

On the Grow

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Be Proud of Your Profession!

by Kevin A. Johnson, At-Large Director, All American Turf Beauty

As I look back over the years I am always amazed at all the changes that have occurred in our industry. My association with professional lawn care began in 1976 when my father, Daryle Johnson, started his lawn care business in the Des Moines area. It was clearly the infancy of our industry, and the public perception of our industry was quite different than it is today. Imagine going to a home show today and receiving literally hundreds of good quality leads that eventually became customers. Not only did the public look at lawn care with open arms, they flocked to the few lawn care companies that existed at that time.

Some of my earliest memories also pertain to the evolution of how our industry has grown. The equipment used to provide our services has improved dramatically over the years. I recall how my father and his associates literally pieced together his first “sprayer.” This was before the day of going to a distributor and buying a sprayer that performed great right out of the box. Something as common place today as the “chem.-lawn” gun presented challenges in the early days. Imagine trying to spray a yard with a flat fan tip nozzle, getting good coverage with no spray drift, using chemicals on the market at the time.

The evolution of the products we use, the amounts we use, and the agronomics involved in lawn care is perhaps just as amazing. In this area, we clearly have a great story to tell the public. Products have been engineered with better LD50 characteristics, use less active ingredients per acre, and most importantly, provide better results in an environmentally-friendly manner. In the days of Balan pre-emergent crabgrass control, our company would have hundreds of service calls due to crabgrass, spurge and oxalis. I almost became as convinced as the customers that our company was seeding these blights since there was literally NO CONTROL. Barricade, Dimension, Pendi-methaline, and other crabgrass preventers available on the market today provide superior control of crabgrass, foxtail, spurge and oxalis. I can't recall in the past 15 or 20 years having a lawn being consumed with spurge or oxalis.

The last part of the evolution that has occurred is perhaps the most alarming and disappointing to me. That

would be how the public perceives us as stewards of the environment. Although we have made tremendous improvements in the equipment, chemicals, and the overall approach to achieving a great looking lawn, we are viewed as the “bad guys” who are poisoning the earth with unnecessary chemicals that serve NO beneficial purpose. We don't receive press time to inform the public about the many improvements that we have achieved in our industry. Perhaps more alarming is the fact that the public doesn't “trust” our information (backed by science) since we make a “profit” peddling our products.

Fortunately, we have a great story to tell to the public, but it is only as good as the professionals that supply the services to the general public. It is quite clear that some of our legislatures are “disgusted” with some of the approaches that so called “professional” lawn care companies take in regards to applying granular products. There will come a day, when the state will regulate the application of granular products to a greater degree than they already do! Companies will be forced (by either local or state law) to do something in the future that companies should be doing now regardless of the law. A common sense approach that the company that I work for has utilized for the past 13 years is to utilize a hand held blower to get the granular material back into the turf. Our customers love this service, and have come to expect our applicators to provide it. Blowing the granular material off the sidewalks, drives, and streets is a perfect example of providing a great application vs. a sloppy application that demeans our entire industry.

Each member of our industry needs to continue to do the things that make us lawn care professionals! If you don't already use a hand held blower to deal with the granular material left on concrete surfaces, I would strongly encourage you to start. Everyone knows that it is the “right” thing to do. Be a strong proponent for our industry and be ahead of the curve. I implore each lawn care professional to consistently promote our industry and utilize practices that can't be scrutinized by the public. Let's not wait for IDALS to regulate something that really needs to be done. A true professional does things, not because he/she has to, but because it is the right way to perform a service.

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Upcoming Events

June 23, 2010: Iowa GCSA Extension Fundraiser

Sugar Creek Golf Course - Waukee, Iowa

Host Superintendent - Steve Elliott

Lunch available for purchase

Time: 11 AM Shotgun

GCSAA Cooperative Research Presentation - Dr. Minner, ISU

Meal after golf by: Bett & Bev's BBQ – Sponsored by Raccoon Valley GC

Cost: \$50.00 includes golf, cart, education and meal

July 14, 2010: Field Day Classic Golf Tournament

Jewell Country Club - Jewell, Iowa

Host Superintendent - Brian Abels

10 AM - Plot tour w/ Dave Minner, PhD - Iowa State University

GCSAA Education Points applied for

11 AM Registration & lunch

Noon Shotgun start

August 30, 2010: ITI/Iowa GCSA Benefit Tournament

Des Moines Golf & Country Club - West Des Moines, Iowa

Host Superintendent: Rick Tegtmeier, CGCS

Details Forthcoming

January 18-20, 2011 : 2011 Iowa Turfgrass Conference & Trade Show

Polk County Convention Complex & Marriott Hotel

Des Moines, IA

Details Forthcoming



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Recognize Your Best Employees

by Bill Feldmann, At-Large Director, Feldmann's Yard N' Garden

What a shame! As the board member responsible for the Lawn Care Professional of the Year award I was very surprised that we didn't get a single recommendation for the award this year. In all our membership I can't believe nobody did a good enough job to get noticed and recognized by the boss to be recommended.

