

Where is everyone else?

The last issue of *The Florida Green* contained a great article by Dr. Monica Elliott decrying the treatment of golf course superintendents by golfers who expect flawless playing conditions regardless of

weather conditions. Dr. Elliott's words were heartfelt and dead on the mark, demonstrating again why she is so highly regarded by superintendents over and above her substantial contributions as a turf researcher.

Predictably, though sad to say, you and the other members of the choir read Dr. Elliott's article in your own association magazine,

rather than in *Golf Digest* where she had submitted it and hoped it would appear. It just seems to be a fact of life that most golfers aren't at all interested in the problems of maintaining high quality turf or helping support our research efforts, while at the same time expecting a perfect golf course each and every time they tee it up. As golf course superintendents, we should be "mad as hell and not take it anymore," to quote from the movie "Network" by way of Monica's article.

Other than the USGA, what other non-superintendent, golf-related organization recognizes the need for turf research and backs it up financially? Why is it that superintendents are the ones sitting on panels debating green zealots about golf's environmental impact; dealing with high-handed regulatory agents; and spending hour after hour planning, organizing, and staging fund-raising events for turf research? Where are the golf pros, the general managers, the developers, the architects, the builders, the owners, but especially, those who play golf almost every day of their lives and profess a love for the game?

I can well understand the disinterest in the day-to-day mechanics of the golf course

maintenance operation — this is what we superintendents are trained and educated for and paid as professionals to do — but I don't understand why we stand virtually alone as the defenders of the game. Yes, we are the ones calling the shots in the facet of the club's operations most likely to have potentially adverse environmental consequences, but we are doing so under the direction of — and for the benefit of — our golfing members.

Answer honestly — how many of you would be doing things the same way if you had total job security and complete authority to manage the golf course as you saw fit? Would there be less water and fewer fertilizers and pesticides applied? My guess is yes, but who gets fired if the golf course does not meet members' expectations, and who is held accountable for regulatory compliance and/or environmental transgressions?

This has been the greatest mystery to me in my 23 years as a golf course superintendent: Why is it that golfers are willing to spend \$250 or more on the latest hot driver or \$40 for a dozen Titleist Tour balatas, but wouldn't spend \$10 a year for turf research if their life depended on it? Though some of them may be rocket scientists, I don't think you have to be one to figure out that escalating maintenance costs over and above the rate of inflation cause higher membership dues and greens fees, and that basic research into the development of new grasses, methods, and products could help reverse this calamitous trend. Think about it. In Florida, Tifdwarf and Tifton 419 are still the predominant grasses found on golf course greens and fairways, and they were released for use over 35 years ago when 1/4 inch was the normal cutting height on greens.

At this point, you're probably saying, "So what's your point, Mark? I've heard all this before and you're still preaching to the choir."

I actually have three points.

I think it's time to resurrect the idea of a

Mark My Words



Mark Jarrell, CGCS
Assistant Editor

“golf tax” in Florida, to finally get golfers to contribute their fair share of the research and development burden necessary to provide the environmentally sound and high quality golf course that they demand. By my estimation, a 5-cent-per-round golf tax would generate about \$2.5 million in this state.

Point two, we need to continue growing and stay unified as an industry so our words carry the clout reflective of this state’s largest agribusiness. our 1992 survey indicated that turfgrass is a \$7.3 billion industry; by IFAS’ numbers, the rest of Florida’s agriculture is worth about \$5.5 billion. Golf and turf is growing while many agricultural commodities are in

