



THE TURF ADVISORY SERVICE

Part Three: 50 Years of Service to Golf

BY JAMES T. SNOW



Green Section staff in 2001, left to right, first row: Bob Vavrek, Keith Happ, Darin Bevard, Larry Gilhuly, Mike Kenna. Second row: Jim Baird, Bud White, Kimberly Erusha, Jeff Nus. Third row: Dave Wienecke, Bob Brame. Fourth row: Stan Zontek, Kathy Antaya, Pat O'Brien, Matt Nelson, Dave Oatis. Fifth row: Jim Skorulski, Jim Moore, Todd Lowe, Jim Snow, Chris Hartwiger, John Foy, Paul Vermeulen. Missing: Pat Gross.

The final installment of this three-part series about the 50-year history of the Green Section's Turf Advisory Service provides insight about the interaction of the TAS with our publications and outreach programs, the Green Section Committee, and the Turfgrass and Environmental Research Program.

PUBLICATIONS AND OUTREACH

For 50 years there has been a staff of agronomists whose sole mission has been to provide practical information to golf course superintendents and course officials for the betterment of the game of golf. In the process of visiting as many as 150 or more courses per year, each agronomist has gained a unique perspective of golf turf culture and of the trials and politics involved in golf course maintenance. This perspective has been shared on Turf Advisory Service (TAS) visits and in other outreach programs and publications over the years.

The *TurfLetter* was the first Green Section publication derived from the TAS. This regional newsletter was published 3-6 times per year, depending on seasonal turf problems and the time constraints of the agronomists. It included such items as seasonal pest and disease control recommendations, suggestions for timely cultural practices, accounts of problems in the field, research results, and news of meetings and conferences. The *TurfLetter* was produced from 1953 until early 1963, when the *USGA Green Section Record* magazine was first published. The intro-



(Above) Over the years, the Green Section Committee volunteers from across the United States have been instrumental in offering help and advice concerning Green Section programs and activities.

(Left) Richard Tufts was the chairman of the Green Section Committee from 1950 through 1953 and was instrumental in conceiving and establishing the Turf Advisory Service (then called the Regional Turf Service) in 1953. It caused a change in the direction of the Green Section, from primarily a research organization to one whose major role became visiting golf courses and offering advice on course maintenance problems. Tufts served on every USGA committee and was its president in 1956-57. He helped introduce the modern handicap system, standardized course setup for USGA championships, and worked with the Royal & Ancient Golf Club of St. Andrews to unify the Rules of Golf in 1951, among many other accomplishments. Tufts was a grandson of the founder of the Pinehurst Resort and was involved in running Pinehurst for 50 years, the last eight as its chairman.

duction of the *Record* also marked the end of the USGA's *Golf Journal and Turf Management* magazine, which split into two publications — *Golf Journal* and the *Green Section Record*.

Over its 40-year history, the *Record* has grown with the Green Section itself. The articles written by Green Section staff reflect the problems and successes they observe firsthand on TAS visits. Guest articles and research articles arranged by the staff also bring forth cutting-edge ideas that help move the industry forward. During the past dozen years the *Record* has expanded to include articles on environmental issues and environmental research and a regular contribution from Audubon International, whose programs have guided the industry toward a more sustainable future. The *Record* itself has gone from a small-format black-and-white publication in 1963 to a 5" x 7"