I will admit, it is a skill that has to be learned. I will pass on a little bit of my military experience.

Did you have an employee who was promoted to crew leader? Section leader? Trusted enough to operate his or her own rig with little supervision? Maybe they just showed up to work in clean clothes every day and did what they were assigned. Maybe they volunteered to get their applicators license. These employees should all be eligible for a nomination for this award, unless they have that black mark that kicks them out of the process for the year.

Unless you are a one man operation like I am, you probably have employees who get good comments from your customers. These employees should also be recognized

by the boss. Maybe they are your nomination for the year.

The board would rather have thirty or forty nominations to look over and assess than three or four.

We are getting ready to start anew with new growth, new employees, new customers, and now is the time to start looking at your employees for next years nominations. Some of our larger companies should have two, three, or four nominations if they are training and growing their employees for more responsibilities and duties. But that is a topic for another article.

Let's show our employees that they are valued. Nominate the good ones for Lawn Care Professional of the Year. Even if they don't win, they will know that they are good enough to get recognized by the boss. That is good for the morale of those employees and the company.

We will be requesting your nominations in six short months, so lets not forget to reward your employees for their hard work.

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Grass Can Be Green: Be an Advocate of Our Industry

by Marcus Jones, Graduate Research Assistant, Iowa State University



It's been awhile since I have posted to the blog. The hiatus is partially due to countless hours of preparation for my preliminary exam which was last week. A preliminary exam is a required step on the way to obtaining a PhD and might be best described as an exercise in poise, patience, and humility while demonstrating your ability to think on your feet. As part of my preliminary exam I was presented with an opinion article that recently appeared in the New York Times.

Here are some excerpts from the article which was titled "The Dandelion King."

....The unkempt look of my lawn is just a byproduct of a conclusion I reached a few years ago: the war on weeds, though not unwinnable, isn't winnable at a morally acceptable cost.

....I soon learned that the carpets of green in suburbia are the product of assiduously applied chemicals. "Pre-emergent" herbicides are laid down more than once in the spring (mixed in with the fertilizer) to sabotage the germination of crabgrass, dandelions and other undesirables. If this fails, post-emergents may be applied en masse. And as the summer wears on, local pockets of resistance can be wiped out with a spray canister of poison.

....releasing dubious chemicals into the environment — is the inevitable result of using them on your lawn; you can't negate this negative externality without rewriting the laws of nature.

....But for me, the practical way to have an eco-friendly lawn is to have a weedy lawn.

The remainder of the article is littered with further inaccuracies and embellishments that mislead the reader and paint a negative picture of turfgrass (the full article can be read at <http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/04/20/the-dandelion-king/#more-46847%29>).

I was asked, as a member and advocate of the turfgrass industry, to provide a rebuttal to this article as part of my preliminary exam. I believe articles of this nature reinforce the notion of the importance that each and every one of us does our part to educate our customers and the public about the benefits of properly managed

turfgrass. Here are some facts about the benefits of turfgrass to the environment based upon published scientific literature. Equip yourself with this knowledge so you can provide an insightful answer next time you are challenged about the benefits of turfgrass. A comprehensive report detailing turfgrasses and their benefit to humans and the environment can be found at <http://www.superbowlsod.com/pdfs/real2.pdf>.

Environmental Benefits of Turfgrass

- Turfgrass provides a dense groundcover which protects the soil from water and wind erosion. Doubling the amount of turfgrass shoots in a lawn (32 to 64/sq.inch) reduced the amount of runoff by two thirds (Easton Z.M., and A.M. Petrovic. 2004. Fertilizer source effect on ground and surface water quality in drainage from turfgrass. *J Environ Qual* 33: 645-656)
- The dense canopy of well-maintained turfgrass coupled with its extensive, fibrous root system results in more water infiltrating through the soil profile. This enhanced infiltration increases groundwater recharge and reduces nutrient loss in runoff. Weedy-low quality lawns had three times more nitrogen runoff than a dense-treated lawn and no more phosphorus runoff (Easton, Z.M. 2005. Ph.D. thesis, Cornell Univ.)
- The turf-soil ecosystem supports a diverse population of soil microorganisms. These organisms are very efficient at degrading and trapping many of organic chemicals contained in runoff and sediment that occurs from impervious surfaces. Thin, weedy lawns leached 1-2 % of a herbicide compared to no leaching from a dense lawn (Easton, Zachary M., A. Martin Petrovic, Donald J. Lisk and Inga-Mai Larsson-Kovach. 2005. Hillslope Position Effect on Nutrient and Pesticide Runoff from Turfgrass. *Intern. Turfgrass Soc. Res. J.* 10:121-129).
- Turfgrass removes carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and replaces it with oxygen. This exchange of gasses allows turfgrass to act as a net sink for the sequestration of CO₂. Well-managed turfgrass receiving inputs can sequester larger amounts of carbon dioxide compared to lawns receiving no inputs (Zirkle, Gina Nicole. 2009. 2009 International Annual Meetings: [Abstracts][ASA-CSSA-SSSA]. p. [52288]).

