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## THE GRASS ROOTS

is the bi-monthly publication of the Wisconsin Golf Course Superintendents Association. No part of the THE GRASS ROOTS may be used without the expressed written permission of the editor.

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### ABOUT THE COVER

Cover Artist Julie Moyer presents the 14th Hole at Blackwolf Run Meadow Valley Course, host of the 2011 State Open.

*When you come to the end of your rope, tie a knot and hang on.* By **Franklin D. Roosevelt, 32 President of the United States, 1882-1945**

This quote by Roosevelt reminds us to work on our goals with perseverance and not give up.

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## Customer Service

By Jeff Millies, Certified Golf Course Superintendent, Edgwood Golf Course

I am sure glad spring is over, talk about cold weather that has kept golfers away. The spring of 2011 will definitely be remembered as one of the coldest. Everyone I have talked to says their rounds are down, but hopefully it is only due to the weather conditions and not the economy.

This unusually cold spring has also seemed to affect people's attitude in providing quality customer service. The few times I've been out shopping it seems like you can't find anyone to help you, and when you do, they make feel like you are an inconvenience to them.

It is hard to believe that in today's economy some businesses don't realize the importance of customer service. I always liked Burger Kings motto, have it your way. It seems to be a slogan you don't hear anymore. The most important aspect of providing good customer service is attitude. If a customer service representative says all of the right things and transacts the deal with efficiency, but does so with an air of indifference or worse, are you satisfied? No!

Our customers can and will dismiss us if we do not treat them as if they are the most important part of our business. Never tell the customer what you can't do, but what you can do for them by using positive language. This can be difficult when trying to phrase a negative situation into a positive

image for the consumer. The need for using positive language shows a willingness to serve and a commitment to building customer loyalty.

Good customer service today involves showing a sincere willingness to serve their consumer and makes an attempt to get it right. The people who understand this fact are the ones who excel and who help distinguish their company from its competitors.

We are fortunate that those suppliers/distributors who advertise in the Grass Roots understand this concept and value their customers. This is my 25th year as a Superintendent and during this time I have gotten to know most of the suppliers and distributors who advertise within the Grass Roots. Many of them have been here before I became a Superintendent so they know what it takes to be successful.

Therefore as you read the Grass Roots, use the WGCSA website or the membership handbook, make a mental note of the advertisements. The next time you are looking to make a purchase, remember to consider the value of customer service and those companies who support WGCSA.

Summer is finally here and the days are getting shorter. Stay positive, fall is coming soon.

### WGCSA MISSION STATEMENT

The Wisconsin Golf Course Superintendents Association is committed to serve each member by promoting the profession and enhancing the growth of the game of golf through education, communication and research.

### WGCSA VISION STATEMENT

The Wisconsin Golf Course Superintendents Association is dedicated to increase the value provided to its members and to the profession by:


- Enhancing the professionalism of its members by strengthening our role as a leading golf organization in the state.
- Growing and recognizing the benefits of a diverse membership throughout Wisconsin.
- Educating and promoting our members as leaders in environmental stewardship.
- Offering affordable, high value educational programs at the forefront of technology and service.
- Being key to enjoyment and the economic success of the game of golf.





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## Perseverance

By Brett Grams, WGCSA Chapter Manager

Those of you who know me personally know that I have been fortunate to hold several positions in our great profession. Like most of you I started out working as a grounds crew member. I had the prestigious job as night waterman my first summer. I worked my way up to be on the day crew then was lucky enough to land several assistant roles as I completed my education. My years as a Superintendent were rewarding just as my years in sales. My latest chapter of my career has me serving this great association. I am proud of my varied positions I have held. Seeing the industry from all sides has taught me how hard all of us work at what we do. We all know that economy, the golf boom of the 90's, and most recently the lack of cooperation from Mother Nature has made it tough for our industry as a whole. I am reminded of this each and every day as I talk to fellow members. Comments of "it's tough" or "were hanging in there", and usually the comments are followed by comments like "I hope things turn around soon". I am glad that most of us look towards the future with some optimism, thinking positive thoughts certainly cannot hurt!

