

Agronomic Science Foundation

Positively Impacting Lives—Chris Stiegler’s Legacy Continues

by Denice Rackley

Dr. Chris Stiegler set the bar high for other students majoring in turfgrass management. He was a great student, meticulous scientist, and dedicated researcher, but the example he set with his life transcended science.

“He was one of those guys that everyone liked—he genuinely enjoyed helping people,” recalls Stiegler’s Ph.D. adviser, Dr. Mike Richardson, Professor of Turfgrass Management and Physiology at the University of Arkansas. “Chris was excited about his family, being a father, and continuing his career. Chris’s research was always precise and accurate. His contributions to the turfgrass industry as a student were impressive.”

Stiegler’s roots ran deep in the turfgrass industry as he began playing golf when he was five years old. Upon graduating from Oklahoma State University (OSU), Stiegler returned to golf as an assistant superintendent and worked for OSU Extension. Graduating with his Ph.D. in 2010, he and his wife Jenny moved to Texas where Stiegler accepted a research and faculty position at Texas A&M. His personal and professional life were on an upward trajectory; a wonderful wife and new daughter and years of hard work rewarded with published research and a teaching career



Jay McCurdy, Assistant Professor and Turfgrass Extension Specialist at Mississippi State University, says receiving the Stiegler Award in 2012 “set a tone for my career to come.” *Photo by MSU Extension Service/Kevin Hudson.*

all abruptly ended when a tragic car accident took the life of Chris and Jenny.

Continuing Chris’s Legacy

“His loss is felt deeply by everyone who knew him and the turfgrass science community. I felt we needed to honor Chris and his work and contributions to science and the Societies as a student,” Richardson explains. The Chris Stiegler Turfgrass Science Graduate Student Travel Award was established in 2011 to reward contributions of deserving turfgrass graduate students by helping them attend and participate in CSSA’s Annual Meeting, Richardson says. “This award reminds us of Chris’s legacy and has been one of the most fulfilling pursuits of my professional career.”

“Chris was a salt-of-the-earth kinda guy—he made everyone feel welcome,” remembers Brad Shaver, who was finishing his master’s when Stiegler came to Arkansas. “It was obvious that Chris was going places both personally and professionally.” The Stielger Golf Fellowship Fund-raiser is held every other year just prior to the CSSA Annual Meeting to raise money for the Stiegler Award. “The tournament enables everyone relax and catch up prior to the meeting while honoring Chris and Jenny. It’s encouraging to see the partnership between those in industry and academia on the golf course and during the meeting,” Shaver says. “The award enables participation in the CSSA meeting, allowing students the opportunity to showcase their research, network, obtain knowledge from other presenters, and gain a wider perspective.”

Positive Effect on Young Careers

The Stiegler Award has been presented to 44 turf science graduate students. Jay McCurdy, now Assistant Professor and Turfgrass Extension Specialist at Mississippi State University, received the award in 2012. “The award funded my travels, but the affirmation of my work was far more meaningful,” McCurdy says. “I believe it set a tone for my career to come—one of service but also gratitude and contribution. I owe much to those that have chosen to honor Chris.”

Receiving the Stiegler Award in 2017, Paige Boyle reconnected with Dr. Kelly Kopp of Utah State who is now Boyle’s Ph.D. adviser. “Discussing my research with professors and international scientists was encouraging.” Learn-



Chris Stiegler

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ing about Chris, winning the award, and attending the Graduate Student Leadership Conference inspired Boyle to give back. She now participates on several Society planning committees.

Cameron Stephens, studying agronomy at Penn State in 2017, remembers presenting his research at the Annual Meeting. "The opportunity to attend the conference enabled me to grow as a presenter and shaped my master's program and Ph.D. research," he says. "More importantly, learning about the breadth and scope of Chris's industry experiences and research contributions inspire me to be mindful of how I can assist the end-user and positively impact the industry."

"Receiving the Stiegler Award made me take a hard look at myself and what I was doing with my life," admits Zane

Raudenbush, who in 2014 was working toward his Ph.D. at Kansas State University. "Chris's story resonated with me. I had worked in the industry as Chris had. I was working toward my Ph.D. and a career in academia with a wife and young daughter. Receiving the award was a pivotal point in my life, making me reflect on what I was doing in my life as a student, husband, and father. It has had a lasting impact on my relationships. I saw where I was falling short and needed to do better, be better." Raudenbush, now professor at Ohio State University, continues to feel compelled by the example Stiegler set. "I carry myself differently trying to positively impact the lives of all those that cross my path. His example inspires me to make the most of what I have and live as if it all can be taken away. I often think of Chris and am reminded to be a better man."

Many students have had their professional careers and lives positively impacted by receiving the Stiegler Travel Award. Chris's life continues to provide inspiration for us all. If you would like to positively impact the future of students and honor Chris Stiegler, please consider making a donation. You can donate online at a-s-f.org/donate, or make your check payable to ASE, 5585 Guilford Rd., Madison, WI 53711-5801 with "Stiegler Turfgrass Science Student Travel Award" on the memo line. Contact Eric Welsh, 608-273-8081, for more information.

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New Home *continued from page 16*

All signs indicate that NIFA and ERS will in fact be relocating to Kansas City—as of 1 August, around 100 employees are expected to have already made the move. There are still issues that need to be addressed, particularly, ensuring that NIFA can get restaffed and operating at full capacity as quickly as possible. But change also presents new opportunities. There will undoubtedly be new staff who bring new ideas and new expertise to NIFA. For those interested in a career in government, NIFA will likely be the single biggest hirers of Ph.D.'s over the next year or two. Relocating to Kansas City also means there are now four senators and a bipartisan group of representatives from Kansas and Missouri who have a vested interest in NIFA's success. They all enthusiastically support the move, and with the proper engagement from our community, could become even stronger champions for agriculture research.

NIFA is a critically important piece of the federal agriculture research portfolio, and ASA, CSSA, and SSSA are committed to working with USDA, Congress, and the broader research community to ensure that the relocation does not impact its ability to connect with stakeholders, fund research, and contribute to finding solutions to pressing societal challenges. Despite the political tug of war over relocation, NIFA is slated for a nearly 10% increase under the House agriculture appropriations bill. This is a clear sign that there remains strong support for NIFA's mission.

New Corporate Member

We welcome the following new corporate member as of 17 June 2019:

Bonaventure Holdings Inc., Warren MI, Gold Level

ASA, CSSA, and SSSA Corporate Membership is an effective component in your company's outreach to agronomic, crop, soil, and environmental science professionals and students. Three corporate membership levels enable your company to interact with the Societies in ways that best fit your needs. All levels provide access to journal, meetings, membership, and recognition benefits, as well as special reduced rates for company-wide Digital Library subscriptions. And a Corporate Membership supports the missions of the Societies and the development of students in our professions.

Visit www.agronomy.org/membership/corporate for more information, or contact Eric Welsh at ewelsh@sciencesocieties.org or 608-268-4981.