

Rockin' with Sam and Fred at Walnut Creek

Tall and outgoing, with a shock of white hair sticking from beneath his University of Georgia baseball cap and his soft drawl, Sam Lang gives the impression of being a good ol' boy — which, in fact, he is. He enjoys a loud time every now and again, and he can spin a good yarn.

This has served him well as owner of the application company, Fairway Green, Raleigh, NC, and as one of North Carolina turf's most vocal and influential supporters, particularly at the statehouse level.

Lang likes a stiff challenge (ask him about his branch office in Greensboro), and has partnered with Fred Yelverton Ph D., a turfgrass extension specialist at NC State, to grow grass on bare ground — over and over.

The site is the ALLTELL Pavilion, the hillside inside the Walnut Creek Amphitheater where, on any given steamy Carolina evening, a capacity crowd of 22,000 music lovers can turn Walnut Creek into a raucous rock-and-roll party, 12,000 of them greatly enjoying themselves on the turfed, bowled hillside.

"A lot of strange things happen on this grass," Lang likes to say, which is probably an understatement.

Touring the site with Lang and Yelverton late this past summer, the hillside had already suffered over 30 concerts, been trod upon by at least a million feet and sopped up enough spilled beer to float the USS Constitution. Yet, the 5-acre site showed a fine cover of Tif 419 hybrid bermudagrass, and Lang and Yelverton insisted that it would be completely returfed in time for the next concert, just three days away.



Fred Yelverton, left, and Sam Lang after the concert

"Since we're growing the turf in from absolutely nothing, over and over again all season, we're here in the middle of the summer every seven days putting fertilizer down," says Lang. They don't spare the irrigation either. But, that's just half of the story.

The sloped site is surrounded by woodlands and wetlands. "We're careful here to avoid nutrient runoff. We don't want pesticide runoff either," he says.

The concert goers that flock to Walnut Creek probably don't give much thought to the condition of the turf when the singing and partying are over.

It's a good bet that they appreciate the soft green grass they spread their blankets on before the music starts.

Contact Ron at 440/891-2636 or e-mail at rhall@advanstar.com

The hillside had already suffered over 30 concerts, been trod on by a million feet and sopped up enough spilled beer to float a battleship. — RH

