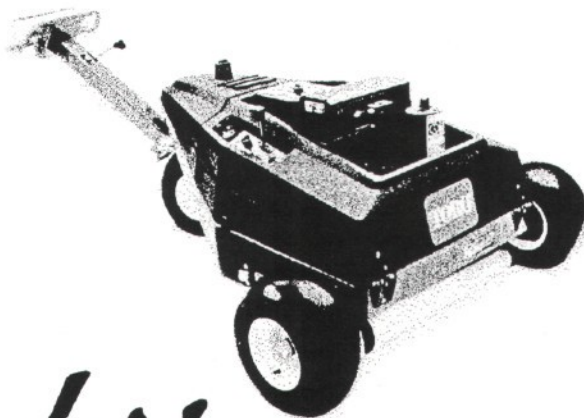
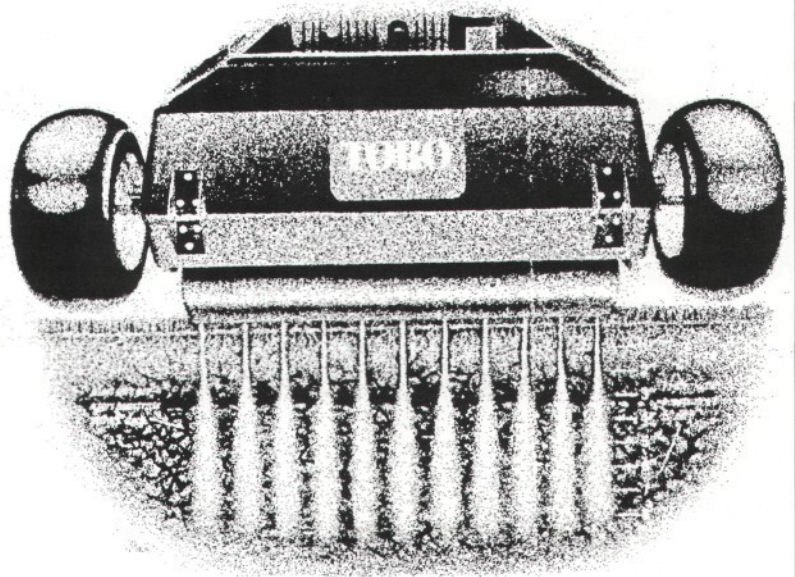
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NEW EMPLOYEES

By Monroe S. Miller

The rain was coming down in buckets as Oscar Bahl and I pulled into the parking lot of the Red Apple Restaurant.

Obey and I could barely hear one another. The sound of the pounding rain on the uninsulated sheet metal of my pickup roof was almost deafening.

It had rained all night in southern Wisconsin, and the intensity of the storm seemed to be increasing. All of the area golf courses were closed for the day.

In fact, we speculated that if someone from our city really wanted to play golf today, he probably would have to drive a couple of hundred miles. Most of the upper Mississippi River Valley was getting some precipitation.

Everybody was ready for this. It was the first time this season any courses had been closed, and the first time all the guys had gotten together since the WGCSA spring meeting.

Half a dozen familiar pickups told us that we were the last to arrive at the Red Apple. I dropped Obey off at the front door, parked, and dashed inside. I was soaked.

"You wouldn't have gotten as wet if you weren't so old and slow," laughed Jack Morley, the venerable golf course superintendent at the Blue Sky Country Club north of the city.

"I'll take you on in a foot race any day, John," I replied as I wiped the rain from my glasses.

The group around the three tables that had been pulled together shared a good laugh at the thought of such a sight. I couldn't blame them. But I still knew I could whip Jack.

"Hey, Obey," hollered Bogey Calhoun, "have you got a crew out shoveling sand yet?"

Bogey was chuckling about the fact that the Old Orchard Country Club had over 90 sand bunkers, including a ridiculous number of 16 on the fifteenth hole.

"Obey spends more money on sand than the rest of us do on grass," Bogey said, repeating a line we've heard him

use a hundred times when he is talking about Old Orchard.

Actually, Obey usually agrees with him.

"As soon as it stops raining, all of the rookies on my crew will be armed with shovels," he said.

"Rookies, huh?" questioned Tom Morris. "Do you actually punish new employees by making them shovel sand?"

"Well, it isn't really punishment," Obey replied. "But there's no better way for new crew members to learn what hard work and teamwork are than when facing an ugly job. You know, Tom, most of these kids who are new have never worked a job before and were sure they'd spend the summer on their butts on a mower."