This spring my family and I have had some extra house guests. Thankfully they lived on the exterior of our home as we had a Robin take up her nesting on an outside light fixture next to our side door. All of us were witness to this Robins toils. The first attempt at building the nest ended during one of the many windy cold days of this nasty spring. The half made nest was lying on the sidewalk below. All of

us felt bad for the Robin. We left for a weekend and were surprised to see a new nest in place of the old one. Things looked like they were going well but one day our hearts sank when we saw several eggs scattered about and broken on the ground below. The Robin was in a nearby tree and by her sounds we could tell she was not happy. Several weeks passed. I was just about ready to take the messy nest down when I saw the Robin back on the nest. It was now early June and I was surprised by how she decided to give it another try. A week later we saw the eggs hatch and then the hungry chicks calling out to be fed. This morning my sons came down to my office and reported that one of the "babies" was sitting in the tree. I grabbed my camera just in time to see the last of the chicks stand up for a photo before he/she flew off to a nearby maple. I was relieved to see the momma Robin finally succeed. I am also grateful as we can finally start to use the side door again!

As I contemplated about what I wanted to write for this article the Robin and her perseverance is a similar parallel to what many of us in the industry are currently facing. The weather caused many of you plenty of heart ache this spring. Every time we had a nice day or two it turned cold and wet for another week. The weather caused most turf and trees to be several weeks behind just like the revenue of your facilities was also slow to come in. I truly wish you all of you the same success as our mother Robin. Even if it took you longer than it should I hope all of us can persevere!

I look forward to seeing all of you at our Summer Meetings. If you need any assistance please contact me as you can at 920-643-4888 or e-mail at [bgrams@wgcsa.com](mailto:bgrams@wgcsa.com)

**This mother Robin made a nest at the Grams's home this spring. Through the trials of Spring she persevered and hatched young robins.**





## CHAPTER CONVERSATION

### WGCSA Industry Support in Scholarship and Reserach Spending

2003 - \$23,000  
2004 - \$24,000  
2005 - \$31,000  
2006 - \$20,000  
2007 - \$24,730  
2008 - \$38,000  
2009 - \$17,000  
2010 - \$32,180  
2011 - \$32,000 (budgeted)

The 2010 & 2011 totals include the proceeds from the Par 4 Research porgram where the public can bid on donated rounds of golf from WGCSA Clubs.

### WGCSA 2011 Support (Approved by the members at the Fall Business Meeting.)

JR Love Scholarship - \$1,500  
Legacy Scholarship - \$1,500  
Monroe S. Miller Literary Scholarship - \$1,000  
TDL Donation - \$1,000  
OJ Noer Research Foundation - \$8,000  
Environmental Institute for Golf - \$500  
UW Madison / Wisconsin Turfgrass Associa-  
tion - \$15,000 \*

*\*Starting in 2010 the WGCSA began giving money for UW-Madison Research through the Wisconsin Turfgrass Association rather than direct donation. This allowed a pooling of research funding and a reduction in administrative charges from the University.*

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## Prove It!

By Paul Koch, Turfgrass Diagnostic Lab Manager

How do you actually prove something? I work to prove the cause of certain ailments to your turfgrass on every sample that comes into the diagnostic lab. Some are fairly straightforward; if the turfgrass is reddish in color, the weather has been cool and wet, and there are numerous spores consistent with a leaf spot fungus then I've proven to my own satisfaction that leaf spot is the cause of the damage to the turf. Others are more complicated. What if no fungal organisms are observed? Users of the TDL never get 'I have no idea' for a diagnosis, so how can I prove that what I suspect to be causing the damage is actually causing the damage. The truth is that in most cases I can't, but in diagnostics 'proof' can be thought of in similar terms to a legal case. Proof is not present or absent in black and white terms, but instead accumulated and often presents itself on a gradient. Some 'proof' accumulated over time will support your case, oftentimes other 'proof' will contradict the previous 'proof' you found. In the end the final verdict is made by the end user, who will then deliberate your case before making a decision that either validates your claims or does not.

### Growth regulation and red turf; a case study

Springtime is both an exciting and frustrating time of year for superintendents. The turf is greening up and activities outside abound, but highly variable weather can wreak havoc on the best laid plans and the turf can assume almost any color under the sun. Every spring though for the past 3-4 years the TDL has received several samples of creeping bentgrass with a red or purple cast (Figure 1). This reddish cast was present because the older (lower) leaves had senesced but the newer leaves were green and healthy (Figure 2). Because the symptoms usually accompanied cool, wet weather it was thought that leaf spot may be to blame. No leaf spot spores were ever observed on the affected leaf blades though. Because annual bluegrass was always healthy while the bentgrass was affected, take all patch was oftentimes another diagnosis associated with these patches. But the roots were usually white and showed no signs of fungal infection, not to mention being 4-6 weeks earlier than normal take-all symptoms appear, eliminating that possibility from contention. So what was causing the off-colored turf? Most of the symptoms would disappear once consistently warm temperatures arrived, and the reddish turf became an afterthought until the following spring.

