

USGA Green Section Great Lakes Region News

Bob Vavrek was born in Newport News, Virginia, but was raised near Cleveland, Ohio. He attended Marietta College and earned a B.S. degree in Biology in 1977. After college he worked almost two years in several hospitals as a Registered Respiratory Therapist before entering graduate school at The Ohio State University. He earned an M.S. degree in Turf Entomology with Dr. Harry Niemczyk in 1983. His Master's thesis investigated the effects of turf insecticides on beneficial insects. He was in a PhD program at Cornell University under Dr. Marty Petrovic studying the effects of pH and calcium on thatch accumulation when hired by the USGA in 1990. He was originally hired to work in both the Great Lakes and Mid-Continent Regions of the USGA Green Section. In 1991 he began working full time in the north central tier of states with Jim Latham, the director of the Great Lakes Region. Bob's hobbies include fly-fishing, hunting and raquetball.

Jim Latham was born in Hillsboro, Texas, where he attended high school and Junior College, with a short tour with the Marine Corps in there somewhere. He graduated from Texas A&M in 1952 with a BS degree in Soil Science and stayed on as an employee/student to earn an MS degree in Agronomy (Plant Breeding) in 1954. During that time, he became interested in turfgrass science through contacts with Dr. Marvin Ferguson, Dr. Jim Watson and a pinochle-playing neighbor who was involved in the then small turf-grass program at A&M.

His first "official" contact with the turf industry was under Dr. Glenn Burton and B.P. Robinson at the Tifton, GA., Experiment Station during the development of Tifgreen and Tifway bermudagrasses and Emerald zoysiagrass. In 1956, he moved to New Brunswick, N.J. to do summer work for the Northeastern Green Section office and further graduate study at Rutgers University. The following year, an opportunity arose to work full-time as the Green Section's Southeastern agronomist, so the Lathams moved South.

In 1960 the impending retirement of O.J. Noer created an opening for an agronomist in the Milorganite Division of the Milwaukee Sewerage Commission under Charlie Wilson. The next 25 years were spent visiting turf installations throughout North America and working with Milorganite distributors such as Jim Graham and Milt Wiley in Minnesota.

Jim and wife Lois are entering their tenth year of this tour with the Green Section in the Great Lakes Region, Jim as director and Lois as office coordinator (she makes things work properly). They have two daughters and four grandchildren.

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