Welcome to the SE Region - Dr. Gerald Henry

*A new turfgrass professor arrives at the University of Georgia.*

By Patrick O’Brien and Christopher Hartwiger, agronomists, Southeast Region

Recently, Dr. Gerald Henry started to his new position at the University of Georgia replacing long time professor Dr. Keith Karnok. Dr. Henry was most recently at Texas Tech. Dr. Henry was kind enough to allow us to interview him and answer a few questions about his new position at the University of Georgia.

Question: Dr. Henry, it’s hard to believe that it’s been almost 6 years since you received your PhD with Dr. Yelverton at North Carolina State University. How does it feel to be returning to the SE Region again at the University of Georgia as a faculty member?

Answer: My wife and I were excited to move back to the east coast. Not only is the scenery better, but it’s one of the best regions in the country to manage turfgrass. The University of Georgia has a great turfgrass program from a storied past to a thriving present. The strength and support of the GA turfgrass industry has made the transition easy and enjoyable.

Question: What will be your main areas of focus for turfgrass research this year?

Answer: My research program focuses on the area of environmental turfgrass science with an emphasis on plant/pest/environment interactions. Within that discipline I conduct research in a wide range of subjects that include physiology, ecology, weed science, fertility, and management. Some of the research projects my group will be conducting this year involve the physiological response of bermudagrass and zoysiagrass to soil moisture and mowing, the use of geospatial data to implement site specific turfgrass management, the environmental fate of pesticides, hybridization and control of weedy *Paspalum* species, and the effect of cultural practices on herbicide efficacy.
**Question:** While at Texas Tech, one of the most memorable droughts occurred in that area in the summer of 2011. What were some of the impacts of this historic drought on golf courses in Texas?

**Answer:** My students and I dodged one wild fire after another as we traveled across the state putting out research that summer. The drought was most severe in West TX, with several areas receiving less than 0.5 inches of rainfall over a twelve month period. It was common to see wells that ran dry, damaged irrigation pipes from cracking soil, and vast areas of dead turf on quite a few golf courses we visited. It was most humbling to see the amount of crop and animal loss throughout the region. Numerous people were giving away horses and cattle. Everyone was affected. We even lost a significant portion of our research facility that year.

**Question:** As the new leader of the turfgrass management program at the University of Georgia, are there any unique aspects of your program that would be especially appealing for students to consider when preparing for a career in the turfgrass industry?

**Answer:** In the short time that I have been here in Georgia I have tried to inject more science back into the program. Students will have a better understanding of challenging topics like soil chemistry, pesticide resistance, plant genetics, and integrated pest management that will help them become some of the elite turfgrass managers in the country. The construction of our new turfgrass management teaching and research facility in Athens will also increase hands-on education and offer students the opportunity to interact with cutting edge research conducted at UGA.

**Question:** As a father of twins just like me, what has it been like to be a parent of twins?

**Answer:** It has definitely been interesting to say the least. Being a parent in general is tough. My wife and I didn’t really know any different since the twins were our first. Now that we have had another child we realize how tough it really was. They are born with a lifetime playmate which is convenient, but you get twice the questions, “accidents”, and expenses to go along with it. I don’t think we would trade the experiences we had, especially the times when we got twice the hugs.

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