

The Grass Roots

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About the Cover:

Tom Schwab, new director of the O.J. Noer Turfgrass Research and Education Facility.

Cover artwork by professional illustrator Jennifer Eberhardt.

"Oh Winter, ruler of th' inverted year,
I crown thee king of intimate delights,
Fireside enjoyments, home-born happiness,
And all the comforts that the lowly roof
Of undisturb'd retirement, and the hours
Of long uninterrupted evening know."

— William Couper
from *The Task IV*, 1785

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(Left to Right) Bruce Worzella, Scott Schaller, Mike Handrich, Mike Semler, Mark Kienert, Tom Schwab, Kris Pinkerton, Dave Brandenburg, Joe Kuta.

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REFLECTIONS

By Michael Semler



The 1994 Wisconsin Golf Turf Symposium appeared to be another large success. The topic "Golf in 2010" was insightful enough and inspirational enough to keep all golf course superintendents thinking about what our future as professional managers of turfgrass may hold. Sometimes in our jobs and personal lives we may forget to look beyond the day-to-day activities and into our futures. I hope the Symposium answered some of the questions you may have had about our profession and its future.

However, with the new year upon us, it made me realize that in addition to looking into the future, we must also pause and reflect upon our past, not just the past year, but maybe the past 15 or 20 years. For

as important as it is to plan for the future, it is just as important to look at the past to gain an understanding of our accomplishments both as individuals and as an industry.

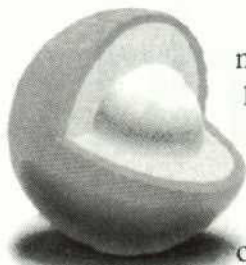
All too often (and I am as guilty as the next person) we tend to feel like the donkey chasing the carrot at the end of his nose. We tend to concentrate so much on setting and achieving goals, that we forget to realize how many goals we may have met or accomplished in the past. Or in other words, in our effort to keep up with the Joneses, we forget to realize all that we have accomplished.

I think it is important for all of us to take a look back at our accomplishments in both our work and our personal lives. It can put many things in perspective, and may even

provide some surprises as well. And this time of year, with the end of the golfing season and the New Year upon us, seems to be a good time to pause and reflect.

I would be mistaken if I did not take a few moments to say thanks to a pair of departing WGCSA board members. Both Tom Schwab and Bill Knight have departed the board after donating so much time and effort to advance our association. We should all be thankful for individuals like Tom and Bill, who generously donate so much to the members of the WGCSA with little or no reward other than personal satisfaction. It is people like them, and the countless others before them, who have made our association what it is today. 🍀

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Grand Finale, A Wonderful Start

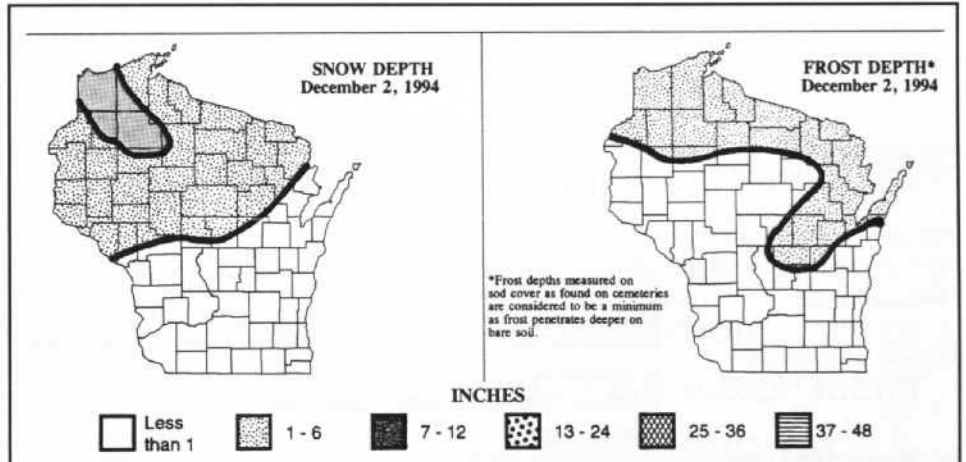
By Monroe S. Miller

I started these lines in the last issue of THE GRASS ROOTS with a lament about our short Wisconsin autumns — usually two months — and our long winters — nearly four months. It was a wasted lament.

