

Soil Judging - continued

with how the week went. MAPSS members who helped out at the contest (before, during and after) are greatly appreciated including: Roger Risley, Jim Balogh, Laurie Brown, Suzanne D'Souza, Scott Smith and Gary Elsner. I will provide more information about soil judging at the annual meeting in December.

I will not have to organize another regional or national soil judging contest because I will retire before it is Minnesota's turn again.

With the 4th place finish, because of eight teams competing in the Region V contest, the University of Minnesota will be able to attend the national soil judging contest again. This spring the national will be in Springfield, Missouri.

We thank MAPSS for their support for the Minnesota Team at the regional contest and for financial assistance with the trophies. "MAPSS" was placed on the trophy and explained to the recipients what it means by Suzanne D'Souza at the awards ceremony.



2008 UM 4th place Soil Judging Team LtoR - Sean Salmi, Coach Pribyl, David Campbell, Samantha Linman, Nick Saumweber, Sondra Campbell, Rick Hillstrom, Karyn Jones, Matt Summers, Noriko Sakuraoka, Coach Cooper

An Experience of a Lifetime "Dig It! The Secrets of Soil"

By Jim Culver, Retired Soil Scientist, USDA-NRCS

I had the opportunity to participate in the reception and preview of the Smithsonian's National Museum on Natural History newly released exhibit "Dig It! The Secrets of Soil" on Thursday evening, July 17th. This was an exciting and memorable day!

My flight from Lincoln, Nebraska to Washington D.C. arrived shortly before noon. As this special reception started at 7:00 P.M., I had some free time before this

special occasion. It had been several years since I had visited the Soil Survey Division staff in the NRCS- USDA building. Many "Thanks" to Mike Golden, Director of the Soil Survey Division who took the time to give me an excellent guided tour of their new office space and staff personnel. It was great to briefly chat with some of the current soils staff that I had worked with directly or indirectly prior to my retirement. Chris Smith, Jon Gerken, Hari Eswaran, Maxine Levin, Paul Reich and Carylon Olson were among those that Mike and I visited with on my short tour of the Soil Survey Division. Maxine was busy and had yet to go the Smithsonian museum to give one or two of the state soil monoliths a last minute help of using glue, and a special touch to keep some of the soil material in place.

I had the fortune to meet and chat with Gay Lynn Kinter, Resource Soil Scientist, Michigan and her son Branson, and Kathy McGuire, Assistant State Soil Scientist, Arizona at the Holiday Inn over a few refreshments before the reception. There was a heavy short rainfall about the time we had planned to head to National Museum of Natural History. The rain stopped and we were advised it would be quicker to walk to the rather than to try to flag down a taxi.

We arrived at the Museum dry, somewhat early and were directed to a lower level to sign in. As we entered it looked like there were several different important activities that were going to happen. It looked like that the "Dig It! The Secrets of Soil" was only one of the important events planned for the evening. Kathy, Gay Lynn, Branson and I got checked in good fashion. Before long the reception took on a very formal look – suits, sports coats, ties, high heels and etc. Several bars and food entries located around the elephant hall in the museum all were doing great business. The 500 people who had indicated they would attend turned out to be about 600 people in attendance. The only show going on was "Dig It! The Secrets of Soil." Outstanding!!

There were soil scientists (men and women) and other interested people there from all parts of the United States. A large number of participants had their wife, husband or friend with them. It was great to renew friendships with many people I had worked with over the years. Maurice Mausbach, former Deputy for Soil Survey & Resource Assessment and Horace Smith former Director of Soil Survey Division and their wives were among the many that enjoyed this special evening. Following the food and continuing refreshments there was a short program recognizing the outstanding work of the Smithsonian staff, USDA, SSSA, funding contributors, and other leadership people who designed, planned and secured the resources to make the world class soils exhibit a reality.

Following the formal short program recognizing of key individuals/groups the doors were open to walk through the 5,000 square feet, one of a kind soils exhibit. I had participated in some of the earlier design and funding meetings in D.C. several years so I had some idea of what to expect. However, the end result greatly exceeded my highest expectations. The Smithsonian exhibits are designed to capture the interest of young people. This soils exhibit certainly does this. It was easy to understand and very visual but at the same time it offers a wealth of information for even the most scientific person.

