

This Ain't Your Daddy's Poa Annua

By **RON FURLONG**

*Everett Golf and Country Club, Mukilteo, Washington
(Formerly at The Wilds in Prior Lake, Minn.)*

Had you cornered me a few years ago and told me that someday, in the near future, I'd be assisting in the management of a golf course swimming in a sea of *poa annua* (greens, tees, fairways, rough, everywhere!), and that there would be absolutely no alternatives to this, I'd have thought you a bit nuts. However, nearly through my first year out here in the Pacific Northwest, I can safely say my attitude has indeed changed.

Having spent the better part of the past decade in attempts at eradicating this "weed," as we called *poa*, from the Twin City courses I worked at, it took a serious change of heart for me to actually accept this "grass" and, indeed, help it flourish.

The managing of *poa annua* in the Seattle area is certainly, without a doubt, the most drastic difference I have encountered in the managing of turf in the Pacific Northwest compared to back home. (I think I will always call Minnesota home, even if I were to stay here another 30 years). Although a close second would be the fact that in January we're actually cutting cups and mowing greens compared to . . . well, you know what is happening at Minnesota courses in January. The word "managing" *poa annua* is the key. At many courses in the Midwest we're trained to a certain extent to hate *poa annua*. To fight it. To never give in. To *control* it. At The Wilds we had *poa annua* alerts if anyone ever spotted a single blade of the evil substance amidst our pure, unblemished acres of Penn Links. Okay, I'm exaggerating a bit, but I think I've made my point. In Minnesota, if you have the means to control *poa*, you control it. However, here, talking about controlling *poa annua* (a mistake I made when I first arrived) is bound to get smiles and a few chuckles from the locals, and the knowing, obligatory shaking of the head slowly. This is not to say that there are not newer courses in the northwest that make attempts, some successful, at growing colonial bentgrass on their greens and tees. However, on mature courses, like the one I work at — Everett Golf and Country Club — which is as mature as they get at 90 years old, *poa annua* is simply a fact of life.

The truth of the matter is, once one accepts *poa annua*,

you begin to realize that growing a quality *poa annua* green is no more difficult here than growing a Penncross creeping bentgrass green in Minnesota. And with a fairly similar quality. All one needs to do to find proof of the potential quality of a *poa annua* green is to look at two of 1998's three major championships played in the U.S. The greens at both The Olympic Golf Club, site of the '98 U.S. Open, and at Sahalee, site of the '98 PGA Championship, are *poa annua*. Sahalee, a neighboring Seattle course, is similar in many respects to Everett Golf and Country Club (EGCG). Both courses are tight, mature layouts, flourishing amidst literally thousands of towering Douglas Firs. Though at only 100 acres ECGS could only dream of hosting such an event as the PGA Championship, we face most of the same trials and tribulations that Sahalee faces, including

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Poa Annua—

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the managing of our *poa* greens.

In the Pacific Northwest, *poa* is seen commonly as a winter annual. After flowering and seeding, the annuals die, leaving dormant seed behind to germinate when moisture returns (moisture is definitely not a problem here from October through April). Mature courses tend to have more favorable, higher quality types of *poa* than the newer courses in this region. Studies have shown as many as 20 different biotypes of annual bluegrass may exist on a single putting green. Another fact that makes *poa annua* a good grass for a putting green is the high shoot densities. As Dr. David R. Huff pointed out in a recent USGA article, a quality Penncross creeping bentgrass green will have about 200 to 250 tillers within a square inch, compared to a similar healthy *poa annua* reptans green which may have as many as 1300 shoots in the same area.

Our greens management program here at ECGC, instituted by CGCS Randy White, is similar in many respects to that of a Midwest program. A spring and fall aerification and topdressing; light topdressing throughout the year, about every third or fourth week; a verticutting and spiking program in the summer; occasional hydroject aerification throughout the year, as well as occasional solid core tining; a sound fertility program, and the mad scramble during the hot months of July and August to keep the deli-

cate grass alive with proper irrigation. There are, of course, many differences as well. We are not hit with pythium or dollar spot here, but instead anthracnose and fusarium reign terror. No cutworms, but the European Crane Fly is a nasty little replacement (crows love to peck at the greens looking for the larvae). But here, like anywhere, golfers want speed (we roll twice a week in the summer months) and conditions just like those they saw on television on Sunday. The Augusta syndrome. Some problems are, alas, universal.

