

CUTT

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Remembering Mike Villani

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Professor Emeritus Michael Gerard Villani was revered by fellow scientists throughout the world, adored by his undergraduate and graduate students, and loved and respected by all. He was the consummate teacher, advisor and mentor.

He unselfishly devoted his time in questioning, cajoling and inspiring others to think creatively and to develop their potential. He always shared the success of his highly acclaimed program on turf insects with his staff and with other scientists around the country. His management style was to encourage freethinking and independence among those who worked both with him

and for him. He was the acknowledged master of the win-win situation. Villani rarely thought of himself and he gave far more than he got in return. Mike epitomized the best in all of us in both his professional and personal life. He will be greatly missed for the unique perspectives he brought to the science of soil insect ecology, the probing questions he asked that often made those associated with this area of research question long held beliefs about soil arthropod behavior, and the engaging and gentle manner in which he did so.

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A Tribute From A Friend and Colleague

Editor's Note:

In a departure from our usual Cornell Turfgrass Team program updates and perspectives we offer this tribute to our friend and colleague Mike Villani. In my short time here at Cornell University there were few people I quoted more often than Mike.

I would be lying if I said Mike and I always saw eye to eye on issues and matters of the turfgrass team. In fact as one of my faculty mentors, Mike took an extraordinary interest in my decision-making regarding the turfgrass program. He regularly challenged my motivation and intent, yet always listened as I outlined my thought process and what I thought we could achieve. At least we both loved the New York Yankees.

Each section in this issue reflects a different aspect of Mike's contributions to the world. This ranges from publications and projects to raising his children. You will be able to see the wide swath Mike cut and the impact he had on so many people's lives, as well as his discipline.

In preparing this issue, I was able to reflect on our six years together, by all measures way too short! I find myself looking for his input at team meetings, looking forward to his ignoring of my urgent emails, and simply looking at me and smirking as I got worked up about an issue. Yet, I know there are people close to Mike that miss him more regularly, especially, Connie and girls, Paul Robbins, and Nancy Consolie. Beyond the *continued on page 4*



Mike always enjoyed sharing the labor—of which there was plenty—in his soil “digs”.

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Remembering Mike Villani

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Villani died at home after a lengthy illness with pancreatic cancer. Mike died in manner consistent with how he lived. He showed dignity, compassion for his family, a sense of humor that never waned, and a commitment to giving each day his best effort. Villani is survived by his wife, Connie; two daughters, Sara and Kate; his parents, Salvatore and Concetta Villani; a sister, Susan; and two brothers, Thomas and John.

He was born in San Antonio, Texas and graduated from East Meadow High School, East Meadow, New York in June, 1971. Villani was awarded his Bachelor of Arts degree from the State University of New York Stony Brook magna cum laude in 1979 and his doctorate degree in entomology in 1984 from North Carolina State University, Raleigh. He also attended Hobart College for two years as an undergraduate and was active in its lacrosse program.

Villani came to the Geneva Experiment Station in 1985 as an assistant professor of entomology. He was promoted to associate professor in 1991 and to full professor in 1999. His specialty was soil and turf insect ecology.

Mike’s principal professional interests scientifically were in the area of the interrelationships between turfgrass insects and the soil environment. His projects on soil insects placed Geneva in the worldwide limelight as the center of excellence for this type of research. His research included the impact of soil heterogeneity on insect behavioral patterns. This included the study of predator/prey and pathogen/host interactions with the soil. Among these strategies were the impact of soil physical properties on chemical and microbial insecticides, use of pheromones in grub monitoring and management, use of fungal pathogens, and the use of nematodes to help control turf insects. His research has been of immediate and significant benefit to researchers and pest management practitioners worldwide. His program was featured in a television segment produced by the BBC.

Villani served as coauthor with Dr. Haruo Tashiro, professor emeritus of entomology at Geneva, and Patricia J. Vittum, associate professor of entomology at the University of Massachusetts, on a revision of a book originally written by Tashiro, *Turfgrass Insects of the United States and Canada*. This book is considered “the bible” of the turfgrass industry and is the

manual of choice among golf courses across the country. He was also a coeditor with Rick Brandenburg, professor of entomology at North Carolina State University, of the *Handbook of Turfgrass Insect Pests* which has become a best seller in the handbook series published by the Entomological Society of America.

During his career, this distinguished scientist received numerous awards and honors. He received a Citation of Merit—their highest award—from the New York State Turfgrass Association in 1999, the National Recognition Award in Urban Entomology from the Entomological Society of America in 1997, the Distinguished Achievement Award in Urban Entomology from the Eastern Branch of the Entomological Society, and several others. In January 2001, Villani received the Outstanding Service Award of the Turfgrass Council of North Carolina.

He was a member of the Entomological Society of America and the International Turfgrass Society, served on the scientific and technical advisory boards of Earthgro Composting and Turfgrass Trends Digest. He was coeditor of *Environmental Entomology* and served on numerous committees both within the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at Cornell University and nationally.

Villani Fund Established

The passing of Mike Villani has resonated around the world in the scientific community, as well as locally, as we grapple with the loss of our friend. The loss of a man as selfless and giving as Mike is difficult to honor in a way that would be worthy. This is why prior to Mike’s death he assisted with setting up a Memorial Fund. *The Mike Villani Graduate Student Research Fund in Entomology* will be awarded to a deserving graduate student in entomology at the Geneva Station.

Donations can be made to *The Mike Villani Graduate Student Research Fund in Entomology*. Checks should be made payable to Cornell University and mailed to the Mike Villani Fund, Cornell University, Development Office, 272 Roberts Hall, Ithaca, NY 14853.