

PLCAA considers giving new life to the 42-year-old Lawn Institute

Marietta, Ga.— On June 30, the executive committee of The Lawn Institute suspended operations of the 40-year old turfgrass trade association. The Professional Lawn Care Association is looking at ways to revive it.

Lawn Institute President Scott Patterson said the decision was made "due to insufficient interest and financial support from the turfgrass seed industry" over the last several years.

"A number of sticks are in the fire," said Patterson. "There's been a number of proposals, including the possibility of The Lawn Institute being united with an industry organization such as the Professional Lawn Care Association of America (PLCAA). We're trying to make some decisions now."

PLCAA's Thomas Delaney acknowledged: "We're working with them to see how we can either make them a division [of PLCAA] or keep it going. . . We're trying to put a proposal together to see what we can do."

Open up membership

Delaney said PLCAA wants to open the Lawn Institute's membership to all supplier categories, an idea whose time has perhaps finally come.

Dr. Eliot Roberts, a past executive director of The In-

stitute, is one observer who believes the Institute's narrow membership has limited the Institute's success.

"I thought it should be open to equipment manufacturers and chemical [companies] as well," Roberts said. "The educational effort would have been a benefit for



Roberts: non-profits need money.



Jacklin: low membership a problem.



Brooks: don't yank plug on Institute.

the whole of lawn care industry. We never got beyond a one-person, half-time executive director. If staff had increased at the same time our base of support increased, it might have made a difference," suggested Roberts.

"Our top budget each year was just over \$100,000," recalled Roberts. "You need at least a quarter million for a non-profit [association] to make an impact."

Roberts believes politics was one cause of lack of support for the Institute.

"The seedsmen have had their agenda," said Roberts.

"One of the key points that has benefitted the landscape and lawn care industries has been the way it has matured over time. I don't think the lawn seed trade has matured over time. They're still fighting over non-green industry issues. Instead of worrying about whether one

and financial support from a wider base of turf industry suppliers and professionals."

About 75 firms belong to the Institute, but "without financial support, no organization is going to make it," emphasized Patterson.

Institute began in '55

The Institute began in 1955 as The Better Lawn & Turf Institute, to promote research and education on the benefits of lawn/sports turf.

"We felt the program had value, but when crunch time came, we were all busy," said Tom Stanley, marketing director for Turf-Seed. "We just didn't want to put those stickers on the bag, because it's another step before it gets out the door."

"We educate people," said James Brooks, most recent director of the Institute.

"The Lawn Institute has never sold a bag of seed and I don't think it ever will. Our role is to raise the consciousness of the homeowner and consumer to where they'll say, 'I want some of the good stuff,'" when planting a new lawn.

"Let's not yank the plug on this thing," added Brooks. "We're going to see if we can come up with another plan." □

company has an advantage over another they should be promoting the lawn garden and turf industry as a whole, not worry about their individual benefits."

"Though the Lawn Institute has been very successful in its consumer education and public relations efforts on behalf of the turfgrass industry, the current membership level cannot financially sustain its growing number of worthwhile activities," said Doyle Jacklin, Jacklin Seed Co..

"We certainly hope a viable plan can be developed to expand the interest, participation