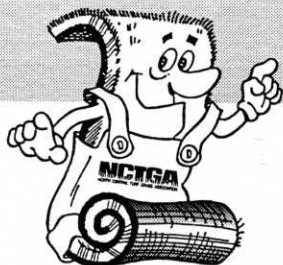
Most are aware, of course, of the testing done over the past few years at the University of Minnesota by Donald White, Ph.D., which has actually produced a *poa annua* reptans (creeping bluegrass) seed for sale on the market. DW 184. According to White, once established, DW 184 produces very few flowers, is dense, upright, dark green and has displayed good resistance to a variety of diseases. Still, convincing someone in Minnesota that *poa annua* is the answer for them may as yet be a hard sale. Some ways are hard to change, and certainly being forced into the change, as I was when I made my move to the Seattle area, was an easier way of facing up to this conversion. I simply had no choice. Yet, even in Minnesota, I think one has to look at the situation with an open mind and say to oneself, is this the way to go? Should I suddenly embrace something I have spent so long trying to eliminate? Time will tell.

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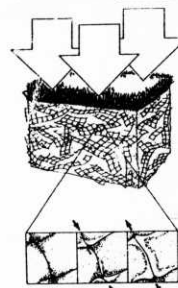
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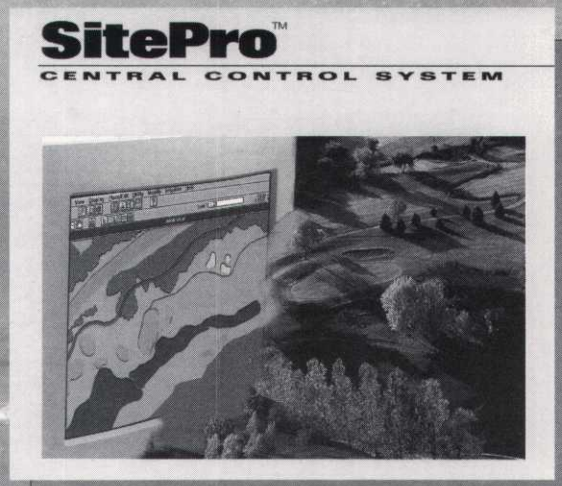


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Garske Scholarships Now in Third Year

Named after the founder of Par Aide Products Co., the Joseph S. Garske Legacy Awards now are in their third year of funding two scholarship grants to children and

grandchildren of MGCSA members. The Par Aide firm, located in St. Paul, contributes \$2,500 annually, divided into two grants. This year Lucas A. Mahal, son of Doug Mahal, su-

perintendent at The Minikahda Club, received his second grant of \$1,250. He is a natural resources student at Vermilion Community College in Ely.

Awarded her first \$1,250 grant for the 1998-99 school year was Amy Mounts, Evansville, daughter of Peter Mounts, superintendent at Tipsinah Mounds Golf Club, Elbow Lake. Amy is a computer science student at the University of Minnesota in Morris.

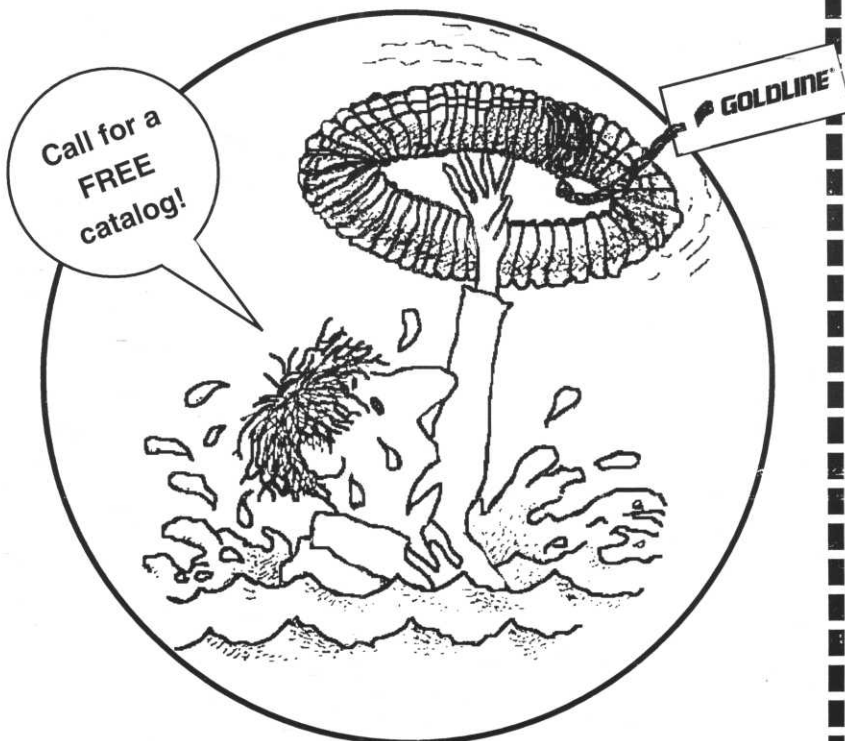
The late Mr. Garske, who died at the age of 76 in 1982, started Par Aide in 1954 with plans to make a "good" ball washer. A foundryman and avid golfer, he knew little about the golf business, tried to sell his ideas for design and tooling to two accessory companies, was turned down by both and so began Par Aide Products Company.

