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# Green Section **RECORD**



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# IT'S A MATTER OF OPINION

*This segment of the Green Section's Annual Educational Program is devoted to the expression of opinions — not necessarily widely held. The purpose is to stimulate, to challenge, to create, and to encourage a greater exchange of fresh ideas within the professional turfgrass management community.*

## USGA-GCSAA Coordinated Effort Means Successful Research Funding

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**T**ALK TO ANY scientist involved in turfgrass research over the past 20 years and ask what single factor has had the most debilitating effect on advancing scientific knowledge. The answer is universally funding. Funding is the lifeblood of scientific research. Money sets the pace, and turfgrass research is not unlike research in medicine or physics or any other endeavor — it is expensive to conduct properly and successfully.

Considered orphans by agricultural funding agencies in earlier years, turfgrass researchers had to scratch for funds, but available funding has greatly improved recently.

Thanks to cooperation between the USGA and the GCSAA in the early 1980s, major amounts of money have been raised and effectively dispersed to meet the serious challenges facing the future of golf. The unparalleled cooperation between the USGA and the GCSAA has created a synergism that raised substantial funds and portends breakthroughs in turfgrass management. The major achievements of this effort are just beginning to emerge, with the greatest advances expected during the next three to four years.

Why has this cooperation worked, and why should it continue? What is the payback to the GCSAA and its members from working with the USGA? What factors could threaten this cooperation? It has worked because both associations made a commitment to the project and to mutual support and cooperation with one another. Once that commitment was made, an attitude emerged that melted away obstacles faster than they could be erected.

From the beginning, this commitment to cooperate was applied to identifying



*James G. Prusa*

the problems facing golf in turfgrass management, from fund raising to selecting researchers and research institutions, to evaluating ongoing work, and to sharing in the credit and applause.

Mutual cooperation in all areas should continue because more can be accomplished jointly than separately. For the USGA and the GCSAA to try to conduct major turfgrass research efforts separately would waste time and money.

It takes time and money to put together and administer any project. And to properly manage a major research project, an administrative committee must be formed to identify needs and select the projects. Such a committee must meet regularly to review progress and evaluate results. Thus, the committee is in itself a necessary expense. The committee expense provides for project management and quality assurance. It stands to reason, therefore, that if the USGA and GCSAA con-

ducted separate turfgrass research efforts, two committees and two committees' expenses would be necessary. When people give money for turfgrass research, it should find its way to the researchers as directly as possible. When money is scarce, it should not be wasted on duplicated efforts or on dual committee administration.

There are other administrative expenses as well. When large research projects are developed, contracts with research institutions can normally be expected. Since committees need lawyers to draft and interpret contracts, legal fees can be expected. These and many other costs, including paid staff support and the administration of costs of fund raising, are doubled when two independent research efforts are undertaken. Donors should begin to question whether their money is going to turfgrass research or diluted by administrative costs. Imagine two separate turfgrass research committees unknowingly but very likely funding the same research scientists at the same research institutions under two separate contracts. A scene like that should chill the bones of any contributor.

One of the greatest achievements the USGA and GCSAA have made since the joint research project began, in 1982, is the elimination of duplicate fund raising. The USGA and GCSAA initiated a cooperative effort to secure donors for this project, calling on golf clubs, associations, corporations, professionals, and amateurs, which resulted in the greatest inpouring of donations for turfgrass research ever experienced. It seemed that finally the USGA and GCSAA were working from the same platform. Separate efforts would suffer while the single fund-raising drive was

a success. This alone is reason enough to justify and continue the joint effort in turfgrass research.

Beside the obvious benefits to the average GCSAA member of advancing turfgrass knowledge, the cooperative research effort has some intangible benefits.

As the project began, a not so surprising concurrent phenomenon occurred: The USGA and GCSAA began to communicate more closely. This communication spilled over into areas of interest beyond pure turfgrass science. The two groups began to talk about the golf course superintendent, the role he plays in the game, and his need to be better recognized. The results were quick and very positive.

