GCSAA shake-up: Schilling, Roberts resign

By PETER BLAIS

LAWRENCE, Kansas — Executive Director John Schilling has resigned and other top Golf Course Superintendent Association of America staff and officials have left in the wake of a GCSAA organizational review. Schilling offered his resignation in late August, to pursue other business interests, he said. Director of Communications Robert Ochs and Director of Operations Diana Green have also left GCSAA. They, Schilling and others have formed St. Andrews Corp., a Lawrence-based firm providing consulting, management and trade services.

Prior to Schilling's resignation, Immediate Past President Bill Roberts resigned from the board of directors as a result of its decision to adopt several major changes suggested in the $24,000 Arthur Andersen Co. organizational review. Schilling denied his decision was influenced by the Andersen study that recommended, among other things, the hiring of a chief financial officer and deputy chief executive officer, moves some saw as undermining his authority.

"The Arthur Andersen study did not play into my decision to leave," the 41-year-old executive said. "Opening my own business has been a dream since I left college. My experience with the association has put me in a position to do just that."

Schilling's resignation is effective January, according to GCSAA President Randy Nichols of Cherokee Town

Acquisitions the aim of AGC spinoff

By PETER BLAIS

American Golf Corp. founder David Price's new company, National Golf Properties Inc., expects to spend $64 million buying new golf courses over the next 18 months. The purchase will be financed through NGC's recent stock offering, which is expected to eventually raise more than $186 million. The company's initial portfolio includes 47 golf courses in 17 states — 23 daily-fee, 13 private and 11 resort operations. All have been and will continue to be managed by AGC.

NGP will focus on courses with strong cash flow potential and the possibility for long-term investment and capital appreciation, according to the company prospectus. Its founders believe many such facilities are available through Aug. 5. Another 244 are scheduled to open by Dec. 31 — the operative word being "scheduled." For various reasons they get strung out and delayed. We have our biggest openings in June, July, August," said Price, who was available for comment - according to the company prospectus.

'93 openings may reach one per day

By MARK LESLIE

Okay. Sit down. A near-record 350 to 365 golf courses are projected to open in the United States by year's end, according to the National Golf Foundation (NGF).

Disproving predictions that openings would tail off this year after two consecutive high-powered, high-production years, developers opened 219 golf courses through Aug. 5. Another 244 are scheduled to open by Dec. 31 — the operative word being "scheduled." "The historical average is 66 to 68 percent of those scheduled to open in a particular year actually do open that year," NGF communications director Bill Burbbaum explained.

"For various reasons they get strung out and delayed. We have our biggest openings in June, July, August," said Price, who was available for comment - according to the company prospectus. "The need to support other business interests," he said. "But he has agreed to speak, give his views and answer questions. I've no doubt it will enlighten our members."

Also on the speaking schedule is Steve Johnson, director of field operations for the federal Environmental Protection Agency. While Johnson will offer insights into the goals and objectives of EPA, James already has a well-defined view of the agency under its new head, Carol Browner.
RISE meeting
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"We're very supportive of her willingness to talk, and she seems to be willing to listen to our viewpoints," said James. "However, she has, on numerous occasions, said it is the job of EPA to reduce the use of pesticides to ensure the safety of the American public. We don't agree with that. We feel the public is already safe and an arbitrary reduction is not in the best interest of the American people or the environment."

Indeed, on the issue of pesticide reduction, the Clinton Administration has presented a united front of sorts. The EPA, the U.S. Drug Administration and the U.S. Department of Agriculture have all taken rigid positions on pesticide use. As James noted, this is the first time any administration has so publicly attacked the pesticide industry as a whole. If you ban spraying on rights of way, it makes sense they might try to ban it on golf courses.

However, as the Clinton Administration settles into the nation's capital, RISE begins its third year with significant victories. Thirty-five states have passed federal pre-emption statutes, which make it impossible for states or municipalities to ban chemicals okayed by the federal EPA.

Yet the effectiveness of RISE campaigns must be measured against its relative immaturity. Trade associations often spend years gathering enough strength to make a difference, but RISE has made an immediate impact.

"I would say that we have matured very rapidly," said James. "Our strength has been the willingness of member companies to get involved at a high level. And most often it has been a great number of people within the same company, which is unusual."

"There was a core group of companies and people who worked very hard to get RISE up and running, but we've had hundreds of people from many more companies who've become deeply involved. Furthermore, no one company has tried to micro-manage the process."

James said RISE now represents about 50 percent of the companies in the chemical industry — a phenomenal achievement in just 24 months. However, there is still work to be done: RISE cannot claim 50 percent of the firms in the vegetation management field, and a large number of distributors in the pest control market are not yet on board, he said.

Down the road, James said RISE will concentrate on more state-oriented issues, including the movement to restrict spraying of herbicides on rights of way. Also on the horizon is a battle over spraying restrictions on school grounds and public places.

"These issues may not hit as close to home with a golf course superintendent as pre-emption," said James, "but they are rigid and adverse to the industry as a whole. If you ban spraying on rights of way, it makes sense they might try to ban it on golf courses."

Dakota provides the blenders and expertise

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Hengel's crew mixed 11,000 yards, or 14,000 tons of material. Dr. Norm Hummel of Cornell University, who authored the new U.S. Golf Association greens specifications, tested the mix 14 times — and the tests were acceptable from beginning to end, Hengel said.

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