Then came the spring of 2011. Whereas 5-6 samples or reports of symptoms would be recorded by the lab in previous springs, 2011 easily brought four to five times that number. A few courses even had symptoms that progressed beyond color to actual thinning of turf. This now was more than a mere afterthought, and caused considerable concern amongst area superintendents. Despite the widespread nature of the symptoms, there were still no signs of any fungal infection. So the question remained, what was causing the off-colored turf?

One of the first things that gets inspected when a sample arrives is the list of recent pesticide applications. While nearly every sample had adequate disease protection, it was observed that every sample submitted also had some sort of growth regulation on their list of recent applications. The most common was a combination of Proxy® and Primo MAXX® to limit annual bluegrass seedhead production, but other superintendents had only applied Primo MAXX®. This was a red flag, as there are numerous reports of turf discoloration in conjunction with a number of growth regulators. Further, symptoms appeared to be the worst in areas of spray overlap, clearly following straight lines at some golf courses. Looking deeper into the applications and talking with the superintendents provided another potential clue, as most if not all of them had been applied shortly prior to a bout of cold temperatures or even a frost. With a couple hard frosts occurring over much of the state well into May, this provided an explanation as to why the discoloration was so much more prevalent this spring than in years past.

Aside from a comment on the Primo MAXX® label cautioning against applying in high or low temperatures, there is nothing on either the Primo or the Proxy label about frosts and discoloration. A quick search on applying either of these growth regulators prior to frost found little information aside from general recommendations and comments. This suggests that this problem isn't widespread or severe, which is consistent with what has been observed in Wisconsin.

The previous couple of paragraphs lay out the case for involvement of Proxy® and Primo MAXX® with the symptoms observed this spring, an affliction I have affectionately called 'PGR patch.' But have we proved a correlation? Well not until we look at the facts the defense would provide in the case.



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## TURFGRASS DIAGNOSTIC LAB

First, and the most damning, is why didn't every course that sprayed Proxy/Primo and experience a frost see this PGR patch? And why was the damage in roughly circular patches, not constant over the entire area sprayed with the growth regulators? What is the mechanism for this discoloration?

These are all excellent questions, and ones that I don't have a good answer to at this point. The likely reason that every course didn't see damage is because every course is different. Local environmental conditions can vary widely from hole to hole, not to mention course to course. The health of the plants also seems to have an effect, as symptoms were more pronounced in areas of heavy traffic, poor drainage, etc. The patchy nature of the symptoms seem to correlate with differ-

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ent strains or 'clones' of bentgrass that are found in a putting green, which can have a number of varying characteristics compared to surrounding bentgrass. The mechanism is the most complicated to theorize about at this point. One potential mechanism could be an overregulation of the plant's growing capabilities, leading to reduced uptake of certain crucial nutrients during the cold temperatures that lead to a temporary discoloration.

So have we proven the correlation yet? The answer remains no, but a lot of interesting information provided with the frosts of 2011 have helped to provide a set of clear questions that could be answered in future

field research. This next step is yet to be attempted, and no plans are currently in the works at UW for a field trial to explore the effects of cold temperatures on plant growth regulators. For those looking to explore this more at their own facility I would recommend leaving a couple 'check' areas next spring when you spray your spring growth regulators. The easiest 'check' is to place a board down over a problem area prior to spraying to prevent the growth regulators from reaching the turf, and compare the health of the sprayed vs unsprayed turf. In the meantime, you will have to act as judge, jury and executioner. Provided the evidence for and against in Table 1, what is your verdict?

### Best wishes Dr. Stier

Like most of us in the turfgrass industry, I did not start out at Wisconsin in turfgrass maintenance. My beginnings were in bacteriology, with aspirations to enter a medical research field. Quickly becoming disillusioned with that track, I looked fondly upon my summer work on the maintenance staff at The Bog golf course in Cedarburg and decided to look up turf maintenance. I met with Dr. Stier to discuss the program my freshman year, and John has been a pivotal mentor and advisor to me in both an official and unofficial manner since that very first meeting. Many of my most challenging questions in both research and academics were answered with assistance from John. In addition, it was with strong endorsements and a backing from John that let the major fungicide producers know Wisconsin was still a great place to test fungicides after the departure of Dr. Geunhwa Jung to the University of Massachusetts-Amherst. My work would have been much harder without John's support. So the news of John's departure to the University of Tennessee was met at first with personal sadness, but was followed quickly by an appreciation and thanks for the guidance he has provided me for nearly ten years. Best wishes in your new endeavor John, an Old Fashioned awaits you anytime you return.