In 1982, USGA President Bill Campbell immediately recognized the golf course superintendent at every USGA championship. At every championship, including the U.S. Open, Campbell praised the superintendent during the final awards presentation. It is important to recognize the impact of this action. The

leadership of golf, the press, the electronic media, photographers, and club members were now hearing the President of the USGA declare that the golf course superintendent was an invaluable part of managing the game. It had a tremendous impact.

Ever since Campbell established this method of recognizing the golf course superintendent, recognition has absolutely snowballed, and Campbell's successors, USGA Presidents James Hand and Bill Williams, have continued the recognition and support of the superintendent. The support level has continued on other USGA fronts as well.

Since 1984 the USGA has allowed the GCSAA the forum of the Annual Golf Writers Banquet at the U.S. Open to publicize itself by presenting a check to the Turfgrass Research Fund.

The USGA has also extended support to the GCSAA at national championships, providing accommodations in the press area and assisting the GCSAA in its coverage.

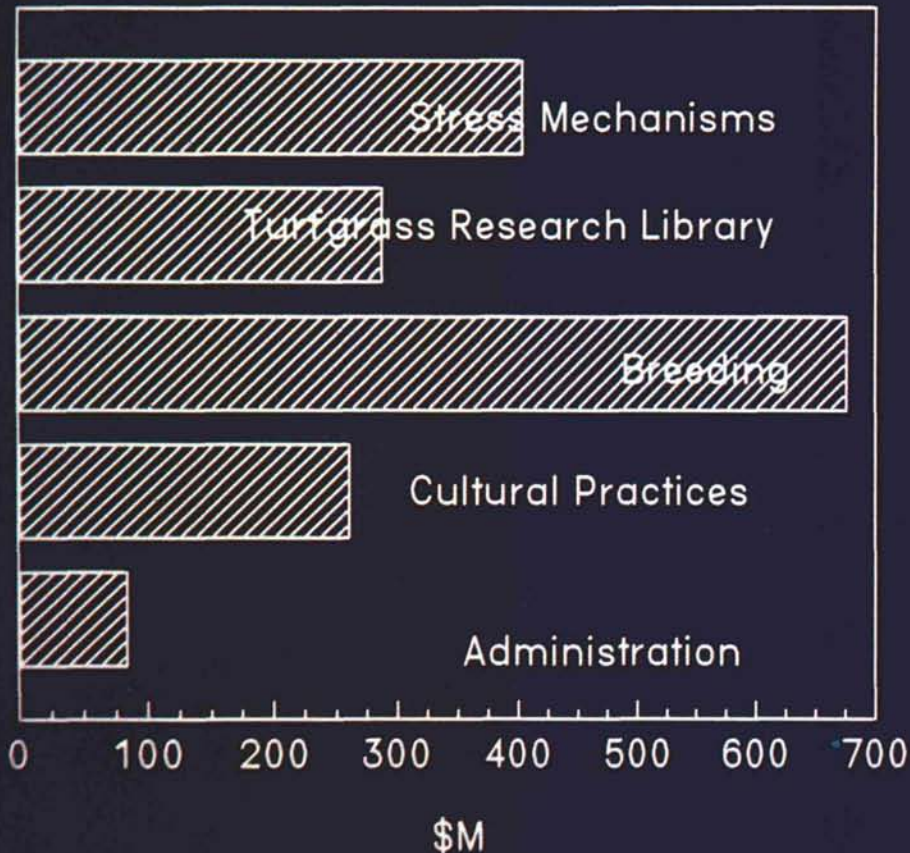
Another intangible benefit that has evolved through the joint scientific research effort has been the information gathering and networking with research institutions. Members of the USGA Turfgrass Research Committee have made annual visits to every major research site funded for the past five years. These annual visits have provided the GCSAA some remarkable opportunities.

First, the turfgrass research scientists have welcomed the visits by the Committee. Indeed, they have called for more frequent and more lengthy site inspections. These scientists have expressed their feelings that the Committee's visits provided them with a feedback on their research that they have never had before. It allows them to share and receive the latest news on other projects. This arrangement has somewhat evolved into a consulting visit to the universities not unlike the Green Section's Turfgrass Advisory visits to golf courses. Never before has any group in turfgrass research had the opportunity or resources to conduct on-site visits.

