

'Ambassadors' get a warm welcome

"It's fun, it really is," says Bill Prest, superintendent at Sweetbriar Golf Club,



Bill Prest enjoys speaker's role.

Avon Lake, Ohio. "I've probably given 15 to 20 talks, and my experiences have been very, very positive."

Prest is one of a growing, but still small, group of "ambassadors".

These golf superintendents and lawn care professionals speak in front of civic and school groups within their communities. They explain their professions, and talk about products and equipment they use.

The Ambassador Speakers Program is jointly supported by GCSAA, PLCAA and RISE.

"I've incorporated some information about the environment and about pesticide use into a slide program," says Tom Gray, CGCS, superintendent at Franklin Hills Country Club, near Detroit. "I start with a slide of Augusta National and show them what we try to achieve. Then I talk about the responsible use of pesticides and, and about our efforts to protect the environment."

So far there are about 35 ambassadors. They all participated in one-day training programs before they began taking speaking assignments. The first group received instruction in Cincinnati in November 1996. The second group trained in Atlantic City, NJ, this past December.

Prest says he's talked to civic clubs (Rotary, Kiwanis, Lions) and to local school groups. While all are attentive, the response from the youngsters is usually more spirited. They particularly enjoy learning about the wildlife on golf courses. Then he helps them build bluebird or bat houses.

Prest says audiences seem to be genuinely interested in his message. Even so, he acknowledges that some of the people

he's spoken to "have some real concerns" over the use of pesticides.

"These concerns are usually unfounded, but they're there," he says. "You have to be prepared for this."



Tom Gray focuses on environment.

"I've had no negative reaction whatsoever," adds Randy Zidik, CGCS, superintendent at Rolling Hills Country Club near Pittsburgh. "I've been surprised by how interested people are in golf course maintenance."

Jon Cundiff, owner of Turfs Up Lawn Service near Kansas City, MO, focuses on the benefits of turf.

"I try to reaffirm the importance of what we're doing," says Cundiff. "As long as I can help them understand the benefits of what we're doing, they will better appreciate it."

Cundiff enlivens his presentation with true-life experiences from his days on the grounds crew of the KC Royals baseball team and the KC Chief football team.

"The time that I've spent in giving these talks has been minimal compared to the good I think they're doing for the industry," adds Cundiff.

Representatives from GCSAA, PLCAA and RISE met in May to discuss expanding the Ambassador Speakers Program. *To learn more, contact either: Kristi Frey, CGSAA, 800/472-7878; Karen Weber, PLCAA, 800/458-3466; or Elizabeth Lawder, RISE, (202) 872-3860.*

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Can you answer these questions?

One way to serve your community is by providing it with answers to questions on pesticide use.

In the eyes of some of the public who don't know the full story, pesticides are a villain. This Q&A from Responsible Industry for a Sound Environment (RISE) will help you and your crews face difficult questions.

Q: What is a pesticide?

A: A pesticide is any natural or synthetic substance that can be used to control or kill pests of any sort, including insects, fungi, rodents and weeds.

Q: Do pesticides cause cancer?

A: There are a few specific pesticides that have been shown to cause cancer in laboratory rodents. Pesticides do not cause cancer in people. In 1997, a panel of international cancer experts evaluated more than 70 published stories. The panel concluded that it was not aware of any definitive evidence to suggest that synthetic pesticides contribute significantly to overall cancer mortality.

Q: Are environmental levels of man-made pesticides and other synthetic chemicals an important cause of cancer?

A: No population studies and studies of the harmful properties of synthetic pesticides and other industrial chemicals do not support a cause and effect relationship between exposure to low levels of these materials and cancer.

Q: Do pesticides cause cancer in children?

A: Pesticide exposure is only one of many potential causes being investigated. To be able to say with confidence that no association exists between pesticides and childhood cancer, the potential for such an association must be thoroughly studied. Many of the studies looking at these questions have been underway since the late 1980s. The findings from these studies are being evaluated and should be available by the end of 1999. Other potential environmental causes of cancer are being investigated.

For more information on how to answer these and other pesticide related questions, contact RISE at 202/872-3860.

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