The Garske scholarships were started two years ago by Joseph Garske's son, Steve, who noted that his father "was an orphan with only a sixth grade education and was self-conscious about his lack of formal schooling, but he always wanted to help young people with their education."

"I am pleased to have our company provide these scholarships since the superintendent's job has become ever more demanding and, for many superintendents, providing a college education for their children requires true sacrifice," Garske said. "I am fortunate to have the opportunity and ability to help."

For more information about applying for these and other MGCSA scholarships, call the MGCSA office at (612) 473-0557 or toll free at 1-800-642-7227 or fax (612) 473-0576.

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How Does He Stay So Long?

By JACK KOLB
MGCSA Life Member

I have often said that it is easy to write about someone who has a lot of interests and I am sure that individual has been found in the person of Ronald C. Fabian. Generally we write about former Superintendents. This gentleman has been around so long that I was sure retirement had taken place. Not so! The name Fabian has been associated with Winona Country Club since 1939. It was Ron's father who started work as Golf Course Superintendent at that time.

I had met Ron in March of 1953 at the 25th Annual Turf Conference held at the Curtis Hotel in downtown Minneapolis. He was there to pick up as much information as possible so he could replace his dad as Golf Course Superintendent that Spring. Thus as I began looking for retired "Soups," you would think that 45 years later Ron would qualify.

To digress for a moment — it might behoove us to know that Winona Country Club was opened in 1920 as a nine hole course. The course was designed by Ben Knight, a Scotsman from Aberdeen, Scotland. He seemed to have been a multi-talented individual. He was born in 1889 and



Great Grandfather Carl Fabian aboard his new Worthington tractor. This picture was taken in 1944.

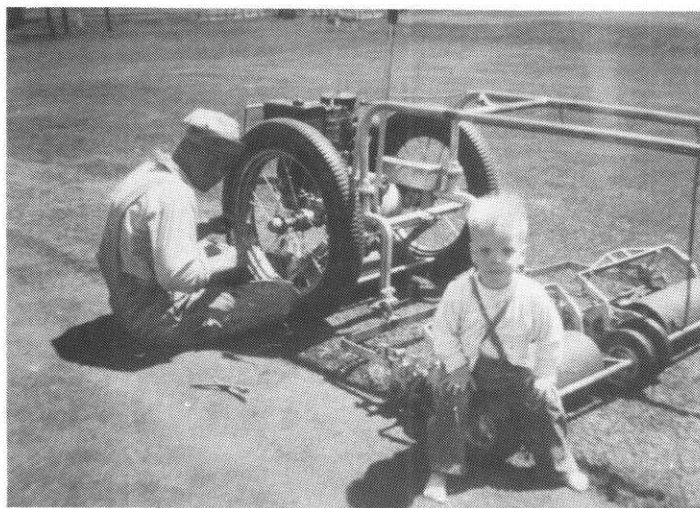
he wound up in Winona, Minnesota and was commissioned to design Winona Country Club in 1919. Upon the opening of the new club in 1920 Ben Knight stayed on as the Golf Pro for the next 31 years and retired in 1951. Winona Country Club is in a beautiful setting. It takes you out of typical Minnesota landscape and puts you in a New England setting such as Vermont. It is located in a deep valley with high, cliff-like, heavily wooded hills surrounding. The geology is so different than the average Minnesota Prairie Golf Course.

Carl Fabian (Ron's father) became Superintendent in 1939 and retired from the course in 1953 at which point Ron Fabian took over. Ron, of course, grew up on the course and began working as a 12-year-old making \$22.50 per 60-80 hour week during the summer. As Ron explains he did everything that had to be done in a crew of 3-4 men.