It was still raining cats and dogs. That's probably why no one was in a big hurry to order lunch. In fact, it was a rare sight—Scottie Fennimore and Steady Eddie Middleton joining Billie Flagstick, Bogey, Tom, Jack and me for a round of Gartenbrau in the middle of the day. Nobody was going anywhere.

"We're turning beer to water," Bogey said.

It was one of those rare times when we all felt comfortable in closing our courses for the rest of the day. Tom recalled an incident from decades ago when he was an assistant golf course superintendent.

"The man I was working for closed the course for the day at 9:00 a.m. because of rain. He then left town. By noon the sun was shining, the wind was blowing and the proshop was full of players," Tom reminisced.

"It was also a Thursday," Tom added, "and conditions were very clearly improving by the minute. It was a damn poor time for the superintendent to be gone."

"So the green committee chairman and I opened the course. I have never forgotten the incident, and I haven't, in all these years, left town under those kinds of circumstances."

There wasn't any worry about today. And lunch at the Red Apple wasn't exactly the same as leaving town for the day, either.

The gray sky did nothing to dampen the chipper attitude that was reflected on everyone's face.

"I don't know about you guys," Obey said, "but I needed this break. We are still in a training mode and some days my nerves are frayed and frazzled."

"Same here," chipped in Eddie.

"New crew members are both part of the fun and part of the frustration of a golf season," philosophized Scottie. "Some have made me older than my years."

"Almost all the kids we hire are great kids," Billie chimed in, "and do great work for our course. But then there are those who are, well...you know." His voice trailed off.

"I gotta tell you about a kid who came in looking for a job earlier this spring," Tom said, already smiling.

"I interviewed him on a Friday, liked his background, and since I needed help, told him to report to work at 7:00 a.m. on Monday."

"We went over our rules and I **carefully** explained how to dress for work."

"I was a little concerned about dress because he came to the interview dressed in a coat and tie! For a minimum wage job! He seemed to understand, though—work pants, steel toed boots and a durable work shirt. I told him that blue jeans were a good choice of pants."

"Well, sure enough, come Monday morning, he was right there on time. In gabardine pants, a white dress shirt, wing tip shoes and a trench coat!"

"With his horn-rimmed glasses, slight build and neatly combed hair, he looked like Wally Cox!"

"What did you do, Tom?" came the chorus.

"Sent him home to get the clothes he was supposed to wear in the first place. He never came back."

Once the waitress had the lunch orders, we continued.

"I had a new employee this spring who decided to experiment with mowing techniques on a Saturday morning. He figured to save some time he would mow a pass, skipping approximately that width and mowing back the other way. His plan was that by mowing in such a circular pattern he would save time," Scott explained.

"When play caught up with him, he went to the next green, leaving the twelfth green with alternating five foot swaths of cut and uncut grass. I heard the howling clear down by the fifth green.

"Needless to say, there's one new employee who will never become a veteran," Scottie concluded.

"Talking about new employees and new techniques, you won't believe this," Obey said. "Fortunately, I caught him before he was too far along in his plan to replace the root zones in all of our greens.

"We trained this new kid to set cups right away. He was a pretty good player and understood the importance of the job. One of the first things he noticed was the 80/20 sandy mix we used to level cups and to topdress them.

"He was curious enough to ask why that material was different from the parent material in the greens.

"I gave him the short version of soil compaction, water infiltration, percolation and USGA greens. He was impressed with the science of it all.

"Nick Blake, my assistant, came up to me a few days after the kid had been cutting cups and told me to look at the places he was cutting the cup on the sixth green for the past week," Obey continued.

"So I took a cart out to the green and quickly could see what Nick had seen. The pattern was clear. He was alternating the pin between two places on the green. Each day's new cup was literally next to the one from two days previous.

"I was hot. He'd ignored the instructions we'd given about cutting cups. I knew damn well at least some of our players had noticed.

"I quickly drove over to the third green; everything was perfect. Same for the fourth and second and fifth.

"Then I started looking for the kid. I found him in minutes," Obey went on.

"What in the hell are you doing on the sixth green?"

"The kid was a little taken aback, not having seen me in the anger mode before," Obey continued.

"I was replacing the rootzone for you, Mr. Bahl," came the shy reply. "When I cut a new cup, I throw the native soil into the woods behind the green. I fill the old cup completely with the 80/20 mix.

"I calculated the area of each cup and the approximate number of times its changed in each year. It isn't inconceivable to completely replace the rootzone of a green in a few short years.

"The secret is to never put it in the same place. So to keep track of where I'd been, I was moving it a cup's width to the right each time. The sixth green was where I was perfecting my methods."

