Jim Baird Joins UCR Turfgrass Team

Doug Martin, Golf Course Superintendent, Wilshire Country Club

It took some time, but the new turfgrass extension specialist is now on board at the University of California, Riverside. On January 1, 2008, Dr. Jim Baird joined the Department of Botany & Plant Sciences as an Assistant Cooperative Extension Specialist whose primary responsibilities include conducting research and providing outreach for the California turfgrass industry. He replaces the vacancy left by the retirement of Dr. Vic Gibeault.

Jim was born and raised in Pueblo, Colorado. He began his turf career through his love for the game of golf and by working on the maintenance staff at the Pueblo Municipal golf course under Superintendent Gary Vitt. Along the way, Jim interned at the Denver Country Club (Superintendent Tony Kramlik), Fox Chapel Golf Club in Pittsburgh, PA (Joe Baidy), and at Meridian Golf Club and Valley Country in Englewood, CO (John Hoofnagle). Jim attended Penn State University, but later transferred back home to Colorado State University where he received a B.S. in Landscape Horticulture in 1985. He obtained a M.S. in Agronomy & Soils in 1989 and a Ph.D. in Botany in 1993, both from Auburn University.

From 1993 to 1997, Jim was an Assistant Professor of Turfgrass Research and Teaching in the Department of Horticulture and Landscape Architecture at Oklahoma State University. His research focused on best management practices (BMPs) to reduce pesticide and nutrient runoff from turf, and he also collaborated with a team of scientists in the breeding and development of cold-hardy bermudagrasses. Jim joined the faculty in Crop & Soil Sciences at Michigan State University as an Assistant Professor of Turfgrass Research and Teaching from 1997-2000. At MSU, he investigated the management of turf under low light conditions as well as the use of optical sensors in site-specific turfgrass management. From 2000-2007, Jim had an opportunity to realize a childhood dream of working for the United States Golf Association (USGA). He was an agronomist in the Northeast Region of the USGA Green Section and made nearly 800 Turfgrass Advisory Service (TAS) visits to golf courses in New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, and Ontario, Canada.
Jim and his wife, Yun, have been married for 20+ years. She is an architect who will also be employed at UCR as a Senior Educational Facilities Planner. They have two children, Alison (age 10) and Jack (age 3). Besides spending time with his family, Jim enjoys golf, running (he has finished eight marathons), and ice hockey both as a player and a fan.

Although Jim is still formulating ideas about his research and extension programs, focus will be placed on maintaining a balance between short- and long-term issues facing our industry. “The issues of declining water resources and quality are not going away,” he said. “At the same time, we want to help turf managers overcome the challenges of the day. Our program will address both facets.” One important UCR activity that is certain to return this year is the Turfgrass & Landscape Field Day. Stay tuned for more information about the date and time.

“I am very excited about coming to California, joining the faculty at UCR, and working with the turfgrass industry,” said Jim. “I have been very fortunate in my career to work for and gain experience from some of the best institutions and people in our industry. Having done all of that, it was nice to be able to take a step back and ponder, what do I really want to do with the remainder of my career? And UCR is where I want to be!” he exclaimed. Please join me in welcoming Jim to California! He can be reached by e-mail at jbaird@ucr.edu, or by telephone at 951-827-5630 (office) or 951-333-9052 (cell).