

AGING GRACEFULLY

At Ohio University, the oldest institution of higher learning in the Northwest Territory, elderly trees help create a beautiful campus.

by Jerry Roche, editor

In 39 years at Ohio University, Dan Stright has seen it all. From floods that forced dormitory evacuations in 1964 and 1968 to a 1986 fire that devastated half the stands at Peden Stadium. From relocating a baseball field to mending severed gas lines.

The landscape at Ohio University, which dates to 1804, is a surprising combination of the old and the new. On the main campus, called the College Green, stands Cutler Hall, the first building of higher learning

in the Northwest Territory. Just to the rear of the building looms an aged sycamore, still apparently in perfect health.

However, areas surrounding the venerable College Green—the East, West and South greens—are in a constant state of flux dictated by varying enrollment and changing educational needs. And that means landscape-size headaches for Stright.

An example. Because of numerous and enormous shadows

cast by the tall trees, Stright once had a problem growing grass on the College Green. But no longer.

"Now, we buy what's called mushroom compost," notes Stright. "We buy 200 tons in the spring and spread it two inches thick over the College Green. It contains minerals, horse manure and peat moss. It doesn't smell very good, but boy it does make the grass grow."

Stright says the compost costs \$325 per ton delivered, but it positively affects both grass and soil.

Twenty tons of commercial 10-20-20 fertilizer are also purchased each year and applied in August "until we run out."

Another example. An area adjacent to the West Green through which the Hocking River flowed 20 years ago became intramural fields in the 1970s. The area has since been converted to a pair of practice football fields, and Stright is in the process of improving the low-lying land's drainage.

"I had to buy 2,000 tons of silt/sand topsoil to crown the fields," Stright says. "When the Army Corps of Engineers re-routed the river in the early 1970s, they buried all our good topsoil." Stright notes that, because of budget constraints, the fields will be crowned and drained but not completely tiled. He plans on installing turf-type tall fescue for its wear tolerance. "There'll be a lot of poundage on those fields, and tall fescues are tough once you get them going," he says.

Turfgrass beaches

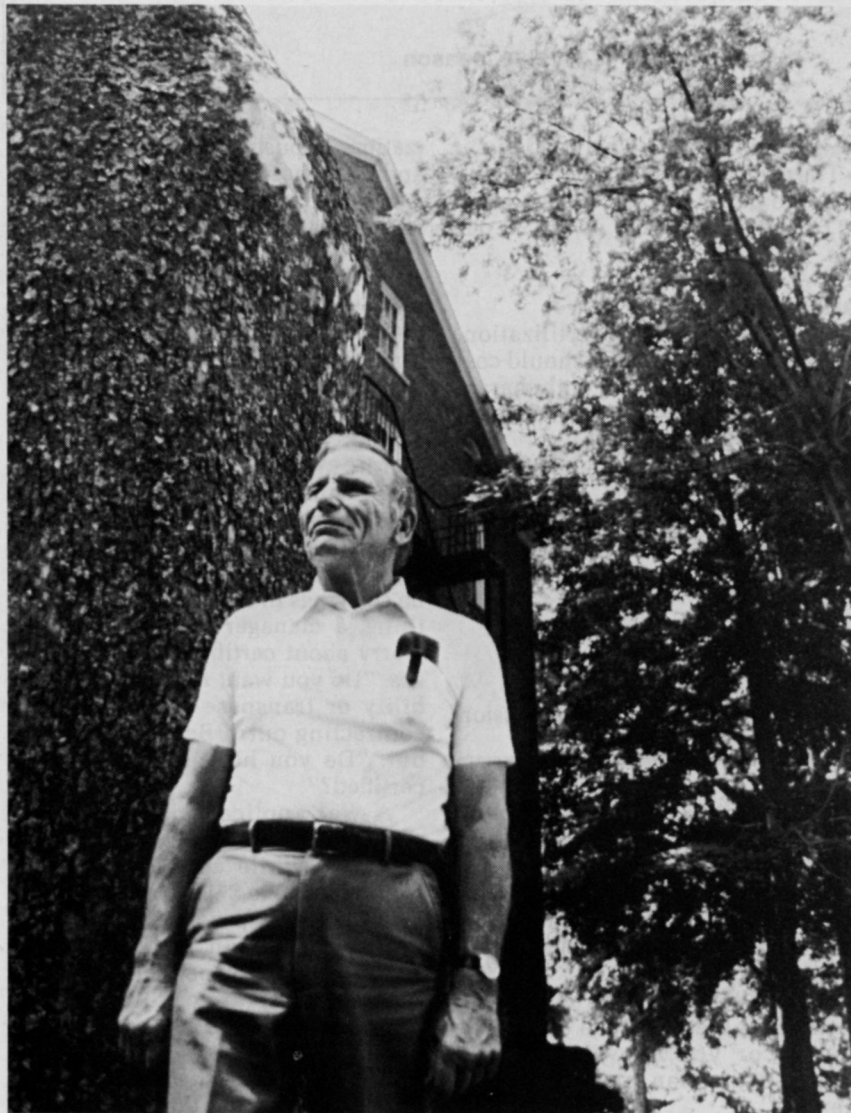
Along the re-routed Hocking is a 2,660-foot strip of turf which Stright calls an Ohio University-style "beach." (Students like to sunbathe on the south-facing stretch during sunny spring days.) This "beach" contains 175 donated cherry trees and a 150-year-old ginkgo tree.

