

Sold on Environmental Education

(Reprinted with permission from the GCSAA's Newsline magazine)

Bob Mateja isn't a salesperson, but he has generated excitement and made an impression in Plymouth, Mich.

He's done it by participating in the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program (ACSP) for Schools, a hands-on environmental education program designed to provide stewardship opportunities for elementary, middle and high school students. The program is administered by Audubon International and sponsored in partnership by GCSAA and Rain Bird.

Mateja, director of grounds and facilities for Fox Hills Golf and Conference Center in Plymouth, met with the owners of the 45-hole course in April 1996 to discuss sponsoring the program. He discovered there was little need to sell the course owners on the benefits to both their facility and local children, so his next step was a cold call to the Salem Elementary School principal.

After explaining the program and his course's offer to pay the school's \$100 registration fee and annual dues, Mateja received an encouraging: "Come on over!"

Salem Elementary was chosen because it's located within five miles of Fox Hills. Mateja had no connections to the school, but he went over to meet the principal with an armful of videos and literature provided by Audubon International and GCSAA.

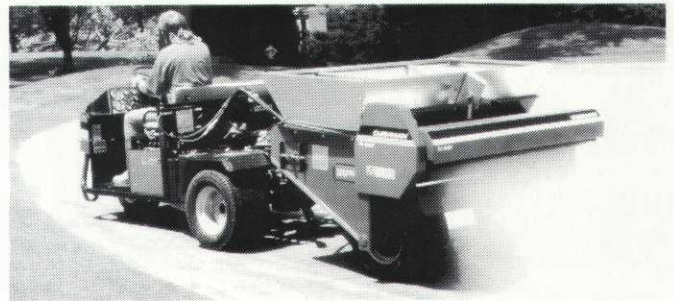
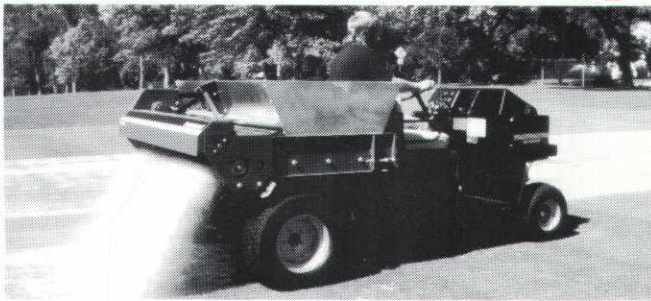
Although his knees were knocking, he came out of the meeting 45 minutes later with new knowledge that the school had already received an \$83,000 grant from the federal government to develop an outdoor research lab. The school considered Mateja the perfect professional to voluntarily assist with environmental education and the development of a wetland, a prairie area and a nature trail, among other projects. The school board also invited him to a preliminary site review meeting to establish plans for the outdoor research lab.

Though plans for the outdoor research lab are on hold until sewer construction is completed in the area, Mateja has helped the school conduct a resource inventory, which is the program's first activity. Audubon International reviews the inventory to provide a conservation report that identifies projects suitable for the school and Mateja and his crew also will use the report to offer assistance and guidance.

This summer, Mateja sees the potential for some of his 35 crew members and area Boy/Girl Scouts to pursue projects at the school. In addition, the fall agenda is already being considered and includes nest box projects and student tours of the golf course and the prairie areas at their

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Environmental Education—

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peak.

For those superintendents considering involvement in the program, Mateja emphasizes that it doesn't take much time or money and the public relations aspect has real value.

"The benefits to the course are great," he says. "We've received a lot of positive press . . . and the community doesn't have the inaccurate perception it once did of us as the big polluter. It sees us as the environmental giant helping them out."

Mateja is now considering adopting a second school as early as next fall. This one may be a middle school that's closer to home so he can stop on his way to and from the golf course.

And it only took one cold call — now Mateja is not only sold on the program, but he's bringing its educational benefits to children throughout his community.

For a complete packet of information on how to get started with the ACSF for Schools, contact GCSAA's media/public relations department at 800/472-7878, ext. 608, or Audubon International at 518/767-9051.

Getting Started in the Schools Program

1. Identify a local school you'd like to adopt and obtain permission from your course's decision-makers.
2. Contact Audubon International at 518/767-9051 to re-

quest a packet of materials that can be used to help explain the program to the school(s).

3. Identify a contact person at the school. Make a phone call, set an appointment to further explain the program in person and follow up with a letter.

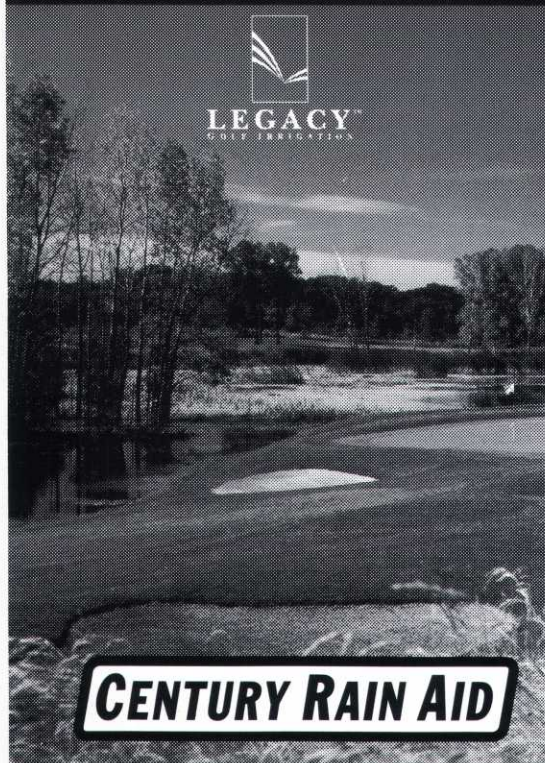
4. Assist with the \$100 registration fee if possible and complete the registration form available through Audubon International.

5. Be patient. Understand that it takes time to develop a successful educational program and fit it into the existing curriculum.



Rob Panuska listens to Rick Lucken's advice on how he can reduce his handicap.

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