My Take on the “Dandelion King”

by Jeff Wendel, Executive/Communications Director, Iowa Turfgrass Institute



Iowa GCSA members have a tremendous resource in the IaTurf Blog, just visit: <http://iaturf.blogspot.com/>. Special thanks to Marcus Jones for his assiduous work on this valuable tool for turfgrass managers.

I urge you to heed Marcus’ advice, “Equip yourself with this knowledge so you can provide an insightful answer next time you are challenged about the benefits of turfgrass.” The Wednesday April 28th blog article from Marcus contains excellent ‘equipment’ for that answer.

The blog refers to an article from the NY Times and a person self dubbed the ‘Dandelion King.’ I find his statement that the war on weeds isn’t “winnable at a morally acceptable cost” is based on his opinion rather than any actual knowledge of turfgrasses or turfgrass management. See the complete article at: <http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/04/20/the-dandelion-king/#more-46847%29>

Again and again I observe the most ‘interesting’ writers getting their blather printed as fact, because they are able to editorialize with word choices and interesting adjectives. For example, the so called ‘Dandelion King’ states; “I soon learned that the carpets of green in suburbia are the product of assiduously applied chemicals...” The word assiduous sounds very sinister here but the definition is benign:

as•sid•u•ous (adj.)

1. Constant in application or attention; diligent: an assiduous worker who strove for perfection. See Synonyms at busy.

2. Unceasing; persistent

[From Latin assiduus, from assid re, to attend to The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition copyright ©2000 by Houghton Mifflin Company. Updated in 2009. Published by Houghton Mifflin Company. All rights reserved.]

I am certain the author meant ‘constant in application,’ but the truth is that diligent is a better definition.

What the author obviously does not understand is that good management can lead to good turfgrass quality without an abundance of inputs. He just ‘doesn’t have time to figure this stuff out,’ so he has developed an ‘environmental excuse’ for his poor skills. Take a look at

Marcus’ scientific response and help this author and others like him realize that there is nothing insidious about proper turfgrass management. It does take a little work and knowledge, but the environment will benefit from that knowledge and effort.

I won’t go on bashing this author about the other misrepresentations in his article, except to say that his ‘multiple’ applications of pre emergent are senseless and the subsequent post emergent applications he so despises have little to do with the success or failure of the preemerge. So it goes.

Suffice it to say the author has done just enough ‘Googling’ to be dangerously misinformed. Atrazine is a grass killer, let’s not lump it in as a ‘lawn chemical.’ Please.

Bottom line is simple, we either educate those that think like the ‘Dandelion King’ or we let the self proclaimed ‘environmentalists’ screw up thing beyond belief.



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Gentleman (and Ladies) Start Your Engines!

by Geoff Proffitt, President/Southeast Director, Hedge Above LLC



At the end of March and we finally experienced the first full week of cooperating weather. The first couple of days that actually reached the mid-sixties prompted many homeowners and commercial places to pick up the phone. Those couple hectic days pale in comparison to the torrent of phone calls going into this extended period of warm sunny days. I'm not certain what logged more miles, the truck going out to look at prospective jobsites or the Echo barstool in my office in front of the laptop as I prepare bids.

Either way the first real warm weather days we experience makes life interesting for us at the beginning of the season. One part frantic, two parts chaotic, and three parts hectic, seems to be how each day starts and ends as I sit and ponder why there are only twenty-four hours in a day. I know, I know, I'm not the only one in this position and as my wife likes to remind me, "remember this is what you wanted." That much is true, this is what I wanted. After all, the goal of most business owners is to grow their business, right? The key for me personally is to have the ability to take a step back and come to the

understanding that we will get done what we can get done and absolutely nothing will change that. Being able to pull back from the sometimes, overwhelming amount of tasks at hand helps with a couple of things. First and foremost it will restore the sense of calmness that I really need in order to accomplish the second thing. Focus, taking that step back from the tasks at hand allows me to put things into perspective and assign a priority. After that I generally find what seems like a never-ending parade of requests, phone calls, estimates, etc. slowly and methodically falls into the pile of tasks accomplished.

