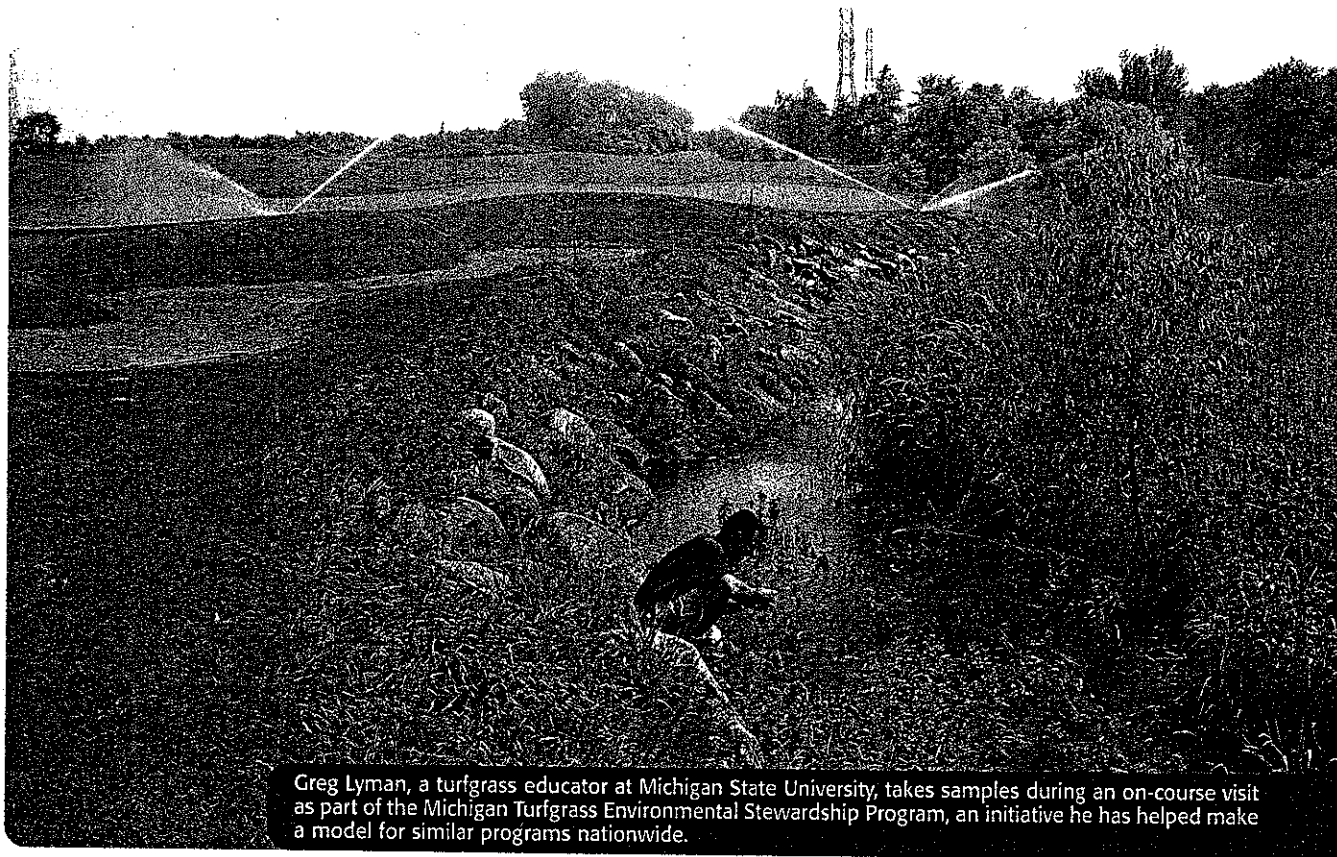


GCSAA President's Award for Environmental Leadership



Greg Lyman, a turfgrass educator at Michigan State University, takes samples during an on-course visit as part of the Michigan Turfgrass Environmental Stewardship Program, an initiative he has helped make a model for similar programs nationwide.

Promising partnership

An innovative Michigan program helps environmentally sensitive superintendents go further than the law requires.

GCM staff

When someone from the government came to Kurt Thuemmel, CGCS, at his golf course and said she was there "to help," the old punch line proved to be more accurate than funny.

