

precipitation was 24.5 inches, which is exactly the same as the 30-year norm.

Stranger still, despite ample moisture around the parts I work, digger reports were of dry soil conditions in early winter to surprising depths.

Details and summaries of our 1998 weather, as recorded by the Wisconsin Agricultural Statistics Service, are presented here for posterity.

As every course superintendent knows, potassium is an essential element in plant growth. Potassium and nitrogen are the elements a solid fertility program on most Wisconsin golf course soils is built around.

Two UW - Madison researchers have now shown that plants can create an electric potential of almost a quarter of a volt across a cell membrane. That differential allows root cells to draw the positively charged potassium ions from soil solution into the negatively charged cells. The K⁺ cations move through special membrane proteins called potassium channels.

The research by Dr. Mike Sussman of the CALS Horticulture Department and Dr. Edgar Spalding of the Botany Department and their grad researchers Rebecca

Hirsch and Bryan Lewis was reported in SCIENCE magazine.

The electrical gradient they measured is several times greater than the one in animal and human nerves, which have been extensively studied. It is sufficient enough to allow plants to take up and concentrate potassium from soils that have relatively small amounts of it.

Dr. Sussman has been busy. He

and another UW - Madison molecular biologist were granted \$1.8 million over three years to help develop a system to rapidly identify the function of genes specific to plants. The grant was one of 20 awarded by the National Science Foundation in the first year of their plant genome initiative.

There are so many exciting things going on at your land grant university, projects that will directly benefit those of us in the field.

Americans had the chance to witness history right before Christmas when the House of Representatives voted to Impeach W.J. Clinton. Normal people would have been so ashamed and embarrassed that they would have hidden under a rock or in some way stayed out of sight. Not Willie. He held a pep rally on the White House lawn right after the vote; "incredible" doesn't begin to express the man's gall.

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Now the Senate decides if he stays or goes, another rare event that will make history. Whatever his fate, he did it to himself, a fact he still refuses to recognize. One thing is for certain - the country will handle the process just fine.

The most troubling thing for me was Clinton's decision to blast Iraq

the day previous to the impeachment vote. As a general rule, people don't believe a liar. And lots of Americans didn't believe the timing was a coincidence. There could be no clearer example of a reason why he should resign. Not that Al would be any better; he would not be. Resignation simply would be

best for the country. But Clinton will never put the country before himself.

As a result of this lousy experience with Bill Clinton and his excesses, I will nominate Cokie Roberts and Elizabeth Dole as our next president and vice president. We are ready for some smart, competent and trustworthy women as our leaders.

•

The 14th Reinders Turf Conference, Equipment Show and Service Clinic is set for March 10 and 11, 1999. This conference will be bigger and better than ever before.

Exhibit space will be expanded (no, they are not moving out of the Waukesha Expo Center and, no, the Expo Center has not been expanded. You will have to attend to see how they have handled the expansion!). At this time, the speaker list is not finalized, but an impressive list of speakers has committed so far, including Dr. Joe Vargas who will be making his 14th appearance at Reinders Conference.

Mark you calendar for this traditional and exciting event.

•

The Wander Springs Golf Course team from Greenleaf competed in the annual John Deere Championship Golf Tournament in Scottsdale, Arizona. Normally the warm weather in the southwest would feel good in mid-November, but the team left some pretty nice weather in Wisconsin. Clearly, their participation was a sacrifice!

Thirty-two teams from around the US and Canada played for the top spot. Our team, led by golf course superintendent and WGCSA member Mark Gorzlanzyk, acquitted themselves well and, presumably, enjoyed the experience. Congratulations.

•

Jordon Sensibar has reported a \$515 donation to the O.J. Noer Turfgrass Research and Education

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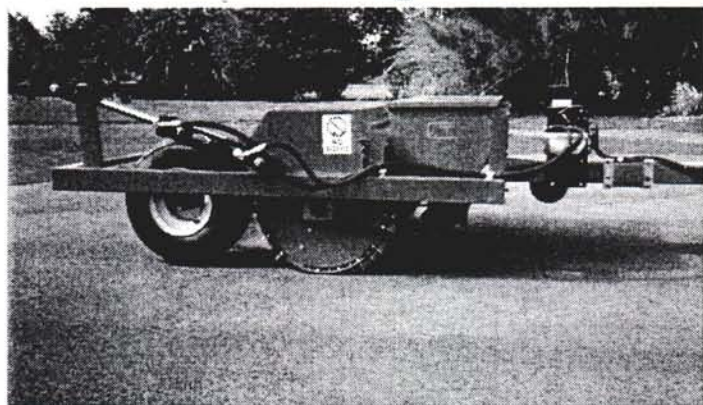
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Wander Springs Golf Course, Greenleaf, WI
 Pictured from left to right: Mark Gorzlanzyk, Golf Course Superintendent; Mike Cisler, Golf Professional; Tom Thiesen, Club Manager; Robert Brandt, Club President; Scott Allsup, Distributor Representative

Facility. The gift came from a donation ProGreen Plus made for each case of Rubigan fungicide sold in 1998. They hope to sponsor a similar program next year.