Obey paused, and then added, "the kid is majoring in engineering. Our only hope is he's interested in electrical engineering, not civil. He's dangerous with soil!"

Obey didn't expect that anybody was going to top this new employee experience.

"Speaking of danger," Jack piped in, "two of my new guys damn near got

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killed on Old Elm Drive day before yesterday. A Cushman wouldn't start so they got the bright idea of pull starting it. They'd seen Mike and me start a vehicle that way. "They started out in the shop yard, figured they didn't have enough room and drove out onto Old Elm Drive.

"I was coming home from the Farmer's Co-op and almost had an underwear problem when I got close enough to them to see what was coming down the road at me.

"It was easy to see when the one on the Cushman popped the clutch—tires squealed on the asphalt, the chain snapped and so did the kid's neck.

"The only funny thing was seeing Mike chasing them down the road on foot, screaming at the top of his lungs."

The waitress finally brought our meals. The Red Apple never has been known for fast service. Rainy days seemed to make it worse. Today, though, we didn't really care.

The talk about new crew members kept up.

The chronically good natured Bogey Calhoun was anxious to tell about another "new crew" and vehicles.

"This goofy new guy on our staff last summer, who was immediately enthralled with all the equipment in our shop, was given a chance to drive a tractor on his second day at work.

"He was sent out with a tractor, trailer and some small tools—a couple of shovels and some pry bars. His job was to cleanly excavate around a stump down in the low wet area of our course. It was way too soft to move a stump cutter down there, so we were going to cut the stump below the surface and backfill with soil.

"I drove down there after awhile to check on his progress. The closer I got the more I realized I was hearing a tractor working hard at a high rpm. There was no mistaking that sound for the relative quiet of hand tools.

"When the kid came into sight, I could see him bouncing up and down on the tractor seat. The engine was roaring and the big turf tires on the rear were spinning and throwing black mud absolutely everywhere. But the tractor wasn't moving. I could see there was a log chain wrapped around the stump and hooked to the drawbar.

"I raced up screaming 'what the hell are you doing?'" Bogey was laughing now.

He clutched, idled the engine down and calmly turned the engine off," Bogey continued.

"He seemed a little surprised, but calmly replied 'I'm going to yank this stump out for you, Mr. Calhoun, and save you the hassle of coming down here with a chain saw.'"

"I didn't have the heart to destroy the kid's initiative," Bogey went on, "but he didn't get any vehicle to drive for quite some time."

We were all done eating, and the rain continued. Dark skies gave no clue as to when it would stop raining.

But that was okay. The respite from work and the socializing had a mild healing effect on our psyches.

"I defy anyone to top this," Eddie Middleton offered as the waitress brought the apple pie sidedressed with a big slab of Wisconsin cheddar for dessert.

"Talking about tractors reminds me of a kid on his first day of work a few years ago.

"He was a city slicker through and through. He hadn't even cut his old man's lawn with a lawnmower. But I hired him because another on our crew knew him and said he was 'a great guy,'" Steady said.

"He had a driver's license—a prerequisite for everybody I hire—and I needed some grunt help. He also lived close by, something that is usually a plus. That was the last time I ever used those criteria for hiring, by the way," Steady continued.

"My assistant gave him a lesson on how to operate a Ford 2110 tractor—a simple and straightforward proposition.

Or so I thought. He then sent the kid out with instructions.

"Two minutes later, we heard a godawful racket in the shop yard and ran out to see what it was."

Steady Eddie was chuckling now. "The kid started out with the tractor in first gear. He wound it up, ground it into second gear. He pulled the throttle clear back again and ground into third. We caught him just as he was trying to shift into fourth, and put a stop to his driving reeeal fast."

Dessert was followed by another round of Gartenbrau. Except for Obey. He insisted on a sloe gin fizz. More stories about rookies on golf courses came out.

Despite the dark skies and the work awaiting us the next day, we were having fun. The talk about funny new guys kept smiles on faces that normally are pretty serious this time of the year.

And we all agreed that new employees on our crews were responsible for gray hair and nervous moments.

But no one argued that on the other hand, these same kids were also responsible for keeping us younger in spirit.

Their enthusiasm and happiness and optimistic outlook rubbed off onto us. We were better for it, despite some tense moments.