"I welcomed someone from the state coming in and helping us out," says Thuemmel, superintendent at Walnut Hills Country Club in East Lansing, Mich.

Over a three-year period, Thuemmel and two staffers from the state's Turfgrass Environmental Stewardship Program worked together to ensure all environmental laws were complied with on the course. Then they put together a plan to make the course more protective of the environment than the law requires.

Thuemmel acted because he has always enjoyed watching deer, fox, hawks and wildflowers on his course, and he wanted to ensure that wildlife and other

resources were protected.

"I think as a golf course superintendent, most of us want to do the right thing, environmentally and in how we manage the turf, so it's just kind of spillover of what we do every day," says Thuemmel, a 29-year GCSAA member.

Last summer, Walnut Hills was the 21st golf course to become certified in the program. Another 140 courses across the state are enrolled in the program and working toward certification. The success of the stewardship program caught the eye of GCSAA's Board of Directors, which has awarded its prestigious 2001 President's Award for Environmental Leadership to the program.

"Other states should take a close look at Michigan's program," said GCSAA President R. Scott Woodhead,

CGCS. "This kind of cooperation taps our superintendents' instinctive interest in managing the environment responsibly while protecting resources and wildlife. There's no more effective way to ensure environmental protection than to encourage cooperation."

Cooperation may be an understatement: The word barely describes the unique relationship forged among five Michigan "partners" (agencies, associations and institutions) and the many individual golf courses in the program.

Spearheaded by Michigan State University's turfgrass environmental education specialist, Greg Lyman, Ph.D., and administrator Debbie Swartz of the state Department of Environmental Quality, the program brings together five "partners" who play roles in advancing the program:

- MSU and DEQ provide the two staffers, Lyman and Swartz.
- The Department of Agriculture provides some funding through a tax on agricultural chemicals and fertilizers appropriated to the department's Groundwater Stewardship Program.
- The Michigan Turfgrass Foundation and the Golf Association of Michigan provide additional support.

"The heartbeat of this program really is the partners," Lyman says.

Fundamentals

Basically, the Michigan Turfgrass Environmental Stewardship Program (MTESP) allows golf course superintendents to comply with state environmental laws while regulators act as consultants rather than policemen.

Charles Scott, owner/superintendent at MTESP-certified Gull Lake View Golf Club in Augusta, Mich., says superintendents appreciate that distinction.

"It's a real easy program to work with

because you're not afraid of penalties," says Scott, a 24-year GCSAA member.

It all begins with a visit from Lyman and Swartz.

"It's not an inspection, so to speak," Swartz explains. "The goal of that visit is to work with the superintendent on all of the different program areas and come up with a list, an environmental action plan to take them over the next three years.

"The idea is to first of all ensure that they are in compliance with the rules and regs, and then to take the next step to implement other measures that go beyond what's required to really step up the level of environmental quality."

Candidates also must attend a stewardship workshop, which features presentation of a variety of modules such as fuel storage, pesticide handling and wellhead protection. A hefty notebook, containing an inch-thick sheaf of guidelines, provides ongoing direction. Even that daunting pile of paper hasn't curbed superintendents' interest.

"I guess I was a little surprised with the amount of interest we had so quickly," Swartz says. "I was thrilled, thrilled with that — and at the same time we know we have just been struggling to stay on top of things."

Swartz, Lyman and the superinten-

dents work together to develop a three-year environmental action plan. When a course meets all the rules and regulations spelled out in the workshop, has proper wellhead protection and no direct point-source discharges to water resources, it is certified. But the MTESP has come to expect even higher standards from its participants.

Above and beyond

Superintendents' innate concern for environmental aesthetics, and their associations' multiyear efforts to educate them on environmental rules, have produced an eagerness and know-how that has consistently surprised government cooperators in the program, who are accustomed to dealing with everything from auto factories to print shops.

"What's interesting here is golf courses are already tuned in to environmental issues," says Paul Zuger, chief of the environmental assistance division at the DEQ. "They need to present a pleasing environmental experience to the golfers, so I think they're closer to their mission to have a stewardship program, and the reception has been very strong."

At The Rock, an 18-hole resort course on Drummond Island in Michigan's Upper Peninsula, superin-



Photo by Mark Kind

Kurt Thuemmel, CGCS (center), won certification from the Michigan Turfgrass Environmental Stewardship Program for Walnut Hills CC in August 2000. Lyman (left) and Debra Swartz (right) of the state's Department of Environmental Quality conducted the site visits and consultations that ensure the golf course complies with or exceeds the requirements of state and federal environmental rules.