Because of a new bike path running along the Hocking, problems were created on the adjacent nine-hole golf course. For safety purposes, four new greens had to be built last fall and some holes had to be realigned.

Unlike other golf courses around the country, the O.U. course has actually suffered from new construction. Originally a spacious, beautiful 18 holes, the course is now a short nine holes.

To "intensely manage" the rest of the 400 acres, the landscape crew consists of 27 regular employees, three supervisors and Stright. During the summer, as many as 30 students are hired. In the spring, Stright hires

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Dan Stright at the trunk of a century-old (or more) sycamore on Ohio University's venerable College Green.



South-facing hills like this one near Scripps Hall have been terraced to minimize effects of the sun on the turf.

eight or nine "emergency" employees to prepare for graduation. And the university has a contract with a nearby workshop, which supplies retarded citizens to mow various areas.

Part of his funds come from an annual budget, but for purchases of special landscape materials, Stright relies on the Campus Beautification Fund, donations from alumni of \$2,000 to \$3,000 a year.

Busy backhoe-ing

A full complement of equipment is necessary to tend this vast area, situated in the rolling hills of southeastern Ohio. The school owns about 20 Gravelly mowers with 40-inch cutting swaths, 10 Kut-Kwicks, a Gravelly Pro 60 with a 60-inch swath, four John Deere riders and two Gravelly riders. The school also uses 10 Ford tractors with three-bladed 84-inch rotaries whose blades must be kept sharp to be effective. (Stright just bought a new one this year. Some of the Fords still in use date back to 1965.) Also available are a Massey-Ferguson loader, a grader, a ditcher, trucks, pick-ups, a bulldozer and 30 or so Weed-Eaters.

Yet the most valuable piece of equipment is the backhoe. "We have to buy a new one every four years," Stright notes. "We have it out every damn day on something or other." The day LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT visited, the backhoe was on the East Green digging up a broken gas line

into a dormitory. Digging alone is quite a problem.

"Places you dig, you run into lines that you don't know what the hell they are," Stright observes. "Most of this land used to be houses and just about everywhere you dig

you run into 'Athens Block' bricks." Athens, home of Ohio U., used to have its own brick manufacturer.

Kentucky bluegrass is the dominant grass on campus. But it gets reseeded with 500 pounds of a 49% bluegrass/30% creeping red fescue/21% ryegrass mixture each year.

Going to the well

Stright is in the process of hooking the university's irrigation systems (Toro on portions of the College Green and Rainbird in Peden Stadium) into a series of wells. Trautwein Field, where the Phillies' Mike Schmidt once helped the baseball Bobcats to the College World Series, is already hooked to an adjacent well.

Stright, a member of the Association of Physical Plant Administrators, was awarded the O.U. Outstanding Administrator Award in 1986. He is proud of his accomplishments.

"The president (Charles Ping) gets a lot of compliments from students," he smiles. "While most state-supported schools couldn't get enough students this year, we had to turn students away. And part of the reason is because the campus looks so nice.

"At least, that's what the president said the other day." LM

LANDSCAPE PROFILE

FROM A(sh) TO Z(innias)

The campus at the University of Minnesota -Waseca is a horticultural smorgasbord. Students design and maintain most of the campus, learning the ins and outs of landscape management along the way.

by Heide Aungst, managing editor



Jerry Nelson: students help out

Most turf managers might call Brad Pedersen crazy.

"We like a golf green to come out with a snow mold problem," Pedersen says coolly. "We love it when it gets dollar spot and pythium."

Love dollar spot? Pythium? There's only one motive to the madness: education.

Pedersen is an associate professor at the the University of Minnesota Technical College-Waseca. His philosophy—as well as the school's—is to give the students one focus:

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