

First Annual Man of the Year Award



Man of the Year, Fred V. Grau.

As Fred Grau lay in a hospital bed in Maryland recently with a less-than-cheery prognosis from his doctor, he wasn't contemplating his mortality. Instead, the 86-year-old Grau was figuring out how he could promote a creeping tall fescue and a variety of zoysiagrass. He had every intention of leaving the hospital to carry on his work that has spanned six decades.

Grau has battled the status quo throughout his life, always saying "it can be done." Driven by the potential he sees for the turfgrass industry, he never gives up. And he didn't give up this time either. He's back at home on the phone, working on his endless agenda.

SportsTURF magazine is proud to honor Fred V. Grau as the first recipient of its Man of the Year Award. Without his foresight, persistence and dedication, the turf industry would not be what it is today. His influence over the decades has affected thousands, if not millions of turfgrass managers, researchers and suppliers. And,

as Fred sees it, there are millions more out there to help.

Leadership is more than being in the right place at the right time. Leaders must be resolute, able to overcome criticism, and continuously willing to fight for what they believe. Grau's timing couldn't have been better and his resolve couldn't have been stronger. Both his supporters and his detractors will tell you this.

He started his turfgrass career as a student at the University of Nebraska in Lincoln. As an agronomy major he observed his professors in the College of Agriculture tackle innovative research into improved varieties of crops for the American farmer. But Grau had a different kind of field in mind.

Oddly enough, his fascination with turf started when he was on the sidelines as a cheerleader for the Cornhuskers. There were lots of students planning to go into agriculture, but few saw the potential of the turfgrass industry. While his fellow students were captivated with the beginning of the

agricultural revolution, Grau charted his career in turf's direction.

It was an inspired decision, as the Great Depression spread across the nation's grain belt. The United States Golf Association (USGA) was impressed with the young agronomist who had an interest in turfgrass selection and breeding. The plots at the Midwest Turf Gardens in Chicago needed the attention of a specialist, so they gave Grau the job. After a few months, the USGA moved him to its larger experimental gardens in Arlington, VA, now the site of the Pentagon.

As Grau maintained and recorded the performance of turfgrass samples collected from across the country, he realized that his education was incomplete. Diseases often made or broke the turf in his plots. He had sought the advice of Dr. John Monteith, a pathologist at the University of Rhode Island, and made plans to work toward a Master's degree under Monteith in Kingston, RI.

Ironically it was Monteith who suggested Grau continue his work with the USGA while he took classes at the University of Maryland in nearby Beltsville. Instead of studying pathology, Grau directed his study toward weed control in turf.

Selective weed control was a wide-open field for him to explore, since 2,4-D would not be developed for another 15 years. He found that sodium arsenite killed common weeds without killing the turf. Selective weed control was the first of the turf technologies he would pioneer.

He continued to work for USGA, evaluating the performance of bentgrasses, Kentucky bluegrasses, fescues, and a new type of turf from Korea called zoysiagrass. It was also Grau's job to document the benefits of the growing C-series of bentgrasses for USGA that included Arlington (C-1) and Cohansy (C-7). He could see the differences between European varieties of turfgrasses and those established from samples collected by golf course superintendents and fellow researchers across the U.S. It was *potential* he was looking for — and he saw it long before others would agree. Meyer zoysia is just one example.

At the same time, he studied pasture grasses for his doctoral thesis at Maryland. One reason he studied pasture grasses instead of turfgrasses was that there were stipends and fellowships for agricultural research, but not for lawn, golf course and athletic field research. From that point on, he started looking for ways to generate dollars for turfgrass research and student fellowships.

Grau wanted to apply some of the advances he had observed at the Arlington Turf Gardens. He got his chance when Dr. Burton Musser was able to squeeze out money from his research budget at Pennsylvania State University at University Park.

While Musser concentrated on research, Grau focused on field work and helping Pennsylvania golf courses, parks and schools solve their turf problems. "This work led to my becoming the first Extension Turf Specialist in the United States," Grau proudly exclaims.

That might not have happened had the golf course superintendents in Pennsylvania failed to organize and voice their demand for help from the university. "Greenskeepers joined forces to create the demand for support services," remarks Grau today. "The squeaky wheel gets the grease, as they say."

In 1935, as he traveled Pennsylvania in his Ford Model A Roadster, his eyes wandered from the pavement to roadsides, pastures and lawns. One day he was driving from Allentown to Reading when he had to make a decision about which road to take. "I turned right at a fork," he recalls, "and you could say I never turned back."

Grau noticed a pile of cinder shale alongside the road, covered with pink and white flowers. He stopped his Roadster and asked the farmer, Robert Gift, about the plant. Gift said attempts to get rid of the

plant had failed so he'd just left it alone, without water or fertilizer. The plant, which he discovered was crown vetch, apparently reseeded itself successfully into the sterile pile of shale.

As Grau continued along his way to



Grau gets around his neighborhood in College Park, MD, in a golf cart.

Reading on highways with their barren, eroding roadsides, he realized that this tenacious plant might be a low-maintenance solution to erosion control and beautification of the rapidly growing network of highways in the country. Not only did crown vetch improve the soil by recycling nutrients from deep in the ground, it did not become a nuisance by spreading into cultivated areas.

There were two problems with this idea. First, someone would have to grow the seed and secondly, a convenient way to seed hundreds of acres of roadsides was needed. Working with engineers at the University, he developed a machine that would spray a mixture of seed, mulch and water onto slopes from a truck-mounted tank. The resulting machine was the first hydraulic seeder.

