

# Michael Gerard Villani

*February 7, 1953 — May 15, 2001*

Professor Mike Villani was revered by fellow scientists throughout the world, adored by his many undergraduate and graduate students, and loved and respected by all. He was the consummate teacher, advisor, and mentor. 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 turf insects with his staff and with other scientists around the country. His management style was to encourage freethinking and independence among those who worked both with him and for him. He was the acknowledged master of the win-win situation. Villani rarely thought of himself and he gave far more than he got in return. Mike epitomized the best in all of us in both his professional and personal life. He will be greatly missed for the unique perspectives he brought to the science of soil insect ecology, the probing questions he asked that often made those associated with this area of research question long held beliefs about soil arthropod behavior, and the engaging and gentle manner in which he did so.

Villani died at home after a lengthy illness with pancreatic cancer. Mike died in a manner consistent with how he lived. He showed dignity, compassion for his family, a sense of humor that never waned, and a commitment to giving each day his best effort. Villani is survived by his wife, Connie; two daughters, Sara and Kate; his parents, Salvatore and Concetta Villani; a sister, Susan; and two brothers, Thomas and John.

He was born in San Antonio, Texas and graduated from East Meadow High School, East Meadow, New York in June 1971. 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. 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. 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. His research has been of immediate and significant benefit to researchers and pest management practitioners worldwide. His program was featured in a television segment produced by the BBC.

Villani served as co-author with Dr. Haruo Tashiro, Professor Emeritus of Entomology at Geneva, and Patricia J. Vittum, Associate Professor of Entomology at the University of Massachusetts, on a revision of a book originally written by Tashiro, *Turfgrass Insects of the United States and Canada*. This book is considered “the bible” of the turfgrass industry and is the manual of choice among golf courses across the country. He was also a co-editor with Rick Brandenburg, Professor of Entomology at North Carolina State University, of the *Handbook of Turfgrass Insect Pests* which has become a best seller in the handbook series published by the Entomological Society of America.

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

He was a member of the Entomological Society of America and the International Turfgrass Society; and 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.

*Rick L. Brandenburg, Paul S. Robbins, Frank F. Rossi, Wendell L. Roelofs*