Thanks from ProGreen Plus to the following participants: Cedar Springs Golf Course, Deer Run Golf Course, Evansville Golf Club, Fox Valley Golf Club, H & H Fairway Enterprises, Heritage Reserve Development, Kujawa Enterprises, Inc., Lawn Doctor of New Berlin, Mequon Country

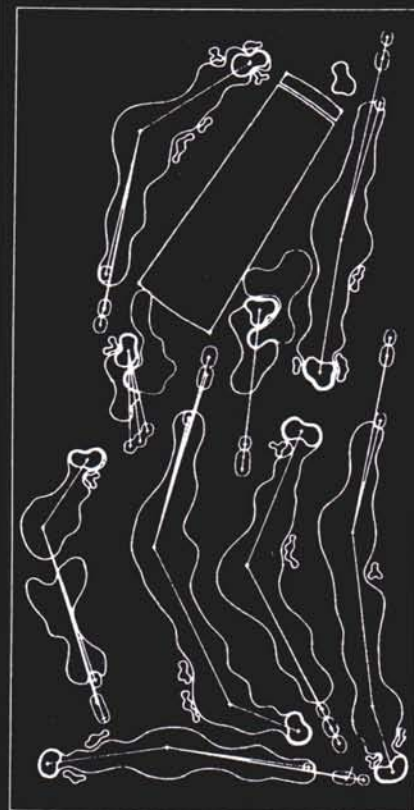
Club, Missing Links Golf Course, Rainbow Springs Golf Club, and Winagamie Golf Club.



We are near the time when departure for the GCSAA conference begins. Orlando is a good conference site, and everybody I have talked to is anxious to go. Include me in the excitement.

Travel safely, learn a lot and start thinking about opening day. It will be here too soon. 🌱

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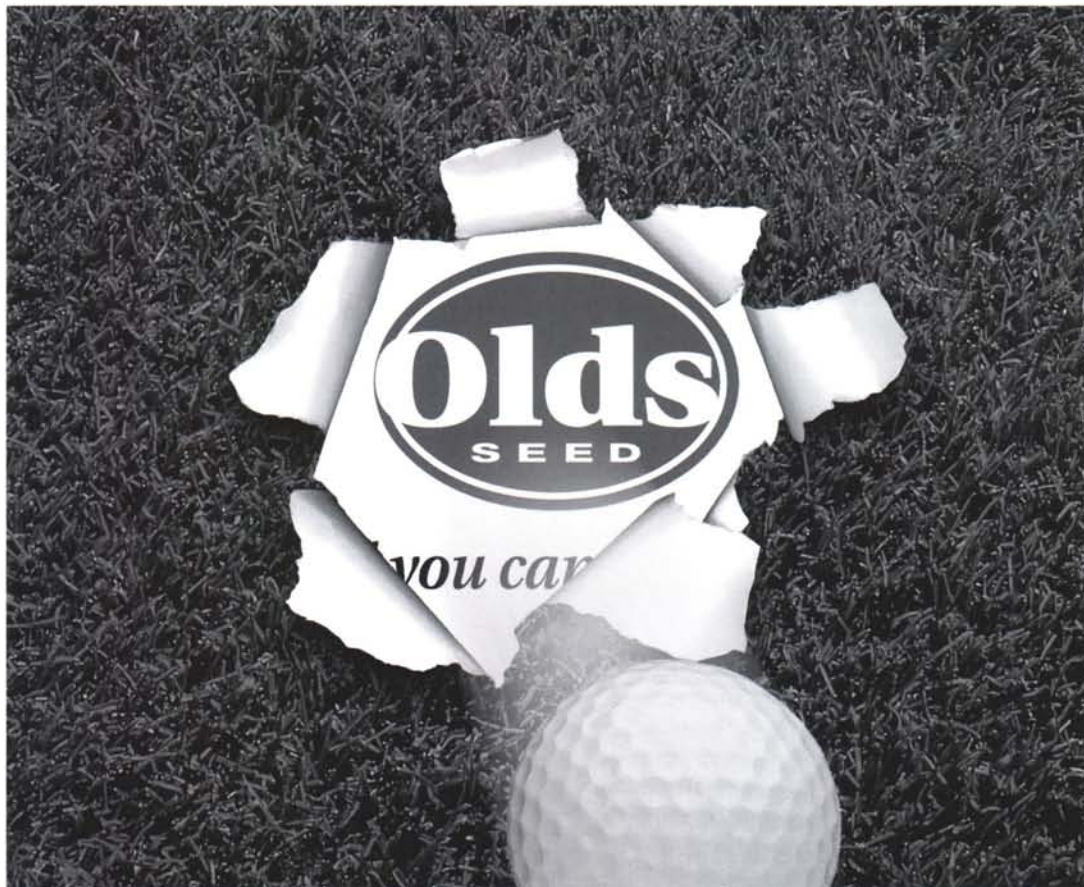
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Golf Course Friendships Keep Him From Retiring Too Early

