

Villani Receives Citation of Merit Award

Editor's note: This was written in 1999 on the occasion of Mike Villani being awarded the Citation of Merit Award from NYSTA, thus the use of the present tense in the text.

Dr. Michael Villani, professor of soil ecology and turfgrass entomology at Cornell University is the recipient of the 1999 New York State Turfgrass Association's Citation of Merit Award. He has been serving the turfgrass industry in New York since 1984, providing leadership in scarab grub research, insect management and environmentally sound practices for pest management.

Mike Villani is a native New Yorker, brought up in the Bronx until the age of 12 when his family moved to East Meadow, Long Island. Mike attended Hobart College in Geneva. He graduated from the State University of New York at Stony Brook with a Bachelor of Arts, Magna Cum Laude, and went on to receive his Ph.D. in entomology from North Carolina State University. Mike's father, a professional fireman, told him, "Michael you gotta get a Ph.D. if you want people to listen to you. Doesn't matter what it's in, but you gotta get one." Mike took his father's advice and the rest is history.

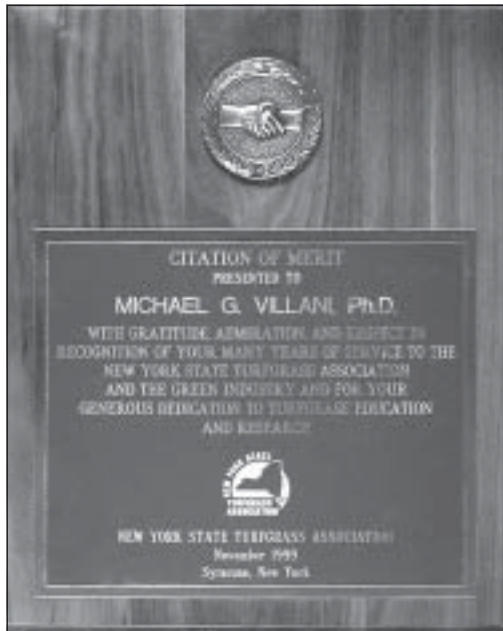
Villani joined the Cornell faculty in 1984 as an assistant professor. He had big shoes to fill, replacing Dr. Haruo Tashiro, who had earned a reputation as the world's leading turfgrass entomologist. Mike immediately went to work applying his knowledge of soil ecology to the number one insect pest of New York turf: the scarab grub. His research includes the impact of soil heterogeneity on insect behavioral patterns; environmental effects on insects and pest control products; and the influence of host plants on insect distribution. He has also stud-

ied the impact of soil physical properties on chemical and microbial insecticides; the use of pheromones for scarab monitoring and management programs; and the use of fungal pathogens and entomopathogenic nematodes for insect control. Current projects include the effects of sulfur on insect populations; behavior and management of mole crickets in turfgrass; and the effects of microbial controls on cutworms.

Mike's initial assignment at Cornell was 100% research. Realizing the tremendous need in the turfgrass industry, he requested a partial extension appointment. His ability to work effectively in both fundamental and applied ar-

reas of research and extension have earned him the praise of colleagues across the country, who consider him one of the world's foremost turfgrass entomologists. Mike is a true leader and team player, who shares credit for his many accomplishments with his research group, scientific collaborators, and the many turfgrass professionals who cooperate with him on field projects.

In addition, Mike has been active on a number of committees. He is a member of the Landscape Horticulture Statewide Program Executive Committee. He has served as chair of both the Cornell IPM Turfgrass and Ornamentals Working Group and the Cornell Community IPM Working Group, which recently secured a substantial amount of state funding to address pest management concerns in schools, parks and residential areas of New York State. Mike has also advised and mentored a number of graduate and undergraduate students, several of whom are working in the field of turfgrass entomology and management.



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Tribute

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work and independent thinking with his staff and students. He trusted those who worked with and for him to do what they said they would do in a timely and efficient manner, and in a way that would answer the scientific question that was being asked. Only a very few individuals violated this trust, but it never eliminated the belief that Mike had in people's good intentions. He was the king of second and third chances for all who crossed his path.

Our own families were important to Mike, and that endeared him to us. On numerous occasions he would say that difficulties we might be facing at home were more important than any problems we might have at work and that home issues should be dealt with first so that we could approach our research in the lab with the right attitude.

No job in the lab was too menial for Mike. He would pitch in to do whatever was required at the moment. Mike used to say that once you had dug ditches for sewer lines by hand (one of his summer jobs as a student) it was hard to think of yourself in an exalted manner. This attitude spilled over in his dealings with everyone he encountered. Even as a student at North

Carolina State University Mike never maintained a mental hierarchy of people; he never treated people by what he thought they could do for him or how important they thought they were. He was present to the situation wherever he was and people felt that.

In my own situation, he was the person responsible for my beginning Graduate School at Cornell University in the Employee Degree Program to pursue a Ph.D. In 1993, he urged me to begin and then gave me the latitude to do what I needed to do to pursue my project.

Because of Mike, I've trapped beetles on cranberry bogs in Massachusetts, dug grubs in Honduras and Nicaragua, and roller-bladed on Venice Beach in California. He was a great encourager and an asker of hard questions about my research that made sometimes squirm. He loved a good discussion and was always ready to sit down and talk about ecology and behavior or the meaning of life. One of my most treasured memories of Mike is him walking off the elevator in the morning towards my corner office saying, "What's it all mean, Paul?".

Nancy and I are better people because of him We miss him greatly. ~

Citation of Merit Award

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Mike has made major contributions to the turfgrass industry, publishing excellent reference materials. These include research publications, technical and extension articles, and two important entomology references. The first book, *The ESA Handbook of Turfgrass Insect Pests* was coedited with Dr. Rick Brandenburg. Most recently, he helped to revise the classic book *Turfgrass Insects of the United States and Canada,*

with Dr. Patricia Vittum, and Dr. Haruo Tashiro. In 1997, Mike was awarded the Entomology Society of America Recognition Award in Urban Entomology. Earlier this year, Cornell promoted him to the rank of full professor.

We are proud to have Michael working for us and our industry here in New York State, and it is my pleasure to grant him our highest honor, the Citation of Merit Award. ~

Mike's scientific contributions are his professional legacy. You can help sustain this legacy by contributing to The Mike Villani Graduate Student Research Fund in Entomology being established at the Geneva Station. Further details are on page 2.

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