*A Research Committee monitoring visit to Texas A&M, Dallas.*



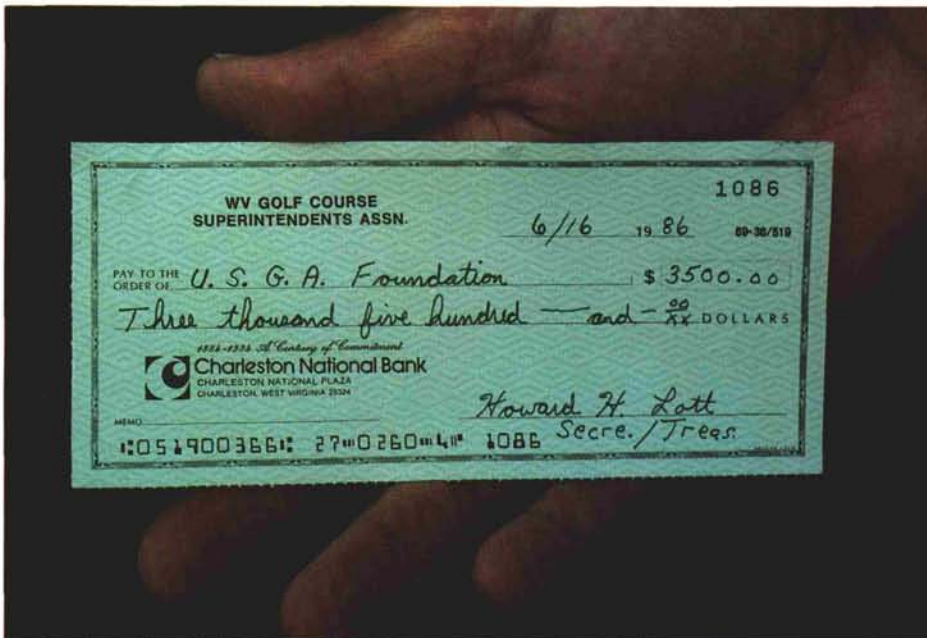
## Five-Year Total



When one considers how well this has been received, perhaps the USGA/GCSAA Research Committee should offer the same service to non-funded institutions as well!

Though the USGA and GCSAA remain committed to continuation of the joint research effort, there are forces in existence that could threaten this cooperation. Of these forces, one, an inherent function of any professional society, looms the greatest. It will come as no surprise to most members of the GCSAA that they are an association of individuals that bends to the demands of its vocal members. Not unlike how our own national politics affect the U.S. Congress, a good thing can be hamstrung by political whim and individual self-interest. GCSAA members should be on guard. It is not beyond the realm of possibility that some self-serving individuals might see an opportunity to grab the perceived glory and seek the power of a duplicate turfgrass research effort. Such a happening would be disastrous. If a scientific research project were to be motivated by the body politic, as they have been in the past, then the next progression would be for scientists to be forced to lobby for funds on their own — not an unheard-of procedure. If politics becomes involved, it is conceivable for the entire research effort to deteriorate and become a hodgepodge of uncoordinated, duplicate efforts, regionally conceived and doomed to fail.

Golf has a good thing going. The GCSAA has a good thing going. We have the best turfgrass research project ever put together, with far-reaching benefits to all of agricultural science, including food and fiber production. It is not perfect. Every human endeavor provides ample room for improvement. Democracy itself is not perfect, but it's the best form of government anyone has yet devised. Therefore, the time is now for all of us to renew our commitment to this successful joint USGA/GCSAA Turfgrass Research Program. In the best interest of the game and in the best interest of our own profession, let's put out the call not only to continue superintendent support, but to expand and strengthen it.



(Top) The halfway point in the joint USGA-GCSAA research effort.

(Above) Financial support from superintendent associations has been important.