The year 1994 ended in a manner that was even better than it began. In our town we had the longest, warmest, grandest and loveliest fall season I can remember. It was a wonderful time to work on a golf course. Jobs that needed doing finally got done, without interference in most cases.

The December 2nd temperature here hit 55 degrees F.! Players had so many bonus days I am convinced some actually grew weary of the game. We had only infrequent rain, just enough to keep grass healthy but not enough to slow us or our employers.

The weather was so good in Madison that we broke the all-time late snow record. The latest point in the year on record for no snowfall was set on November 26, 1902. The record held firm until this year, close to a century later. The killing frost held off too, until that record was threatened. A difference of definition of killing frost between the state climatologist's office and the National Weather Service moves me to stay out of a fray. By any definition, it was late.



I heard only modest complaining about the lack of snow, and it came from deer hunters. But so many I know filled their tag that even their grousing was shortlived.

It seemed fitting that autumn finally did end abruptly; by December 6th we had a foot of snow on the course. Dreams do come true!

Golf course superintendents have a lot in common with farmers, too often looking for some bad news when there really isn't any. Production agriculture in Wisconsin had a bin buster of a year, bringing smiles to producers' faces, along with "corn prices won't amount to much." This is once, however, when I haven't heard a single WGCSA member wish for something other than the year we had.

Here it is in a nutshell: if superintendents and golfers weren't pleased with weather conditions in 1994, they NEVER will be!

Our final soil moisture report from the Wisconsin Agricultural Statistics Service appears here, showing soil moisture conditions around the state on November 18, 1994. From now on we will be talking about snow and frost depths here and there in Wisconsin. The reports are gathered from grave diggers in Wisconsin and are valuable information as we record yet another cold, winter season.

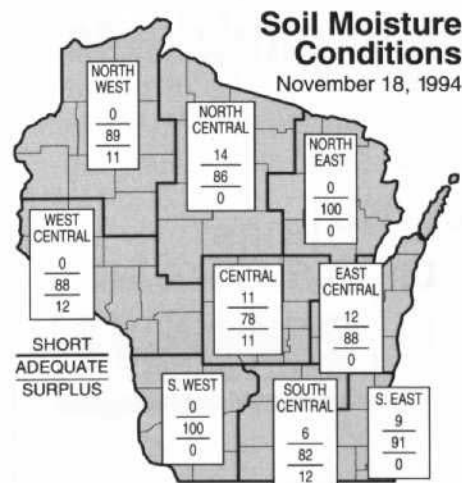
Unfortunately, I am going to miss the WTA winter meeting for the first time ever, and that pains me no small amount. We will be at the Hall of Fame Bowl in Tampa on January 2nd, along with lots of other Badger fans. It was a great fall to enjoy football in Camp Randall in 1994, even if some of the games were frustrating (Purdue and Minnesota come to mind immediately). But I've been going to them since 1964, and in that time context, 1994 was a glorious season.

Worse than the tie and the losses was the conduct of some of the players. It is hard to imagine why some were involved with drugs. The cartoon Rod Johnson sent me summarized it best; Bucky was up against a wall, cops were there with guns drawn and the caption was 'Say it isn't so, Bucky'.