For most of them, this innocent time in their life, a summer on one of our courses will be a sweet memory that will last a lifetime. With that, we pushed our chairs from the table, left a tip and tromped off to the home fires. 🍷

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Remaining Teachable

By Dr. Frank Rossi
Department of Horticulture
University of Wisconsin-Madison

I had hoped to fill this month's "gazing space" with a scientific article, loaded with facts for you to sink your teeth into. The traveling pace has been frantic; you know when you see Wayne Otto four out of five days in one week you are traveling too much! Yet, as this month's title suggests, there are always new experiences around each corner from which to learn, if I choose to remain teachable.

Golf course superintendents in Wisconsin are a virtual wealth of practical experience when it comes to what works and doesn't work when growing grass. Still, we struggle with lingering concerns regarding winter injury, disease management, and maintaining environmental quality. I have been impressed with many of the innovative strategies employed by many of you and your willingness to consider alternative management options.

However, many remain ignorant of today's concerns and closed minded towards tomorrow's solutions. This is the group I worry for. They're not interested in continuing education, will pay lip service to research, but do not support it. And unless it impacts their track of land, it doesn't concern them. I read the other day in the *NY Times* about a retired civil engineer in Canada who was a member of an environmental group trying to block the development of a sensitive area. He said, "The problem is man's life span. If we lived to be 600 years old, everyone would be an environmentalist".

As a scientist, I am charged with investigating certain topics in my discipline. This requires a full understanding of the scientific literature on which you base the hypothesis that you design your experiment to address. Sounds fairly straight forward, until I traveled around the state with scientists like Julie and Wayne, who have not been indoctrinated into the turf industry. I realized how much of what I have carried with me over the years as a golf course manager was either based on work from 40 years ago or was hearsay from some conference proceedings which was never held up for scientific scrutiny. In looking back through the turf literature, it was apparent that there are many gaps in our understanding of basic turfgrass biological principles.

We are a profession which has been driven by practically-minded individuals to address management concerns and, in my opinion, we have not always been asking the right questions. So, I come to you today a scientist who must re-think much of the dogma, and as Joe Vargas would say, "folklore," that our management practices are based on. If you want an example of what I mean read Wayne Kussow's 'cultivation' article this month. I welcome the opportunity to approach my discipline from a new perspective, but first I have to go back and re-evaluate those "scientific" facts I learned during my development as a golf course manager.

Do you? I hope you all and I can remain teachable! 🌱

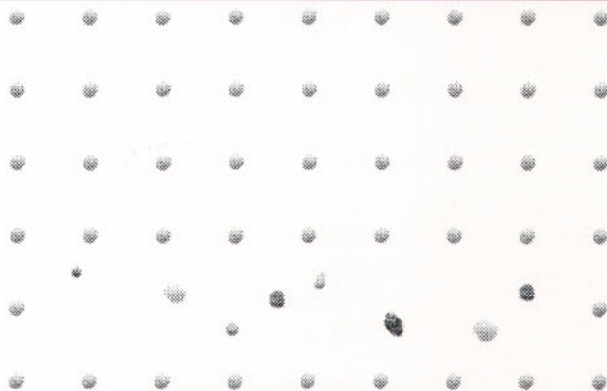
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SUPPORT GROWING FOR PESTICIDE EXPOSURE STUDY

By Monroe S. Miller

The decision last year by the GCSAA to initiate a study on the effects of pesticide exposure is gaining wide support as more and more people learn about it and the details of how it will be conducted.

Given the suspicion a lot of citizens have concerning pesticide issues, the tact is to address those suspicions head on and learn, to use plain language, what causes death among golf course superintendents.

As Bill Roberts pointed out last year while he was GCSAA president, nothing could hurt the game of golf more than if players believed the game might be dangerous to their health. Science can demonstrate to them and to the public that golf courses are safe and healthy places. But somebody has to pay for the science. Therefore, fund raising for the pesticide exposure study takes on major significance.

This study will examine causes of death among GCSAA members over the past several years. Records will be studied and compare illnesses among golf course superintendents with the national average and possibly with "control groups" of people who have never been exposed to turf pesticides.

The University of Iowa's College of Medicine was selected to conduct this important new study of occupational exposure among our members. The initial phase will focus on superintendents because we are typically exposed to both concentrated and diluted pesticides throughout our careers.

Depending on the results of this phase, later studies may examine health trends among living superintendents, their employees and even golf players.

Dr. Burton Kross of the University of Iowa Medical School's Institute of Occupational Health will head up the

study. Dr. Kross and his team are widely considered to be the foremost epidemiological researchers in the country when it comes to pesticide exposure. He is also leading a 10-year EPA/NIH study of urban pesticide exposure, indicating that we probably couldn't have a better group working on our behalf.