In 1964 construction began on the second nine and opened in August of 1966, thus Winona Country Club became an 18-holer. Three tennis courts, automatic irrigation and, swimming pool completed in the mid 70's brought the course into "Country Club" status.

In high school Ron became a musician specializing as an accordionist. He often brought his accordion to school and would leave directly from school for a gig. This was his second love and he found it to pay more than he could make on the golf course. He never abandoned the golf business (because of the fickleness of people in entertainment), music was his social expression. He got to travel far and wide, he

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Ron Fabian working on his Worthington "Overgreen," the forerunner of triplex green mowers. Son Dennis is interested in Mom the photographer. The "Overgreen" had one mower mounted between the large wheels and two following. The operator was accessible by the long handle-bars. Photo taken in 1955.

emigrated to the USA in 1909 as a 20-year-old with a background in engineering. His talents led him into many endeavors in many parts of the country. Several of his jobs were in association with the construction of Golf Courses. After a short hitch in the U.S. Army during World War I,

Fabian—

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watched lovers spoon, bar room brawls, played at weddings, wakes and corporate parties. Even after he was appointed Golf Course Superintendent of Winona Country Club in 1953 (succeeding his dad) Ron worked days at the golf club and played with the band at night.

Ron has played all the "big-time clubs" in Minnesota and some better known out-of-state. Ron played the old Prom Ballroom on University Avenue in St. Paul, Schliefs Little City around the corner from my place in Inver Grove Heights, Marigold Ballroom on Hennepin Avenue in Minneapolis, the Playmore in Rochester, Minn., Avalon Ballroom in La Crosse, Wis., Pine Island Pavilion, George's Ballroom in New Ulm and the list goes on including a twice a year trip to Chicago to play the Aragon Ballroom on the North Side and the Trianon on the South Side. As we all know many of these ballrooms have disappeared and Ron has been able to concentrate more on his first love — the golf course.

When Turf Supply Company was an infant and this writer was trying his luck at sales, I would arrive at Winona C.C. rather late in the afternoon (like 4:30) and would have to seek Ron at his Witoka Tavern and Dance Hall. He had bought this place in 1975. Joan, his wife, would open the bar about 3:00 p.m. and Ron would help close it at 3:00 a.m. the next morning. After about five years of working 12 hour nights and 12 hour days they sold it. Ron has been very generous in praise of his wife Joan who carried the load for most of these enterprises.

Ron's outside interests never cease to amaze one. At the time of this interview he had dropped his wife Joan off in Stillwater as she was conning the antique shops and sharpening her eye for value of furniture, jewelry, trinkets,



Pictured from right to left are grandfather Ron, son Dennis, grandson Adam and grandson Lukas.

dinnerware and all those things that go along with estate sales. You see, Joan and Ron also handle estate sales.

Ron's son, Dennis, also has been a great support. Dennis started working for his father at age 16. Ten years ago he was named Assistant Superintendent. Dennis' son, Adam, (age 23) started working for Pat Shortridge in the pro shop and upon legal age joined the grounds crew. Grandson Lukas (Dennis' son) is a two-year veteran of the grounds crew. Ron and wife Joan have been married 46 years (1952). They have five children, 12 grandchildren and one great grandchild.

Ron received his 45-year plaque from the MGCSA and has 24 years as a member of the GCSAA.

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The Great Stewards Of Minnesota Golf Courses

By **MICHAEL BROWER**
Hillcrest Country Club

It is my belief that the late John James Audubon would be very happy to see what is happening at golf courses in Minnesota today. And the same could be said for the late George Bird Grinnell. Both of these men played key roles in the beginning of America's wildlife conservation movement. John James Audubon, a man impassioned with birds, became the authority of ornithology in North America in the early 1800s. He would later become forever famous as a painter of North American birds. George Bird Grinnell, the editor of *Forest and Stream* magazine, a man who at an early age was tutored by Audubon's widow, formed the first conservation movement in America in the late 1880s. Grinnell, who believed that Audubon "had done more to teach Americans about birds of their own land than any other who lived, felt that "Audubon" would be a very appropriate name for his newly formed conservation organization. Hence, the birth of the first Audubon Society. Grinnell was motivated at that time by the vast destruction of birds by humans for their use of feathers and wings on hats and clothing. This disregard to conservation nearly lead to the extinction of several species of North American birds. Grinnell didn't disapprove of the taking of wild fowl for consumption, but he did disapprove of people and practices that held no regard for the future well-being of wildlife in America.

