

Tribute

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Memories of Mike

by Fred Baxendale
University of Nebraska

It is with a deep sense of admiration and respect that I prepare this tribute to my late friend and colleague Michael G. Villani.

During his tragically shortened professional career, Mike emerged as an outstanding researcher, a gifted educator and a well-recognized leader in the scientific community. His dedication, creativity and strength of character were significant contributing factors to this development. Mike's research and outreach programs were highly regarded by academic colleagues and clientele groups alike, and he became an internationally-recognized authority in the area of soil arthropod behavior.

A natural communicator, Mike conveyed his ideas in an effective and concise manner and had the enviable ability of being able to explain difficult technical materials in simple, easily understood terms. Not surprisingly, he was in high demand as a presenter at professional turfgrass meetings across the country. As a writer, Mike developed his topics well, and prepared manuscripts that were helpful, accurate and to the point. His high standards were reflected in the quality and quantity of his written work. Mike played an important role in helping me develop and focus my own turfgrass entomology program. Over the years, I came to depend on his expertise and counsel.

On a more personal note, Mike was a good friend. As I think back over our experiences together, I recall many special times. I will never forget the early days when money was tight and Mike and I would share a room at entomology meetings (his snoring was legendary!). I remember spirited discussions with Mike perched on a table or sprawled out on the couch and the pleasant smell of his pipe tobacco (Balkan Sobranie, if I recall correctly) wafting through the room. I remember walks along the seashore at Wrightsville Beach, NC, and great discussions at Turfgrass Entomology Workshops. I remember conducting turf workshops together, his cats Booger and Phlegm, and his unceasing devotion to his family. I will miss his humor, wisdom and companionship.

Mike's contributions to entomology, the turfgrass industry, his family, friends, students, colleagues, and community were far too numerous to cover in this brief testimonial. However, an examination of his record will show


A Gifted Professional, A Caring Person

by Pat Vittum
University of Massachusetts

Mike Villani was a trusted friend and colleague whose loss will be felt throughout the turf industry. Mike and I worked very closely on the revision of *Turfgrass Insects of the United States and Canada* (originally authored by Haruo Tashiro, who pioneered the turf entomology position at the New York State Agricultural Experiment Station in Geneva). There were days when it felt like the book revision was out of control, but invariably when I called Mike to discuss it, he would help me relax and put things in perspective. In many ways Mike was like a co-parent of that book!

Mike was the best turf entomology researcher—he had the ability to blend practical and more basic, or technical studies. He had a real gift for crafting research projects to elucidate the finer points of the ecology of a particular insect while, at the same time, identifying some ways to enhance management strategies. And through it all, he always deflected the credit. While he was the one doing the bulk of the work (whether personally or with his laboratory personnel), he invariably downplayed his own role in the effort.

His analytical mind was always challenging us to “go a little deeper”, and look at little nuances we had not noticed. I spent a lot of time thinking, “Why didn't I think of that?” His observations seemed so obvious and straightforward when he brought them to our attention, but there were always wonderful little twists that expanded our horizons.

If you asked Mike, his greatest contribution in life was his family. He adored his wife, Connie, and his two daughters, Sarah and Kate. He arranged his meeting and travel schedules so that he could be at most of his daughters' softball or soccer games, and he just beamed whenever you asked how the family was doing. As far as he was concerned, his family was “the measure of the man”. 

he generously shared his time, experience and resources with all who asked. With his passing, Mike left a remarkable legacy of compassion, commitment and accomplishments for the rest of us to emulate. 