Past President's Award winners

The GCSAA President's Award for Environmental Leadership recognizes an individual or organization whose actions and efforts benefit the golf course management profession and merit industrywide recognition. The recipient of the award is chosen by the GCSAA Board of Directors. Winners are honored at the association's annual conference and show.

Previous winners of the President's Award for Environmental Leadership are:

2000 Tom Watschke, Ph.D., Penn State University
1999 Edward C. Ted Horton, CGCS, moderator/host of

the first "Golf and the Environment" summit.
1998 Joe O'Brien, CAE, GCSAA chief operating officer
1997 Michael Hurdzan, Ph.D., golf course architect
1996 USGA Environmental Research Program
1995 William Timothy Hiers, CGCS at Colliers Reserve Country Club in Naples, Fla.
1993 Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program for Golf Courses
1991 Cape Cod Study participants

tendent Craig Hoffman was already well on his way to certification in the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program for Golf Courses when he jumped on the MTESP bandwagon. A graduate of MSU, Hoffman now sits on the MTESP's steering committee and accompanied the administrators to Washington, D.C., last Earth Day to meet with U.S. Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman and Michigan legislators to "spruce up the program and drum up some grant money."

"It's a great way to interact with government agencies and work together as a team," says Hoffman, an eight-year GCSAA member. "We're all looking for common ground."

GCSAA board member Jon Maddern, CGCS at Elk Ridge Golf Club in Atlanta, Mich., says the Michigan program produces real improvements on golf courses and bestows a certificate that is based on a superintendent's actions, not on his ability to promote himself.

"With other programs, superintendents often ask, 'In order to be recognized, how much schmoozing do I have to do, and how well do I write?'" Maddern says. "This is very basic and very clean. Greg and Debbie come out, do the on-site visits. They tell you, 'Here's what you need to do.' They give you ideas of what other people have done so you're not reinventing the wheel."

Finding solutions

Some superintendents find that they have problems on their courses, and they also find ways to fix those problems.

"Someone I consider to be an excellent superintendent got up in front of a crowd and said, 'I thought I knew my

We see that golf courses are part of the solution, not part of the problem.

—Keith Creagh

property, but as a result of this assessment, I found some glaring deficiencies that were easy to fix," Lyman recalls.

Hoffman says he had certified a previous course in the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary program, and approached the MTESP with that goal in mind for The Rock.

"What I discovered was that because I recycle oil here, I needed to modify the holding area in case of spills," he says.

Adds Thuemmel, "We were in pretty good shape to begin with; we had constructed a new maintenance facility (in 1993), when environmental concerns were at a peak. This time, my concerns were more with the golf course itself. You're always curious to know if you're contributing to a problem."

"I know a lot of golf courses who spent an awful lot of money just cleaning up after problems," adds Scott. "I told Debbie (Swartz) that I thought being environmentally sound made a lot of sense, and I spell that c-e-n-t-s."

Part of the solution

Perhaps nothing speaks about the program's success more obviously than the eagerness of government officials to stand up and boast about it. At the awards ceremony for Walnut Hills' cer-

tification beside a practice green, officials stood elbow-to-elbow for pictures with the plaque.

"We see that golf courses are part of the solution, not part of the problem," says Keith Creagh, deputy director of the Michigan Department of Agriculture.

Yet Swartz and others are all careful to note that the program grew out of Michigan State University's Extension program, where Lyman brought together all the partners to make the program a reality.

"I think Greg is the one who really had the big vision for the program," Swartz said.

For his part, Lyman is thinking about how to grow the program further, noting that receiving GCSAA's highest environmental award will give another boost.

"This award will really help us continue to grow, and we're really excited about that," Lyman says.

Expect Lyman to turn on his powers of persuasion when he accepts the President's Award for Environmental Leadership on behalf of the program partners Feb. 15 at the Golf General Session at the Dallas conference and show.

"I want to challenge other states to get together with their agencies and jump on board," he says. "There's more that we can do together than just regulating pesticides. The turf industry — they have it going on. They have some thoughtful and responsible people within the industry, and I think I have the best job in the industry."

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Information for this article came from Mark Kind, GCM science editor, and other members of the GCM staff.