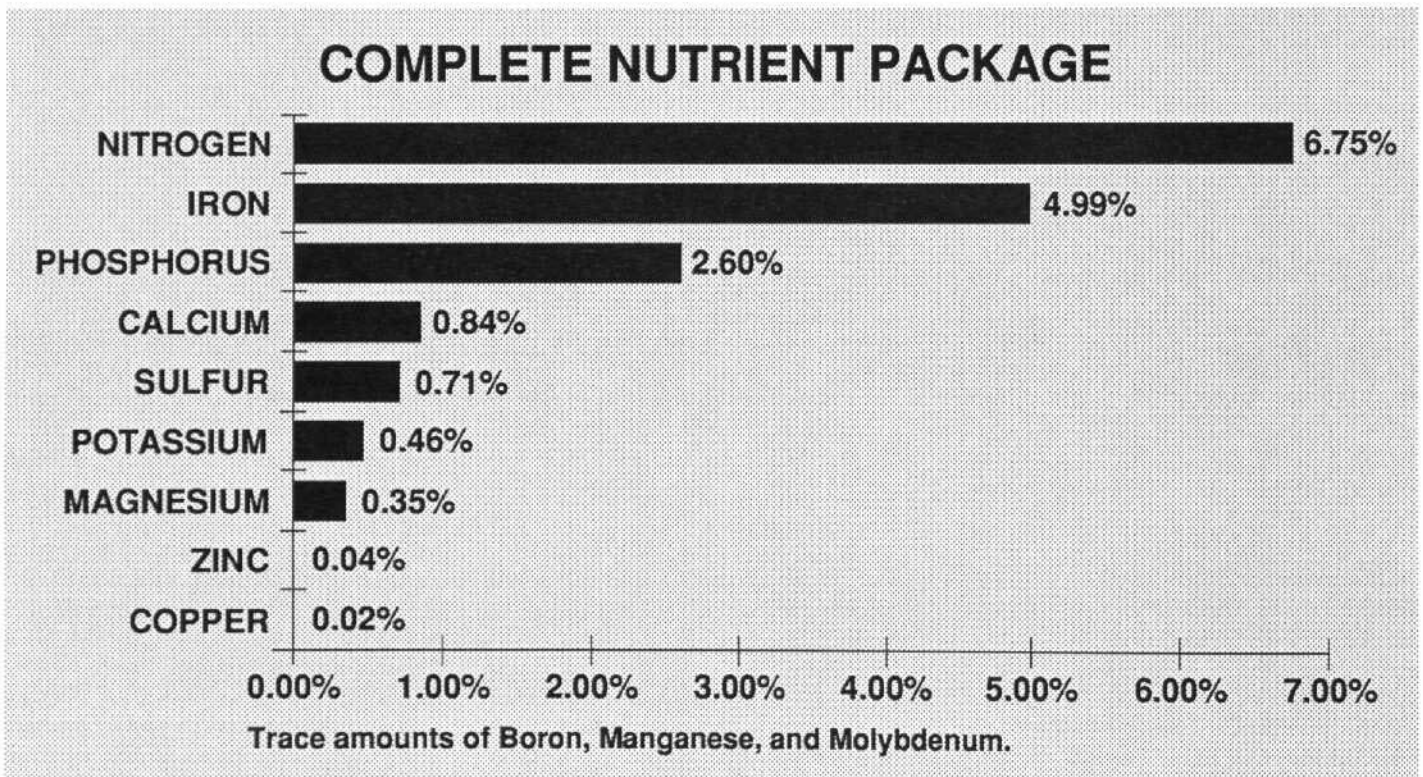
Pretty sad. You have to hope it isn't the price paid for a successful program. Barry Alvarez has made it pretty clear that he won't put up with any more of it.

Madison has been an especially fun place to be since the November elections. Some are still whining and wringing their hands and offering up dire

(Continued on page 7)



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(Continued from page 5)

warnings of pending disaster. Every day is a holiday when it comes to reading letters to the editor and editorials in the city papers. My advice to the disbelievers is simple — get used to it; there's likely more to come.

Everybody has their own idea as to what it all means and their own "spin" to offer. Here's mine.

The election proved there is still a mainstream America. It pays the bills and is finally, at long last, beginning to demand some responsibility in return. Its patience is worn out, and it is sick of a big, clumsy, unresponsive government run by deaf politicians and rude bureaucrats. It wants less government, not more. Fewer government workers, not more. Lower taxes. Less waste. Less interference.

Maybe mainstream America, who goes to work everyday and comes home tired, is disgusted. Not mean spirited. Not heartless. Not devoid of compassion. But for sure frustrated by

the lack of accountability on the part of too many. Everything from farm subsidies to rich farmers to welfare payments for irresponsible single parents to absolutely gross waste by the Defense Department is driving mainstreamers crazy.