Outstanding!

The All-American Soils (individual State Soils Monoliths) presentation is one of a kind --impressive. A short display explained how each soil monolith was prepared in the field, which was very helpful for those who have no idea on how each soil monolith was prepared. There is information about each state soil along with a series of questions given in a hands-on touch-button kiosk.

It seemed to me that all phases of soil science, interpretations and uses were cleverly included in the variety of photos, simple illustrations, and short sayings about the importance soils. In short, there was something for everyone to enjoy and learn.

Viewing the exhibit reminded me of the crowded conditions at a State Fair or getting around during a big football game. 5,000 square feet of exhibit space is a lot – but the 600 people trying to get a peep of the highlights of the soil exhibit made for a lot of fun. The exhibit was scheduled to close at 9:00 pm. However, security had a hard time trying to get everyone out—but in time the security did clear the area. It was an enjoyable evening and one the soil science community collectively can be appreciative and proud. Hats off to all!!!!

There was a special reception Friday afternoon at the USDA Whitten Building recognizing the “Dig It! The Secrets of Soils” and giving tribute to those who made this exhibit possible. Making presentations were NRCS Chief Arlen Lancaster, SSSA President Dr. Gary Peterson, Gary Mast, USDA Deputy Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment representing Secretary Ed Shafer, John Redding, president of the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD), a Smithsonian Museum representative, and the president of The Fertilizer Institute, a major exhibit sponsor.

Gary Peterson, President of Soil Science Society of America noted that about seven years ago there were three people who had contacted the Smithsonian’s National Museum of Natural History on the idea of an exhibit about soils. These individual were – Patrick Drohan, soil

scientist, Penn. State, Tom Levermann, USDAS-NRCS and Jim Ware, soil scientist, USDA-NRCS. Through the years I have worked with each of these individuals on different kinds of projects. Each of them are high energy “do it” kinds of soil scientists. I first worked with Tom Levermann in helping with a soil educational field soil pit activity on a Saturday morning in the 1980s. Tom at that time worked for the Papio Natural Resource District in Nebraska. I worked with Jim Ware on numerous projects – one on aerial procurement of aerial photography for use in soil survey field mapping. Jim always had good ideas and was one to move forward. Jim was the lead coordinating individuals in getting the state soil monoliths prepared as part of the National Cooperative Soil Survey Centennial. Following the soil survey centennial activities the individual state soil monoliths were stored in rather poor offsite space within the USDA Agriculture Building. Jim was thrilled to get the soil monoliths out so the public could view them rather than to see them deteriorate in the back of a dark storage area. Job well done!! My contacts with Patrick were after I retired in helping with the organization of the United States Consortium of Soil Science Associations. Patrick was one of the key individuals in helping to make for improved communications among soil scientists.

During the weekend I spent some time with my son, daughter-in-law and granddaughter - Meral. Meral is 11 years old, enjoys camping, growing plants and the outdoors. She wanted to see the “Dig It! The Secrets of Soil”. Elephant Hall is one of her favorite’s places to visit. So on Sunday morning we took the Metro to the Museum to visit the “Dig It! The Secrets of Soil.” Meral really enjoyed the hands on activities, the state soil monoliths, looking at all of the different soil maps, worms, kids play in the mud, illustrations and soil sayings.

I had an interesting experience at the Reagan National airport on the return home. I had made the mistake of not taking a small three-inch pocketknife out of my travel bag. I was given the choice to leave the knife with the airport security or to pay a small amount to have it shipped home in a separate envelope. I chose to pay and have the knife sent to my home address. I was impressed with the airport security person who helped me fill out the required forms. He was quite knowledgeable of the corn grown in Minnesota, Iowa and Nebraska. He commented that there must have been a big special agriculture event in Washington D.C. because a lot of people boarding planes that afternoon have all had small plastic shovel (given as part of the opening). I was pleasantly surprised to see the impact that “Dig It! The Secrets of Soil” had already made.