When all is said and done I feel very fortunate. I have been blessed with doing a job and building a business that I am passionate about. I have had the privilege of working with and meeting many terrific people. These would include clients, other lawn-care business owners and members of IPLCA. On that note, I would like to remind and ask each of you to be sure and invite someone to join our organization. Purchase a membership for an employee, extend an invitation to a competitor, help strengthen the lobbying power of the IPLCA. Have a great 2010 season everybody, be busy, be safe, and be focused.

PLANET Names New President

Reprinted from <http://www.landcarenetwork.com>

The Professional Landcare Network (PLANET) is pleased to announce the selection of David Snodgrass, Landscape Industry Certified Manager, as president of the association for 2010/2011. He was sworn into office at PLANET's Executive Forum held in February in Las Vegas, Nevada. "It is both an honor and a privilege to be serving as president of PLANET, which represents more than 3,500 professionals who create and maintain green spaces that enhance our environment," said Snodgrass.

Snodgrass has been CEO of Dennis' Seven Dees Landscaping, Inc. since 1977. He served as board president of the Oregon Landscape Contractors Association in 1994 and has been actively involved with PLANET for more than 15 years. David comes from a diverse green industry background that includes experience in design/build, landscape management, lawn care, interior installation and maintenance, retail garden center, and wholesale growing.

David's priorities during his time as PLANET president include delivering on the PLANET Promise (to provide member value, grow the workforce, expand partnerships, advance marketplace recognition, and influence through advocacy), continuing the focus on advancing professionalism in the industry, and strengthening the community, identity, and the voice of each individual green industry specialty group within PLANET so that each segment gets the attention it needs to thrive.

"Professionalism is the common thread that runs throughout PLANET, and it provides separation from those unskilled opportunists who easily enter this industry," said Snodgrass. He continues: "We need to find ways to help our members solve current economic challenges and create new ways to grow their businesses."

2nd Annual PLANET Day of Service a Success

Reprinted from <http://www.landcarenetwork.com>

On Earth Day, April 22, 2010, the Professional Landcare Network (PLANET) conducted its 2nd Annual PLANET Day of Service. The event is a grassroots effort that encourages individual members, supplier members, and state associations to create volunteer lawn care and landscape projects in their own communities. More than 3,000 volunteers participated in more than 200 projects from a total of 38 states and Canada. Those projects included landscaping elementary schools, city parks, court houses, libraries, baseball fields, playgrounds, and senior citizen homes and creating vegetable gardens.

Patients at local hospitals were also beneficiaries of the PLANET Day of Service. The BC Landscape & Nursery Association (BCLNA), one of the state association partners for Day of Service, organized a project with local Canadian landscaping companies, including Beneath Your Feet Landscaping, to renovate the grounds of the Ridge Meadows Hospice Society's Bailey House and McKinney Creek residences in Maple Ridge, Canada.

"Like most nonprofit organizations, the BC Landscape & Nursery Association has grown and thrived through the

good deeds and camaraderie of our members. So, when the folks at Beneath Your Feet Landscaping decided to round up colleagues in their town to take part in PLANET Day of Service, we were thrilled, but not exactly surprised. It's amazing to have BCLNA members, who do so much for their industry, extend their volunteerism to the community during the busiest time of the year. I think it speaks to the sort of people this industry attracts, people who care deeply about their natural and social environments. We're grateful to PLANET for initiating a movement that underscores what the green industry is all about." said Renata Triveri, interim managing director of BCLNA.

PLANET Day of Service sponsors played a big role in supporting and participating in Day of Service. There were a total of five lead sponsors and 23 supporting sponsors. Matt Moskowitz of American Profit Recovery, a lead sponsor, said, "Once again, I am amazed and proud to be part of such a great event. American Profit Recovery continues to look for ways to give back, and the PLANET Day of Service is one phenomenal event that we take pride in sponsoring. A great event for a great industry!"

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About the Iowa Professional Lawn Care Association

The Iowa Professional Lawn Care Association was founded November 22, 1983. The original Board of Directors consisted of: Gerald Boulton, Daniel Corrigan, Alan Duey, Patrick Freemire, Michael Grooms, Norman Hummel, Dayl Inglett, Daryle Johnson, Richard Mulder, Dennis Pennington, and Doug Tyrrell. Dennis Pennington acted as the first President. IPLCA became a very active professional group in 1987 with the Ground Water Act. IPLCA joined with the Iowa Turfgrass Institute for the purpose of increasing educational opportunities in 1995. IPLCA has earned the respect of regulators and legislators in working to maintain fairness in public policy. In 1987, IPLCA awarded Daryle Johnson, of All American Turf Beauty, the Distinguished Service Award for his service to the lawn care industry. In 1995, IPLCA moved its office to Ames in association with the ITI, Iowa GCSA and ISTMA. IPLCA is committed to serving its membership and advancing the professionalism of lawn care specialists throughout the State of Iowa.