It seems I can sense resentment for a leader who sends the country's sons to war and decides who can serve on what terms but dodged the draft himself. There is similar feeling in some mainstreamers about the first spouse who thinks she knows what is best for us, but clearly doesn't. Witness the health care fiasco.

Mainstream Americans cannot see the need for illegal immigration, midnight basketball or severely restrictive gun control. It believes the concepts of right and wrong, legal and illegal, shouldn't be that difficult for any citizen to grasp.

The election is giving a new group of politicians the chance to change things for the better. They don't have much time.

And my guess is they will be given little room for error or they will be out, too.

Finally, those attending the GCSAA conference will have the pleasure of seeing a good Wisconsin native receive the association's Distinguished Service Award.

Dr. Milt Engelke, professor of turfgrass breeding and genetics at Texas A & M, is a native of Grant county and a graduate (B.S. degree) of Platteville. He received his M.S. and PhD from the University of Wisconsin - Madison. He's spoken from one end of the country to the other, and was featured at our EXPO 94 last year.

His bentgrass breeding program and his work developing 'Prairie' buffalograss has put him in special company that includes O.J. Noer and J. R. Love. He has earned the award and our congratulations. 🏆

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The Real Thing! The New O.J. Noer Facility Manager— Tom Schwab

By Dr. Frank Rossi

If you were walking down the street and bumped into Tom Schwab, the first thing you'd notice is his smile. The new manager of the O.J. Noer Facility is the epitome of the mid-westerner; friendly, mild-mannered, easy-going and compassionate. He is such a likable guy that a sarcastic New Yorker like me thinks he must be up to something. Yet, I know he's the real thing.

Tom was born and raised less than a mile from where I live today, near the Glenway golf course on the near west side of Madison. His mom was a nurse and dad a mailman; they still live in the house he was raised in. One thing about this area is the feeling of an old-fashioned neighborhood, where people are close knit, making up the fabric of a unique Madison community. Tom has two brothers and a sister spread out from McFarland to Dubuque to Denver.

Tom demonstrated consistency at a young age by attending Edgewood School from Kindergarten through High School. Then life became an interesting journey. First, by his own admission, a *ski-bum* in Utah, odd carpentry jobs, real estate, and then finally to the UW-Madison for Forestry. While Tom was in school, he moonlighted as a cab driver (of course, as a New Yorker I was interested in this professional experience). One night while taking a fare, he was held-up at gun point and the person made off with about \$10. Ironically, a few months later, the same person got in the cab to be delivered to the same stop. Tom opted to let him go.

It was in 1979 when Tom went looking for a major that made sense at the UW. Dr. Love must have been waiting for him, just as he waited for a generation of turf majors in Wisconsin. Tom worked at Sun Prairie Golf Club with Dean Scott Russell and then followed the path to Blackhawk CC from 1980-83. A few years were spent becoming indoctrinated at the hands of Monroe Miller and then to South Hills in Fond du lac with Pat Norton. Together these men guided Tom with keen agronomic skills and professional integrity. By the end of 1983, Tom was ready, and Monroe Country Club in Monroe found the real thing.

During his years at Blackhawk CC in Madison, Tom met Diane, whom he would marry in 1988. Diane was completing her Ph.D. in International Education that included a 6 month stint in Africa working with the Peace Corp. Today, Diane is on the staff at the UW in the College of Education. Tom and Diane live down the road from the Noer Facility in Verona with their two daughters Maimoona and Lauren. Maimoona is in high school and Tom simply says she's great; filled with integrity, responsibility and compassion. Lauren is 4 and, having met her, not only does she win you over with her smile (like her Dad), but she loves to play and kid around.

Tom remained Superintendent at Monroe Country Club for 10 years, yet he's always lived in the Madison area and commuted 40 minutes each way. When he arrived at Monroe



Both Tom and Diane are serious skiers.



Tom's family, relaxing at home.

CC, there was no budget and still today he says things are very informal. He loves the layout of the course and the regular challenge of providing a high quality golf course on a modest budget. Anyone who has attended a WGCSA meeting that was hosted by Tom knows how beautiful the place can look.