Using seed Grau had gathered from Gift's farm and the seeder, the Pennsylvania Turnpike planted a section of roadside in 1939. The crown vetch along much of the turnpike is clearly visible today to travelers.

To complete the puzzle, Grau decided that he would grow the seed himself and formed Grasslyn, Inc. In 1946, the company began marketing crown vetch to highway

departments across the nation. Later in his career, Grau's Penngift crown vetch would provide him with the financial independence to pursue some of his many ideas.

The Depression and World War II set back the golf course industry tremendously. But when the war ended, there was a tremendous demand to build new golf courses and expand existing ones. The USGA was loaded down with requests for assistance. Fielding Wallace, chairman of the USGA Green Section Committee, asked Grau to return to Beltsville as the first director of the Green Section in 1945. For eight years, he coordinated USGA's efforts to help architects and superintendents meet the exploding demand for golf in the U.S.

Under Grau's direction, the Green Section promoted the development of hybrid bermudagrasses by Dr. Glenn Burton at the Georgia Experiment Station and improved seeded bentgrasses at Pennsylvania State University. Grau encouraged the use of Merion and other improved Kentucky bluegrasses as well as zoysiagrass in the transition zone. He kept superintendents apprised of developments with fungicides, fertilizers and herbicides.

Despite the tremendous load on USGA, Grau wanted to expand the organization's influence to other turf areas. "So much of the technology benefiting the golf course industry was desperately needed by others," explained Grau. It seemed only natural to him, especially because of USGA's close relationship with the U.S. Department of Agriculture at Beltsville. Grau's controversial opinion was not shared by the USGA, and he left the organization in 1953.

Grau saw three options for him to participate in the improvement of turf management for all uses. The first was from the commercial side of the market, promoting new products that he believed would make a difference. He did this by working for Nitroform Agricultural Chemical Corp. (later Hercules, then Nor-Am), giving demonstrations across the country of Nitroform ureaformaldehyde, a slow-release fertilizer. He also helped refine and demonstrate the first turf aerifier and verticutter for West Point Products.

Some of his greatest work has come from his participation in the second option, state and national turfgrass associations. In 1959, Grau became executive secretary of the Pennsylvania Turfgrass Council upon the death of Dr. Musser. He worked diligently to involve representatives from all types of turfgrass occupations in the state, in addition to gaining support from industry suppliers. The result was a larger financial base from which to support all types of turfgrass research through grants.

Grau is perhaps best known for his involvement in the Musser International Turfgrass Foundation, created after Musser's death to raise funds for turf research and fellowships. He resigned as

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executive director of MITF this past year when his health started to slip. Five years ago he helped launch the National Sports Turf Council in order to gain recognition and support for the improvement of parks and athletic fields.

Throughout his career he has contributed in numerous ways to the American Society of Agronomy. In 1987, the Crop Science Society of America, a division of ASA, created the Fred V. Grau Turfgrass Science Award to recognize significant contributions to turfgrass science. ASA will present the award to those in the turfgrass industry regardless of their occupation. It will consider the career work of researchers, teachers, suppliers or administrators.

The third option Grau has successfully mastered is writing. Starting with the USGA Green Section Bulletin, Grau's words have been printed in the *National Geographic*, *Golfdom*, and virtually every industry publication today. He always has a cause to promote and writes prolifically to get the word out. Most recently he has been published on the importance of living soils. "We should be managing turf to encourage beneficial microorganisms, not discourage them with overuse of chemicals and sterile soils," he asserts.

According to Grau, he still has a great deal of unfinished business. He admits that

somebody else will have to pick up the ball for the National Sports Turf Council and run with it. But he has every intention of pursu-



Grau and former assistant Sharon Lee Flavell, remove a plug of zoysiagrass from a lawn in his neighborhood.

ing his ideas for a creeping tall fescue and releasing Sunburst zoysiagrass.

"I've kept Sunburst on the back burner

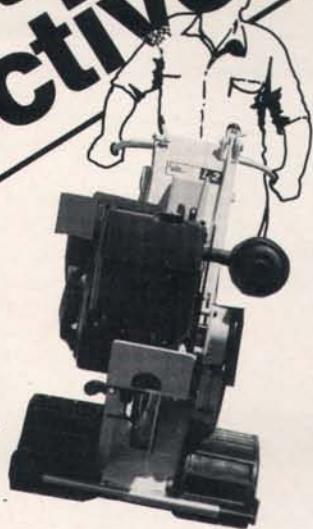
until now so it wouldn't interfere with Meyer," he explains. "It's too good to hide any longer. It has excellent resistance to insects and diseases and doesn't develop thatch. It is a low maintenance grass that will do great in regions of the country where bermudagrass and Kentucky bluegrass are hard to manage."

Grau still lives just a few miles from the USGA turf plots in Beltsville. He doesn't get there as often as he used to, but nearly every yard in his neighborhood was planted with selections he made throughout his career. He reads stacks of trade magazines and journals every month and either calls or writes his comments to their editors on a regular basis. His son, Fred V. Grau, Jr., manages the Grasslyn farm in Pennsylvania and keeps him informed of production and orders weekly.

"The turfgrass industry is still a long way from reaching its potential," says Grau. "All you have to do is look around and see the bare, rutted football fields at schools and parks, lawns that fail because they are overfed and overwatered, and highway roadsides that are eroded and collect trash. We have a long way to go. We have to get organized to make sure that the turf industry will reach its potential in the future."

Editor's Note: Doris J. Watson of Marketing Support Services in Austin, TX, and George Jones of Nor-Am Chemical Company, Wilmington, DE, assisted with the development of this story. ☞

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