

THE FRONT OFFICE

OPINION PAGE

RESEARCH FUNDING NOW



Eberhard "Eb" Steiniger, one of the most generous and knowledgeable men in the golf course business for the past 60 years, is the semi-retired superintendent of Pine Valley Golf Course in Pine Hill, NJ. Eb has watched over his course, which has consistently been listed as one of the best and toughest in the country, for most of its 66-year history. He has also observed and participated in the advancement of the golf course maintenance industry during his lifetime.

Steiniger will tell you that during the past 25 years, the golf course industry has experienced a technological revolution. He will tell you that

much of the credit is due to the cooperation and support of the Extension Service and agronomists at universities across this country. By working with researchers at Rutgers, Penn State, the University of Maryland, Cornell, the University of Rhode Island and the University of Massachusetts, and many others, Steiniger has helped the golf course industry overcome some of its most critical problems. He will tell you that without the university system, the golf course industry would not be where it is today—where any person with a desire to play golf has a good course available to him.

Thanks to superintendents like Eb, university agronomists and hundreds of thousands of dollars donated each year, the problems of the golf course industry have largely been solved. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said for the athletic field side of the sports turf industry.

At best, athletic field maintenance is where golf course maintenance was 25 years ago. At a time of critical need, sports facilities with the highest use and lowest budgets have few places to turn for answers to pressing problems. But, the industry doesn't need 25 years to catch up. By borrowing technology from the golf course industry, more than two decades of work can be accomplished in less than ten years. By adapting information currently available in England and Australia, American agronomists and athletic field managers can speed into the future.

Extension turf specialists are anxious to delve into major problems, and they know what they are, but there is little money for equipment, supplies and salaries. They have to justify every penny spent on research. More than ever before they must depend on grants and gifts to pay their expenses.

State and national turf organizations and manufacturers have come to the rescue with grants in the face of shrinking taxpayer support. The twist is the vast majority of these grants are earmarked by their donors for certain types of research. So far, these donors have almost automatically stated that their grants are for golf course turf research.

Only a fool would state that golf research should suffer so that more money can be spent on athletic field research. On the other hand, donors must understand that the need for athletic field research is as great, or in some cases greater, than for golf. They also need to understand that without earmarking funds for athletic field research, little will be done.

At this moment there are at least five major universities on the verge of launching major athletic field research programs. The only thing holding them up is funding—money earmarked for athletic field research. Open the tap just a little and results will begin to pour out. Big problems can be solved in a matter of two or three years.

Hopefully, ten years from now, we can all look back on the progress of the athletic field market, like Eb Steiniger does today on the golf course industry, and say, "We did it, we found the money to put athletic fields on par with golf courses." The Eb Steinigers are out there ready to cooperate with the Extension Service and to help prime the pump of research dollars for the athletic field segment of the sports turf industry. The universities are poised to start research. What are we waiting for?

Bruce F. Shank

EVENTS

CALENDAR

APRIL

19-20 Southern California Turfgrass Conference, Anaheim Convention Center, Anaheim, CA. Contact: Ed McNeil, SCTC, 2492 E. Mountain St., Pasadena, CA 91104, (818) 798-1715.

MAY

18 North Carolina Turf and Landscape Field Day, North Carolina State University Field Center, Raleigh, NC. Contact: J.M. DiPaola, Box 7620, North Carolina State University, Raleigh, NC 27695, (919) 737-2657.

JULY

12 Sports turf seminar and field day, College of the Holy Cross, Worcester, MA. Contact: PGMS, 12 Galloway Ave., Cockeysville, MD 21030, (301) 667-1833, or STMA, 400 N. Mountain, Upland, CA 91786, (617) 793-3477.

19-20 Athletic Facilities Maintenance Seminar, Mulberry Street Recreation Center, City of Lenoir, NC. Contact: Professional Grounds Management Society, 12 Galloway Ave., Suite 1E, Cockeysville, MD 21030, (301) 667-1833.

AUGUST

3 University of Georgia Turf Field Day, Georgia Experiment Station, Griffin, GA. Contact: Dr. Gil Landry, 2400 College Station Rd., Athens, GA 30605, (404) 542-5350.

9 Mississippi Turfgrass Association Annual Meeting, Royal D'Iberville Hotel, Biloxi, MS. Contact: Professor Euel Coates, P.O. Drawer PG, Mississippi State, MS 39762, (601) 325-3138.