Today, another movement is underway, and it happens to be on golf courses throughout America. The Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program for Golf Courses, administered

by the non-profit Audubon International, was started in 1991. There are currently 79 Minnesota golf courses involved in the program. The purpose of this program is to educate and assist landowners and land managers through active involvement in protecting and enhancing wildlife habitats and conserving and sustaining natural resources on their properties. Audubon and Grinnell would be proud of this program, because it is a continuation of what they started. There were conservation issues in the 1800s, there are issues facing us as we approach the year 2000, and there will be issues for future generations to come. There will always be a need for conservation efforts.

Audubon and Grinnell would be especially proud of the superintendents that I'm going to refer to as "The Great Stewards of Minnesota Golf Courses," the golf course superintendents that have embraced this conservation philosophy wholeheartedly. Are you one of them? In a day and age of increased environmental awareness and scrutiny, can you afford not to be one that adopts this philosophy enthusiastically? There are currently eight Minnesota golf courses that have achieved full certification in the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary System.

The Great Stewards Of Minnesota Golf Courses

Minnesota Valley Country Club
Bloomington, Minnesota
Larry Mueller and Staff

* * *

The Minikahda Club
Minneapolis, Minnesota
Doug Mahal and Staff

* * *

Baker National Golf Course
Medina, Minnesota
Keith Greeninger and Staff

* * *

Woodhill Country Club
Wayzata, Minnesota
Rick Fredericksen and Staff

* * *

Izaty's Golf and Yacht Club
Onamia, Minnesota
Steve Schumacher and Staff

* * *

Somerset Country Club
St. Paul, Minnesota
Jerry Murphy and Staff

* * *

The Town and Country Club
St. Paul, Minnesota
Bill Larson and Staff

* * *

Tartan Park Golf Course
Lake Elmo, Minnesota
Joe Moris and Staff

Each of these superintendents, their staffs, and their golf courses have been recognized by Audubon International for their efforts and success in each of the six achievement categories that the Audubon Sanctuary Program administers. They are environmental planning, integrated pest management, outreach and education, wildlife and habitat management, water conservation and water quality management. There are 20 addition-

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Great Stewards—

(Continued from Page 19)

al courses in Minnesota that have submitted environmental plans for their properties and are working toward full certification.

Nearly 2,500 courses across the country are now active members of the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary System Program (the ACSSP). This number is growing each day, and I encourage every Superintendent to become involved with the program. It doesn't matter whether you're in the center of a metropolitan area or in the northwoods, there are im-

provements each of us can make to wildlife habitat on our golf courses and conservation practices and environmental planning that will have a positive impact on our properties. The ACSSP represents an opportunity for all golf course superintendents to promote positive, pro-active environmental achievements. Your members, your community, your staff, your image, wildlife, and the overall environment will all benefit. And let's not forget about Audubon and Grinnell, they started the movement that has benefited our generation. Golf course superintendents have the opportunity to continue the movement for future generations. Become a "great steward," embrace it wholeheartedly!

For more information, contact:

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Business Meeting—

(Continued from Front Cover)

ceived the association's Distinguished Service Award.

Fred Taylor, Mankato Golf Club, was presented the Watson Award for his journalistic efforts for *Hole Notes*.

Scholarship honorees were **Chad Wilson**, Utica, Minn. (Iowa State); **David Swift**, Sherburn, Minn. (Penn State); **Kristine Ramsey**, Peterson, Minn. (Iowa State), and **Mike Harrington**, Delafield, Wis. (University of Minnesota).

The Trans-Mississippi/MGCSA Award went to **Riley Kieffer**, Nisswa, Minn. (Michigan State).

The Joseph S. Garske Legacy honorees were **Lucas Mahal**, son of Doug Mahal, CGCS, and **Amy Mounts**, daughter of Peter Mounts.

The MGCSA Legacy Awards went to **John Redmond**, son of Mike Redmond and **Aaron Smith**, son of Mark Smith.

Tom Garrett, Mendota Heights, a Minnesota director of the Trans-Mississippi Golf Association, presented two checks totaling \$1,500 from the Trans-Mississippi Turf Scholarship Fund, Minnesota Project.

The next MGCSA meeting will be held on Monday January 11, at Izaty's Golf & Yacht Club. **Jim Lehman** will be the guest speaker starting at 11:30 a.m.

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