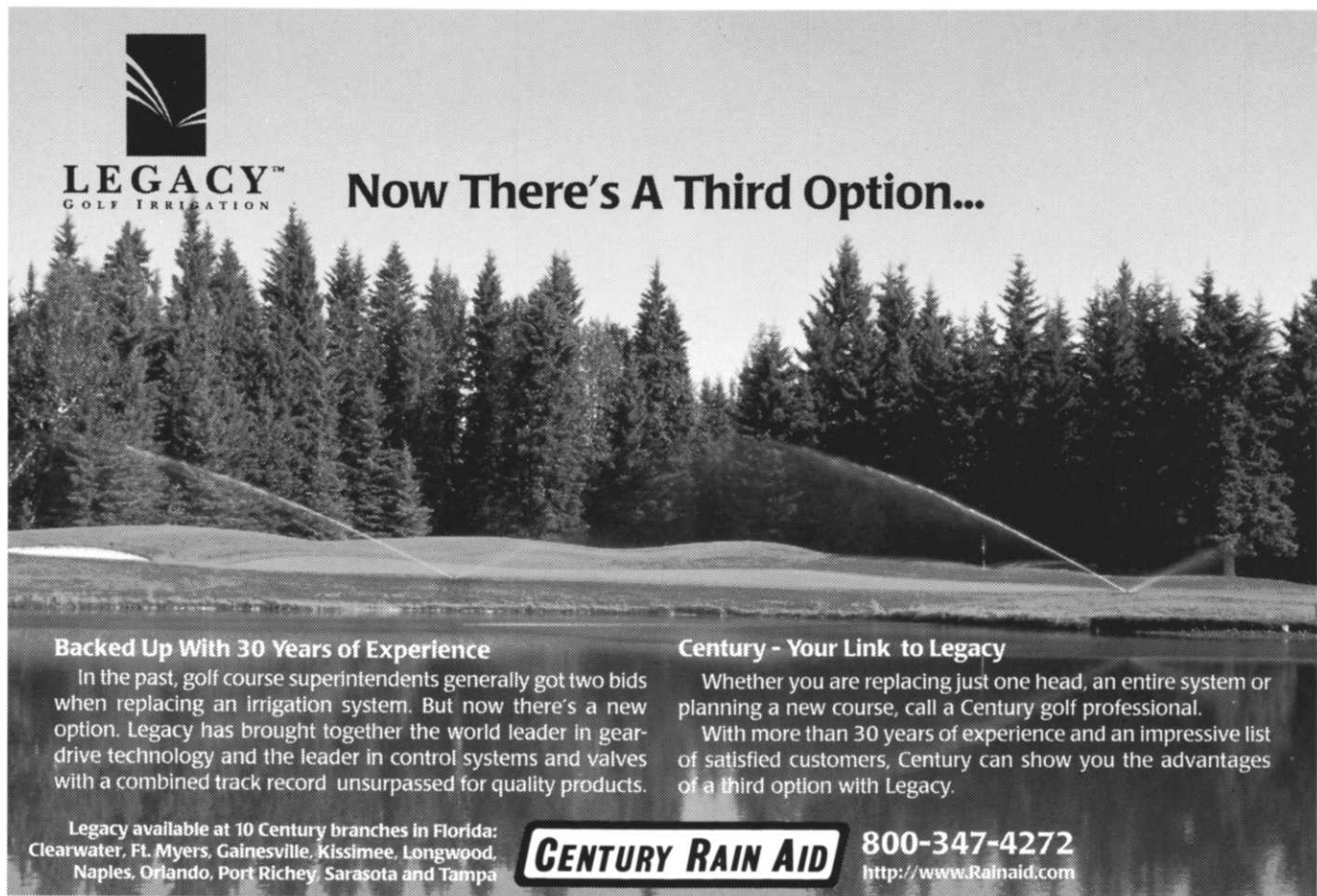
decline or on the ropes due to NAFTA and other factors. The FTGA and the FGCSA need to continue working closely together to solve our problems. Those who disagree with certain decisions or policies should get involved and work through these associations rather than against them.

The third point is that we need to work more closely with IFAS to improve the University of Florida’s turf program, and with the state legislature to secure proper funding. We have already started working with IFAS, and we are making headway. Vice President Dr. Jim Davidson has already agreed to increase turf faculty by three new positions: we will be getting a weed specialist, an

entomologist, a pathologist, and two breeders dedicated half time to turf — that’s a lot more than simply hiring a replacement for the loss of Dr. Bert McCarty.

There should be no adversarial stances between the different segments of the golf and turf industry and/or their customers. There are plenty of very real and very dedicated adversaries to golf, and those of us who care about golf should work together to support the necessary research to provide the high quality that golfers want and the environmentally friendly golf courses that we all want.

Superintendents are doing their part. Where is everyone else?



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