The work is already underway. The Iowa group has received GCSAA's extensive records of members from the past 25 years, and expect to have the work done next January. Results may be reported at conference in Dallas in February.

The funding is being handled by the GCSAA Scholarship and Research Fund, and they are looking to golf course superintendents from all across the country for financial support.

Rod Johnson has taken the lead in our state. As you know, the signs now required by the State of Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection were made available through Rod and the WGCSA. Any profits from that effort will go toward the funding of the study.

Rod has also gotten the support of the Greater Milwaukee Area Country Club Association. Members clubs are showing their concern by contributing to the GCSAA S&R Fund in the sum of \$250. Full support will add significantly to the Wisconsin effort.

Everyone in the golf community, but especially golf course superintendents, should get behind this research. It's a project that will benefit everyone. So if you did not purchase signs from the WGCSA or if your employer is not a member of the GMACCA, consider independent support.

If you have any questions, contact Rod. His leadership on this issue should be appreciated by all. ♣

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Pesticide Use Forum Highlights Spring Educational Meeting

By Pat Norton

Three great speakers, one no-show, some interesting questions, and great discussion highlighted the WGCSA Spring Educational Meeting on March 22 in Fond du Lac.

The speakers for the "Pesticide Use Forum" (arranged by Scott Schaller and the hard-working Education Committee) included Dr. Frank (don't call me Dr.) Rossi, Mr. Tom Dawson, and Dr. John Harkin. Our super-serious moderator, Mike Semler, presented these three gentlemen with ten different prepared questions concerning pesticides and their use in Wisconsin.

Much to the surprise of all present, there was very little controversy and nary a voice raised in anger as these three discussed the pro's and con's of pesticide use. All three were reasonable in their arguments, with only good natured bantering back and forth among the speakers.

It is too bad that the fourth panelist could not attend the meeting. Carryl Terrell of the Sierra Club was scheduled to be the fourth voice on the podium, but for whatever reason, could not attend. It is regrettable that she wasn't there. Attendees were most interested in hearing her viewpoints. It would have been good for her to hear our opinions also.

The major theme of the discussion was that through communication and open-mindedness pesticide use and other environmental issues can be discussed in a rational, productive manner. These discussions are becoming more commonplace as people learn that professional user groups such as the WGCSA are indeed interested in protecting our natural resources.

Following a hearty luncheon, the Spring Business Meeting of the WGCSA convened. Items of interest were as follows:

- President Bruce Worzella gave us all an inspirational message on the value of the WGCSA and of being a participating member.
- Secretary Mark Kienert reviewed BOD actions since fall '92. Kienert is one thorough dude — I'd forgotten most of what he mentioned.
- Treasurer Tom Schwab presented a '92 financial statement and a '93 operating budget. No problem there whatsoever.
- Vice-President Mike Semler stated in no uncertain terms that membership applications must be completely filled out—no more SAME scrawled across the application. Those who fill them out in that manner in the future will have that simple word printed across from their name in the directory.



Talk about a group of veterans—25 year plaques were presented to L to R: Jeff Bottensek, Wayne Otto, Larry Karel and Tom Harrison. Congratulations!

- Twenty-five year members recognized at the meeting included Larry Karel, Wayne Otto, Jeff Bottensek, and Tom Harrison. All four had to be helped to the podium and propped up in order to take their photograph. Roll on, senior citizens!

- The S&R committee presented the 1993 scholarship and research proposal for membership approval. The disbursements, passed by the WGCSA membership, are as follows:

Wisconsin AgriBusiness Council dues	\$200
J.R. Love Scholarship.....	\$500
WTA Contribution	\$8,000
<i>(This represents a \$1,000 increase over '92 spending—it's earmarked for golf turf research at the O.J. Noer Center)</i>	
USGA Research Fund.....	\$1,000
O.J. Noer Foundation	\$1,000
WTA Golf Outing Hole Sponsorship	\$100
FRoWT Donation.....	\$800
TOTAL	\$11,600

- The membership voted on and approved a \$10 annual dues increase for all membership categories to be effective when paying '94 dues. Considerable debate preceded this vote—it was not done in haste.

In summary, the Spring Meeting was great. If you missed it you a) were truly too busy to attend the meeting, or b) are just a deadbeat who doesn't want to be active in this association. Take your pick.

Thanks to the speakers, the Education Committee, and those members in attendance for helping get this WGCSA meeting season to a really great start! 🍷



The audience at the environmental forum was formidable in size, indicating serious concern.



Forum participants were, L to R: Dr. John Harkin, Tom Dawson, Dr. Frank Rossi and Mike Semler.

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