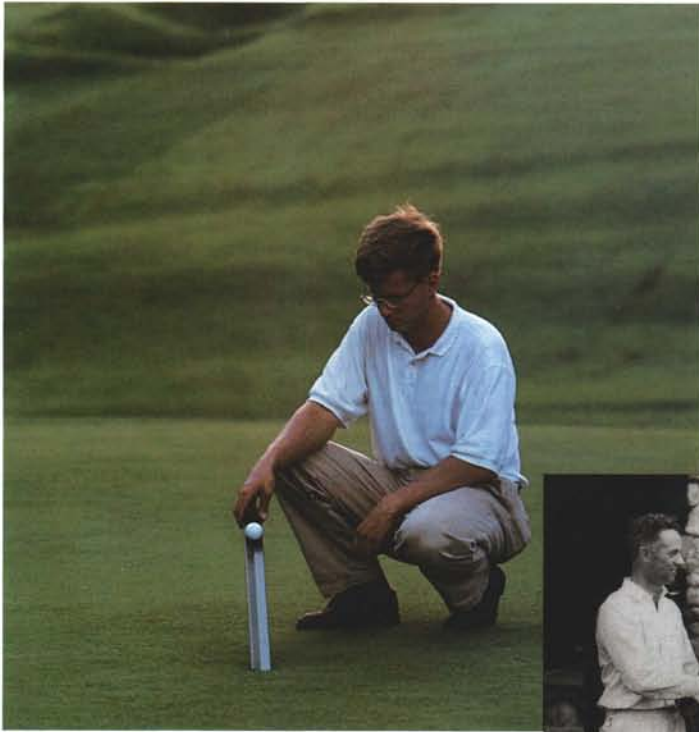
color magazine in 1978 to a standardized format in 1979.

The second edition of the USGA-sponsored book *Turf Management*, by H. Burton Musser (1962), was the first to benefit from the field experiences of the USGA agronomists. Bill Bengeyfield, Dr. Marvin Ferguson, Charlie Hallowell, and Al Radko all served on the editorial board and contributed a wealth of practical information to the book. Later, many USGA agronomists contributed in a similar manner to the first (1981) and second (2002) editions of the USGA-sponsored book *Turf Management for Golf Courses*, by Dr. James B. Beard.

Beyond these USGA publications, Green Section field agronomists have written thousands of articles and updates for other turfgrass periodicals, conference proceedings, golf course superintendent chapter newsletters and

magazines, and other turf and golf-related publications worldwide. In addition to these contributions, they have given many thousands of presentations about golf course management issues to audiences at local, state, national, and international turfgrass and superintendent meetings, and at golf and golf-related organization meetings and conferences at every level.

Today, the Internet has opened up a whole new information thoroughfare for companies, organizations, agencies, and individuals to share information. On its Web site, the Green Section has placed a vast amount of practical information at the fingertips of anyone searching for articles or reports dealing with nearly every aspect of turfgrass maintenance and golf course management. The capability to communicate via e-mail also has been a boon to Green Section agronomists, who now



Edward Stimpson (below left), shown here at the start of the final round of the 1935 Massachusetts Amateur Golf Championship, first introduced the concept of measuring putting green speed in the mid-1930s. His prototype was refined by the USGA and the Stimpmeter was made available for golf course use in 1977 to provide golf course superintendents with a method to prepare golf greens for play.

can survey their fellow staffers on any question and receive responses within a day or two, even when they are on the road. This means better and timelier responses to questions put forth by TAS subscribers and others calling for advice.

Green Section agronomists also serve on committees and boards of golf and turf-related organizations, lecture to college and university students, and interact with governmental agencies and organizations outside of golf. The information they glean from their TAS visits reaches well beyond the actual subscribing courses, and this is great for the game of golf!

DOING GOOD THINGS WITH HELP FROM OUR FRIENDS!

Since its inception in 1921, the Green Section has enlisted volunteers to offer help and advice concerning its programs and activities. Collectively, these volunteers constitute our Green Section Committee. The chairman of the committee is appointed from the USGA Executive Committee by the USGA president, and other volunteers are appointed by the Green Section's regional directors. Appointments are



for two years, with the possibility of renewal. Today, 170 members from all facets of the industry serve on the committee. They include:

- Golf course superintendents.
- Club presidents.
- University faculty.
- Golf course architects.
- Persons with special technical expertise.
- Green committee members.
- Club managers.
- Golf association representatives.
- Golf course builders.
- Golf business industry representatives.

