Golf course’s water quality no issue for President Bush

By Vern Putney

The day President George Bush’s thyroid condition was announced, he stepped smartly from his helicopter at his Walker’s Point summer home in Kennebunkport, Maine, and strode to a nearby garden hose. He drank copiously and smacked his lips.

Was he returning to his boyhood method of quenching his thirst, or making a statement? Mainers like to think he was expressing continued confidence in drinking water long considered the world’s best.

Water is undergoing intensive scrutiny in areas the Bushes have stayed for lengthy periods. Texas, Washington, D.C., and Camp David, Md., are high on the inspection list.

It is puzzling that wife Barbara also has the Graves’ disease symptom. Once the president alighted, he was re-energized and “relaxed and invigorated as always by the sea,” according to press secretary Martin Fitzwater.

As further proof, Bush a couple of days later expanded his swift 18-hole routine at nearby Cape Arundel Golf Club to 27 with no sign of slowdown.

In perhaps sending a signal to physicians and scientists to look elsewhere for the source of trouble, Bush might have pointed to Webhannet Golf Club in Kennebunk Beach, five miles away. Roger J. Lowell, course superintendent there and president of the Maine Golf Course Superintendents Association, noted that the most recent test of the two wells at Webhannet proved the clearest and purest in their 20 years of existence.

“Members, of course, frequently tap these wells for their everyday needs as well as cooling moments during their golf rounds,” added Lowell.

He continued: “With all we hear about ground water quality, it’s hard to understand the reasoning behind some of the rashly conceived ground water contamination from golf courses. Of course, there is understandable concern for water quality around hazardous waste sites we see on television, where heavy concentrates can seep into the ground.

“Reports of ground water quality around golf courses nationally, where testing has taken place, shows water to be at safe levels. The ditch layer produced by turfgrass restricts penetration of chemicals into the soil.”

Edmund A. Muskie, former Maine governor, senator and secretary of state, long has appreciated Webhannet’s liquid refreshment. His first course-side home was next to the clubhouse. He now lives little more than a marsh shot from the 16th green.

To the charge that Cape Arundel and Webhannet might be among courses wasting water, Lowell simply counters, “The layout has irrigation systems and perhaps no need for such setups. The fairways are green and trim, and hard-watering takes care of tees and greens.”

Watching Bush bring the hose to his mouth in the most heavenly of simple pleasures, many a caddy of the early 1950s must have propelled himself back in time. Water then was largely for drinking.

All knew the best water in the world available to the general public had its source nearby Sebago Lake, and that adjacent Poland Spring catered to the thirsts and palates of an elite world clientele.

Sebago Lake has given ground-grubbing to chlorides and fluorides as population expanded and boat traffic mushroomed. Poland Spring bottled water remains in demand worldwide.

Toymakers, however, surrounding golf course water holes held a special charm.

No longer can the thirsty tap golf course spring sideaways. Kneeling down to quaff cool, sparkling waters or turning on hoses placed strategically by golf course superintendents no longer inspires. Frequently tepid fountains and water stops have replaced the impromptu drink.

There are no cut-and-dried answers, but wrong from 60 years of golf course acquaintance are these observations:

• Water is over-used and abused.

• The rush to flood the courses in the post-World War II period reached solid proportions. The price for that overflow reached high-water marks.”

• Latest golf gimmick in the water connection-frenzy is advocacy of brown fairways, a covert version of playing surfaces in Great Britain.”

• Why not step back in time and go one more giant stride? Turn off the freely running hoses, shut down the automatic sprinkler systems and return the fairways to the near-white look of the 1950s.

“What’s that, you say?” Golf courses that aren’t a lush green?

Believe it or not, you devotees of

Continued on page 17
Mass. to require pesticide applicators to file annual reports

Continued from page 1

State. The Green Industry Council, a trade group that represents many of the state's superintendents, fears the information could be used to pass stringent local regulations, developed by boards with little technical expertise and/or support, it would be very difficult for green industry professionals to comply with any new laws.

Gillespie said Massachusetts has a strong record of developing regulations that address public concern for safety and the environment, and stressed that the green industry has consistently complied with these regulations and supports equitable legislation and regulations to meet these objectives.

Ed McGuire, chairman of the council's Public Policy Committee, noted that with hundreds of inconsistent local regulations, developed by boards with little technical expertise and/or support, it would be very difficult for green industry professionals to comply with any new laws.

Continued from page 16

the game dating only from the 1950s, that unyielding surface commonly called 'hard-pan' was the norm at most New England courses. Players coped and adjusted, expected little different, and enjoyed. So the 'dift' often was just a puff of dust. What were the advantages? Plenty. For openers, the course was playable three weeks earlier in the spring because it had been spared soaking not in Nature's scheme.

By June, the occasional rubber golf shoe had been mothballed. The golfer was on solid earth. Come September, the course was a delight — a fast track inviting low scoring. In late October and early November, leaves and the hunt for stray balls therein slowed playing pace a bit, but there was no slogging through mud as is the current practice. And it was nice to squeeze out another week or two of play, painfully aware that winter's grip was to replace golf's grip.

Unlike the modern playing strategy, which is to boom the ball out of the 'divot' often was just a puff of dust. The secret of his success was 'professional pesticide applications to file annual reports'.