By Lori Ward Bocher

People are always asking 77-year-old Vince Johnson when he's going to retire from selling turf equipment. Well, he tried retirement for four months, way back in 1982 when he was a young man of 60 years. "And for four months it was driving me nuts," he recalls. So Vince has no plans of retiring from a job and customers that he dearly loves.

"As long as I'm physically and mentally capable, I'm going to continue to do what I do, and I love doing it with the people I'm doing it with. There's no greater bunch of people than the people in the golf course industry," he says. "My only regret is, as one person, it's awfully hard to get around and see everyone that I'd really like to see.

"I could do other things. But I really enjoy this so much. It keeps me busy. I need challenges. I guess that's just the way I'm built. I thrive on challenges," Vince adds.

Vince runs his own turf equipment distribution company, now known as Johnson Turf Equipment (formerly Johnson and Associates). In August, he hired Mike Limoni as a sales rep; Mike works out of Green Bay. Together, they cover all of Wisconsin and the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. How he got to the point of starting his own distribution company at the age of 68 goes way back to the beginning and follows an uphill, downhill, curving journey.

Father a landscaper . . .

Born in 1922 in Zion, Ill., much of Vince's childhood overlapped the Great Depression. "My father was in the tree and landscape service," he recalls. "When I was a small boy he used to take me up to a nursery in Wisconsin and I would go around with him when he was selecting plant material. He did a lot of landscape work on the north shore of the Chicago area. When I was about 15 years old I began to climb trees – trimming them – for my father.

"I did that until October of 1942 when I went into the Navy during World War II," Vince continues. He became an air traffic controller and spent the remainder of the war years in Alaska – most of them on the island of Attu, one of the last islands in the Aleutian chain. "We were only 60 miles from Kamchatka, Russia. We ran nuisance bombing raids over the Kuril Islands in the northern part of Japan.



"It was kind of boring," Vince says with a laugh. "We only had about 12 days of sunshine in two years. It wasn't cold, but we had a lot of snow and a lot of fog. The fog would just roll in – I'd never seen fog like that in my entire life. It was so heavy because the Japanese Current ran through there."

After the war, he wanted to go to college. "But the colleges were full. I got married in 1947, and then we had kids. I couldn't go to school then," Vince explains. Instead, he worked for the Civil Aeronautics Administration, the forerunner of today's FAA. However, his assignment in Evansville, Ind., wasn't challenging enough for him. Plus, he knew he'd have to move around a lot if he wanted to advance within the CAA. So he left the air traffic control business.

Back to landscaping . . .

"I came back to Illinois and worked into the business with my father," he explains. "I've always been an outdoor person. Getting back to landscaping and working outdoors was really my cup of tea."

In 1955, he had an opportunity to work for a large nursery – Eugene A. de St. Aubin Nursery in Addison, Ill. "I was their landscape designer for seven years," Vince points out. "We did a lot of commercial work in the Chicago area. After seven years, the owners decided that they didn't want to be in the retail business anymore, they just wanted to sell wholesale. So they





