CUTT

Tribute

As a student, I was able to see a side of the turf industry that few are privileged enough to see, and I feel like I was part of something really special and meaningful to the future of the industry. As a result, I tell every student that I meet about the experience and how valuable it could be for them.

An Industry Perspective

by Rich Stigberg
Stadium Golf Course
Schenectady, NY

Mike Villani was a great person to know, and he had a very positive influence on me, not only as a student and turf professional, but as a person as well.

My interactions with Mike began on a field trip my class from SUNY Cobleskill took to the research center in Geneva. Upon walking into his lab, I felt a warmth and welcome feeling that I hadn't found in other trips to other places. It was that day that I knew exactly where I wanted to do my internship. Mike's coworkers and students were all very knowledgeable, professional and extremely enthusiastic about their work.

I did a two week voluntary work experience upon Mike's advice to "make sure it was something I would be interested in." Immediately, I was hooked, and that fall I did my fifteen week internship under his direction. The work experiences and wealth of knowledge I gained during that time was—and still is—priceless! As a student, I was able to see a side of the turf industry that few are privileged enough to see, and I feel like I was part of something really special and meaningful to the future of the industry. As a result, I tell every student that I meet about the experience and how valuable it could be for them.

As a superintendent, Mike's impact has been huge. Not only did he and his crew come to our golf course to scout and perform some experiments, but he also continuously kept me up to date on his work. Having this knowledge has kept me well in tune with new pest management techniques and alternatives to conventional pesticide controls. And as we all know, this information is invaluable when it comes to dealing with tighter pesticide use regulation and public scrutiny of our current methods. On a lighter note, it just feels great to be able to say that I had the privilege of working and sharing knowledge with a turf professional as great as he was!

Aside from schooling and professional experience and development, one couldn't help but be affected in a positive way simply by knowing Mike Villani. He was compassionate, always inquisitive and upbeat, and just fun to be around. All these qualities tend to just come naturally to someone when they are in his company. He "kinda rubs off on ya," you know? If there's one quote that came from Mike's lab that I'll never forget and always gets a smile it's got to be: "There's no sex like Insects!"

Mike had a great impact on my life as a student, turf professional and person. Although we didn't see each other that frequently, I miss his company very much and my memory of him will always be a great one.

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In 1997, my friend, I, Drs. Tamson Yeh and Robert Shutter published data on the effectiveness of Bacillus thuringiensis japonensis *for control of Japanese and oriental beetle larvae. We showed clearly the potential for this bacterium to control white grubs.*

Working With My Friend

by Steven Alm
University of Rhode Island

So many people would call Mike Villani their friend and colleague. Friend: 1) A person attached to another by feelings of affection or personal regard. 2) A person who gives assistance; supporter. 3) A person who is on good terms with another; not hostile.

My friend and I worked together on determining the distribution, the biology, and the optimal trap and lure combination for monitoring the oriental beetle. This was a major undertaking, in that we sent out several hundred traps and lures to 54 cooperators in 20 states. This undertaking greatly increased the awareness of the oriental beetle as a pest of turf, nurseries, blueberries, etc. While working as a graduate student under the direction of Mike and Wendell Roelofs, Henry Facundo made some great progress in understanding the biology of the oriental beetle while working in Rhode Island, Connecticut and New York.

In 1997, my friend, I, Drs. Tamson Yeh and Robert Shutter published data on the effectiveness of *Bacillus thuringiensis japonensis* for control of Japanese and oriental beetle larvae. We showed clearly the potential for this bacterium to control white grubs. Although no commercial product is available yet, I believe there will be one in the not too distant future.

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Mike and his canine collaborator Kaiser.

CORNELL Turfgrass

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In 1999, my friend, I, and Dr. Richard Cowles published data on the effectiveness of a molt accelerating compound on several white grub species. This research clearly showed the importance of the first step in an integrated pest management program: identifying the pest.

Our latest project was a collaboration under the direction of Paul Robbins on the optimal blend of pheromone components of *Phyllophaga anxia* and unraveling speciation in that group. These are just a few examples of the breadth of my friend's involvement and impact in the turf and ornamental industry. He thought big, with big research projects, big research crews, which produced big results. I miss him dearly.

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He "belonged" anywhere he happened to be. Why? Because, although he was truly a great scientist, his real priority was people—relationships, friendship. I am truly grateful for his scientific contributions, for his humor, for his humility. But most of all I am grateful for his friendship.

Mike fostered independent 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.

Mole Cricket Research

by Rick Brandenburg
North Carolina State University

My work with Mike Villani focused on the development of a better understanding of mole cricket ecology and behavior. This has literally opened our eyes as to what takes place below the ground when we introduce a control agent. As a result, we have a much better understanding of the inconsistencies of pesticide performance, thus allowing us to take the next step to overcome the behavioral activity that renders mole crickets so difficult to control. This research was funded for seven years by the USGA.

Our research not only has provided new information for educating turfgrass managers, but also has further reinforced our scouting and timing programs. The overall benefit is that turfgrass managers are indeed doing a better job of managing mole crickets, and this information has a carry-over effect into other soil insect pests. The research has global application as well since mole crickets are found as pests of turfgrass on a worldwide basis.

Belonging

by Pat Cobb, Prof. Emeritus
Auburn University

Mike Villani was a Southerner; he was a Northerner, a Midwesterner, a Westerner. He "belonged" anywhere he happened to be. Why? Because, although he was truly a great scientist, his real priority was people—relationships, friendship. I am truly grateful for his scientific contributions, for his humor, for his humility. But most of all I am grateful for his friendship.

A Personal Reflection

by Paul Robbins
NYS Ag Experiment Station, Geneva NY

Working with Mike Villani on a day to day basis, as Nancy Consolie and I did for over ten years, gave us a unique window into his life. He was our friend, our colleague, and our supervisor. Mike's management style was distinctly hands off. He fostered independent

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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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