

NOTED TURFGRASS SCIENTIST MICHAEL G. VILLANI REMEMBERED

May 17, 2001

CONTACT: Linda McCandless, llm3@cornell.edu, 315-787-2417

GENEVA, NY: Michael G. Villani, 48, 80 Hillcrest Avenue, Geneva, died on Tuesday, May 15, 2001 at home following a lengthy illness with pancreatic cancer. He was a professor of entomology at Cornell University at the New York State Agricultural Experiment Station, Geneva, NY.

"We have lost not only a remarkable scientist but one of the finest human beings I've ever had the pleasure of knowing," said Dr. Wendell Roelofs, chair of the Station's department of entomology. "He was the epitome of what a person thinks of when they say 'a wonderful human being'. He was revered by his co-workers, admired by fellow scientists throughout the world, adored by his many undergraduate and graduate students whom he taught, and loved and respected by all. He lived much too short a time, but while with us, he made contributions to science and society that will last forever," continued Roelofs.

Villani rarely thought of himself. He was the consummate teacher, advisor, and mentor to all. 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



Suggested caption: Dr. Michael Villani

Download 300 DPI [tif](#) photo

Other links to Dr. Michael Villani:

[Villani Receives Turfgrass Award](#)

[The Grass is Never Greener on the Other Side](#)

[Turfgrass Specialist is Promoted at Geneva](#)

turf insects with his staff and with other scientists around the country. "He gave far more than he got in return," commented Rick Brandenburg, a professor of entomology at North Carolina State University, who recently presented Mike with the Outstanding Service Award of the Turfgrass Council of North Carolina.

[Second Edition of Turfgrass Insects of the United States and Canada released](#)

Even more important than what he accomplished during his career with turf insects, was the relationship he had with his wife, Connie, and two daughters, Sara and Kate. Just as he knew the right questions to ask in his scientific endeavors and was able to instill a tremendous sense of pride in his co-workers, he was also a loving and devoted husband and father who always gently challenged his family to do their very best in whatever they are involved.

Born in San Antonio, Texas, 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 research. Highly regarded as a practicing entomologist, Villani developed a unique radiographic technique to study the behavior of soil insects. His research included the impact of soil heterogeneity on insect behavioral patterns. This included the study of predatory/prey and pathogen/host interactions with the soil. Additionally, he intensively studied and made recommendations regarding the use of Integrated Pest Management (IPM) strategies for controlling insects. 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.

Villani served as co-author with Dr. Haruo Tashiro, professor emeritus of entomology at Geneva, on a revision of a book originally written by Tashiro on *Turfgrass Insects of the United States and Canada*. Also a co-author on the

revised book was Patricia J. Vittum, associate professor of entomology at the University of Massachusetts. This book was considered "the bible" of the turfgrass industry and is the manual of choice among golf courses from Pebble Beach to Silver Creek.

During his career, the distinguished scientist received numerous awards and honors. In addition to the Outstanding Service Award from the Turfgrass Council of North Carolina in January 2001, 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.

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 co-editor of *Environmental Entomology* and served on numerous committees both within the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at Cornell University and nationally.

Villani spent 20 percent of his time on extension-related activities. In doing so, he had many outreach programs on the national scene. He and his highly dedicated staff also spent numerous hours working with elementary students in the City of Geneva teaching them about the exciting science of insects.

Mike also served in the community as a coach for Geneva's Little League softball programs, a consultant with Geneva City officials on lawn care and the beautification of Geneva, and as a member of the Greens' Committee at the Geneva Country Club.

Villani is survived by his wife, Connie; two daughters, Sara (18) and Kate (14); his parents, Salvatore and Concetta Villani, East Meadow, New York; a sister, Susan (Tom) Capasso, East Meadow, New York; two brothers, Thomas (Elizabeth), Point Lookout, New York and John (Gilda), Durham, North Carolina; niece Marie Capasso, nephews Andrew Capasso and Christopher Rodriguez Villani; and several aunts, uncles, and cousins.

There will be no prior calling hours. A memorial service will be held on Sunday, June 3, at 1:00 p.m. at the New York State Agricultural Experiment Station, Jordan Hall, North Street, Geneva, NY. Memorial contributions in Villani's name may be made to: Geneva High School: Girls Soccer & Softball Programs; Mike Villani

Graduate Student Research Fund in Entomology (checks made to Cornell University; mailed to The Mike Villani Fund, Cornell University, Development Office, 272 Roberts Hall, Ithaca, NY 14853), or to the Finger Lakes Community Cancer Center.

###

[NYSAES](#) | [Publications](#) | [Latest](#)
Contact Webmaster: webmaster@nysaes.cornell.edu