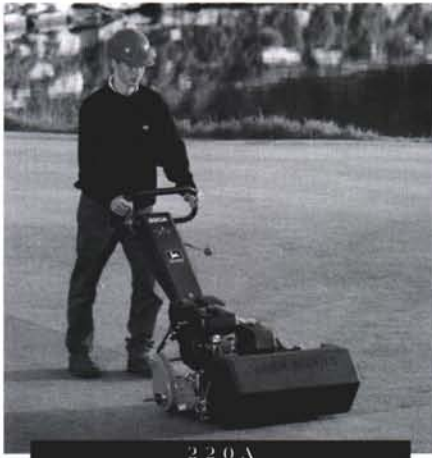
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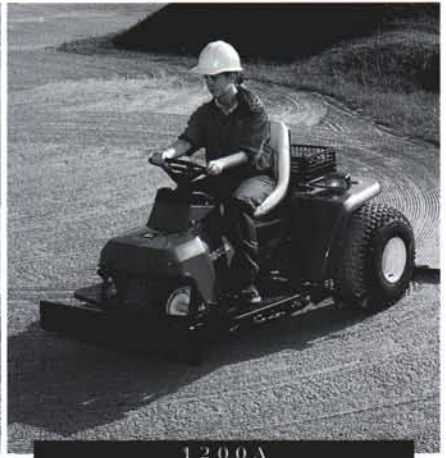
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turned the retail part of the business over to me and I went into the landscape construction business for myself in 1961."

His business was known as Johnson Landscape Company. "My former boss had a lot of connections with golf courses where they wanted to landscape their club houses, tennis courts, swimming pools, tee boxes – things like that," Vince recalls. "They would call me in to design the areas, my old boss would sell the plant materials, and then the superintendent would do the planting. I did a number of courses in the Chicago area that way."

National award . . .

But he's most proud of the construction work he did at an old railroad station and right-of-way in LaGrange, Ill. For this joint venture, he and the designer, golf course architect Lawrence J. Packard, received a national award from the American Association of Nurserymen in 1967. "It was the highlight of my life," Vince recalls. "We flew to Washington to receive the award. Lady Bird Johnson was at the ceremony because of her beautification program for America."

Now that he was in business for himself, Vince decided to get some schooling in business by attending a

two-year community college. He also joined the volunteer fire department since his company office in Villa Park, Ill., was close to a fire house. He remained with the department for the next 22 years.

When the oil embargo hit in 1972, the bottom dropped out of the landscape construction business. "It was just like everything froze up. It was unbelievable," Vince says. "I had a grounds maintenance company as part of my landscaping business, so I kept that but got rid of my heavy equipment and everything else."

"In 1975 the fire department had an opportunity to grandfather certain of us volunteers into the department full time," he continues. "The fire department was my second love, and I could work on a 24/48 shift (24 hours on, 48 hours off), so I was able to keep my grounds maintenance company and be on the fire department where I served as a paramedic for the next seven years."

As someone who has always liked challenges and the opportunity to learn, in 1979 and 1980 Vince returned to school, Southern Illinois University, where he received a bachelor's degree in business administration.

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Move to Wisconsin . . .

Sadly, Vince's wife, Delores, died in 1980. He married Alice in 1982, and they decided to move to her home state of Wisconsin. "I had spent a lot of time up here before, and I liked it," Vince recalls. So they moved to Neshkoro in northeastern Marquette County. Vince was 60 years old at the time.

"What I was going to do was retire," he says with a big laugh. "I did for four months. And for four months it was driving me nuts." He tried a number of different things, but none of them seemed quite right until he connected with Star City Fabrication out of Minnesota that made the Mars Sweeper for golf courses. "I became a national sales rep for this company, setting up distributors throughout the country, calling on salesmen with the distributors," Vince explains. "That's when I started to have regular contact with golf courses, in the early 1980's."

But in 1989, the company closed its doors without notice. "I decided in 1990 that nobody was going to close their doors on me anymore," Vince declares. "That's when I started up my own business as Johnson and Associates." He was 68 years old at the time.

Starts his own company . . .

"I didn't want to sell mowers. There are plenty of mowers out there," Vince explains. "I decided that I wanted to sell equipment that was unique, that would be interesting to golf course superintendents because they'd be labor saving and efficient. And that's been my philosophy ever since."

His product line has varied somewhat over the years, and he thanks the golf course superintendents who have called him with ideas for equipment that he could carry. "If it weren't for them, I wouldn't be selling some of this equipment," he adds.

"Just three years ago, I was at the OJ Noer Research Facility," Vince explains. "They had come up with this piece of equipment to simulate golf shoe spikes in the turf. I looked at it and said, 'Hey, I think something can be done with this.' Wayne Otto came over at about the same time and I told him I was going to look into the possibilities.

"And I did," he continues. "I spent a couple of months on and off talking with Wayne about what we could do with this piece of equipment. I went to a manufacturer and asked them if they'd be interested in



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