The one thing I've noticed about most golf course superintendents who enjoy their work is their love of the variety of tasks, plant material and people they encounter. Tom is no exception. And his personal life is no different. He has competed in 10 straight Birkebeiners (cross-country skiing over a 35 mile course), sailboards on the Madison lakes and enjoys volleyball as a player, referee and spectator. His most favorite activity is swimming with the women in his life, especially Lauren.

During the search and interview process that included candidates from several states, Tom provided some progressive ideas for the future of the Facility. He mentioned getting the Facility involved and certified in the Audobon Cooperative Sanctuary Program. He listed several strategies for improving public access to the Facility via tours and demonstrations. Still, the one thing that excites the UW Turfgrass Group is Tom's practical ability and professional insight into growing grass! And when it comes to someone who knows how to grow grass, Tom's the real thing. 🌱



Pilgrimages for Golf Course Superintendents: LATROBE COUNTRY CLUB

By Monroe S. Miller

For forty years Arnold Palmer has been an all-American hero. No one has held him higher, liked him more or extended more respect than I have. Golfers and non-golfers alike have revered him and his strong values, his bold go-for-broke style that was his signature and his respect for those who made him what he was—golf fans. He has been an exemplary, eminently commendable individual of great accomplishment.

Latrobe Country Club has been associated with Arnold Palmer from the very beginning of his career. It was to him like the Milwaukee Braves were to Eddie Mathews, the Green Bay Packers to Vince Lombardi and the Yankees to Mickey Mantle.

Yet this association was somewhat unique. For example, can you name the golf course Jack Nicklaus or Sam Snead or Byron Nelson grew up on? It is likely there is not another golfer whose name and a golf course are so closely related as Arnold Palmer and Latrobe Country Club.

It was only after I had become interested in a career as a golf course superintendent that I learned why Latrobe CC was so important to Arnold. His dad, Milfred "Deacon" Palmer, was the heart of that club. He was the superintendent and golf pro at LCC for 55 years, from 1921 until his death in 1976.

Arnold Palmer was guided by a wise, strong and principled father. Deke worked alongside his employees and respected them, believed in God, loved his country, respected all people and possessed great humility. It is no wonder his son found ready acceptance by Americans.

Deke gave his children—Arnold was one of four—limits on the Latrobe golf course and at the club. They couldn't swim in the club pool, and his very talented son wasn't allowed on the course when member play was heavy.

It seems to me a good bit of Arnold's appeal was his

humility and a commoner touch, a grasp of his own roots. He is the kind of guy most would like to drink a beer with.

Arnie bought Latrobe Country Club in 1971 and his father continued on as the pro and the superintendent.

The GCSAA recognized Deke Palmer when Arnold was chosen as the first Old Tom Morris recipient. Deke's picture was on a cover of *Golf Course Management* magazine, as I recall.

Is it any wonder I have wanted to visit this golf course for thirty years?

The day I finally made the pilgrimage to Latrobe Country Club was a perfect day. It had rained the entire day previous, giving my visit a high, bright and blue sky. It was cool, around 50 degree F for a high temperature, and there was no wind. It was the kind of day golf course superintendents dream about.

I took a route that passed beneath the Oakmont CC bridge over I76. It seemed symbolic since the 1994 US Open was held there and it was the last Open Arnold Palmer would compete in. Not only did it sadden Palmer; many golf fans will miss seeing him at the Open competitions.

Only now do I know why he felt so strongly about Oakmont. I didn't realize how close Latrobe was to Pittsburgh nor how close Oakmont was to Pittsburgh. Why wouldn't a kid who was a great player from a rather humble background want to play one of the world's greatest golf courses, especially when that course was so close?

Exit 7 from I76 led me east on Highway 30. The ride through Greenburg to Latrobe is pleasant, up and down the hills, through the valleys and across the ridges. I drove into Latrobe and looked around before surrendering to the reality I could not find the golf course on my own.

In Middleton where I live there is a "new concept" development underway where the lots are narrow, the garages



A beautiful place—the clubhouse and its surrounds.



A look at the clubhouse across the pool area. The pro shop is to the right.



A look at the golf course through the oak woods south of the clubhouse.