The volunteers on the Green Section Committee serve many roles, which include:

- Promoting the use of the Turf Advisory Service among other superintendents, course officials, and club managers.

- Promoting other Green Section programs, such as the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program, construction education, and regional conferences.
 - Regional conferences — help plan, give talks, participate as moderators, etc.
 - Writing articles for the *Green Section Record* and other Green Section publications.
 - Serving as liaisons to organizations of superintendents, club managers, architects, course builders, industry, and academic groups. In this role, they either promote TAS or invite our agronomists to speak to or interact with their members on topics we believe are of interest and importance to them.
 - Providing a sounding board for ideas, new programs, etc.
 - Providing constructive criticism and feedback about our Turf Advisory Service and other programs.
 - Representing the Green Section at certain meetings and functions.
 - Serving as a source of in-depth expertise on topics where our agronomists are generalists, such as irrigation systems, turfgrass pathology, environmental engineering, golf course construction, etc.
- The Turf Advisory Service is stronger today due to the active participation of several thousand volunteers on the Green Section Committee over the years, for which the Green Section is most appreciative.

TURFGRASS RESEARCH AND TAS — BETTER TOGETHER

As stated earlier, the Green Section changed course in 1953 from a research organization to one that emphasizes outreach and one-on-one consultation with individual golf courses. The idea was to take university research and combine it with field observation and experience to offer golf courses the best advice possible for their very real problems. In fact, the USGA has continued to fund turfgrass research annually since 1953 and has spent more than \$21 million on turfgrass and environmental research grants since 1983. This is an ideal arrangement for our TAS agronomists, who can take unbiased research from 7 universities and apply it in a real-world sense to the problems they see on golf courses.

In reality, you need both — research *and* field outreach. Research is not useful by itself unless the information is valid and is applied properly, and field consultation is only as good as the science background, the experience,



In 1933, Johnny Farrell (right), 1928 National Open Champion, and Dr. Fred Grau, Green Section National Director, tested the putting qualities of grasses at the Arlington turf garden research plots. A mechanical putter was used to minimize the human factors within the test.

and the good common sense of the consultant. Bill Bengueyfield, longtime Green Section agronomist and former national director, often quoted a statement from Oliver Wendell Holmes, who said, "Science is a first-rate piece of furniture for a man's upper chamber if he has common sense on the ground floor." Amen!

The story of the Green Section's Turf Advisory Service program is one of service and success. From Charlie Wilson's one-man office in Davis, California, in 1953, the program has grown to include 18 regional agronomists and another 22 full-time and part-time support staff in 13 offices nationwide, serving more

than 1,600 individual golf courses and conducting nearly 2,000 visits each year. After 50 years of leadership in putting useful information into the hands of golf course superintendents and course officials, our staff believes strongly that golf courses are better today than they would have been without the Turf Advisory Service. By many measures, the Green Section's mission to help golf courses produce better turf for better golf has been a great success!

JIM SNOW joined the USGA Green Section staff as an agronomist in 1976. In 1990 he was named national director.

At times there are questions if USGA agronomists possess super powers! Agronomist Dave Oatis received the following letter from an impressed Green Committee member.

Dear Dave,

The tree to the right rear of number 12 green was struck by lightning last week and is now browning out and will surely die. In all the years I've been around and many old-timers — we have never seen this reaction to a lightning bolt. Bark was scattered in all directions from the tree for yards around, even covering the green area 40 feet away. This is the same tree which you suggested we remove to prevent it from shadowing the green most of the day and blocking the ventilating effect of the movement of air through the opening we had previously created. Much reaction against removal was expressed at our next green meeting, but no one on the committee realized the power or connection the USGA had with the Lord's electrical emissaries and influential relationship you agronomists had with the powers to be. We bow our heads to your obvious influence. Needless to say, we are currently reevaluating all your other suggestions with attentive enthusiasm as much of the new equipment you recommended has been placed on our next two annual budgets.

Looking forward to your next visit.

Sincerely,

E.G.M.

