GCSAA actively pursues public-access members

By Hal Phillips

AWRENCE, Kan. — To keep pace with changing demographics in the industry, the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America (GCSAA) is poised to more actively include superintendents at public-access golf facilities.

The GCSAA’s newly formed Public Golf Resource Group met in October to discuss ways the association could reach out more effectively to superintendents at daily-fee and municipal golf courses, according to Chief Operating Officer Joe O’Brien.

“We talked about better providing services to our members in the public sector and attracting new members from it,” said O’Brien. “The numbers speak for themselves.”

Two-thirds of the nation’s golf facilities are public-access: daily-fee, municipal and resort. The percentage is climbing higher: From 1990 through 1993, 80 percent of spending thousands of dollars on new equipment is looming at public-access member courses.

Focus on everyday people: The Family Stone

By Peter Bias

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Builder, beware what you're buying

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labs have been left trembling in financial fear. The entire golf industry is taking steps to curb faulty construction. Early and frequent soil testing is key. "It's prudent and the industry has not been doing it, and it is catching up with them," said Steve MacWilliams, vice president of Turf Diagnostics and Design in Olathe, Kan. "It's almost negligent if you don't do quality control. Architects are making out checks with their clients' money. Whether they feel they have the best supplier in the world and they are working with all top-quality companies, they still have to do it. It's not a reflection on anyone in the process as much as that Murphy's Law dictates."

"All the major architects are testing [materials]," said architect and builder Rees Jones.

Perhaps none are testing as meticulously as Bob Cupp, whose staff agronomist, Billy Fuller, sees that every truckload of sand is perc-tested and full soil tests run meticulously as Bob Cupp, whose staff agronomist, Billy Fuller, sees that every truckload of sand is perc-tested and full soil tests run throughout a project.

Obtaining material that meets rigid specifications should not be difficult, especially with the recent growth of specialized soil blending companies.

"We're not talking "art" here," Cupp said. "We're talking high-tech soil blending. And we're just barely approaching the same types of consistency requirements as the AIA [American Institute of Architecture] specifies for structural support."

Inconsistency is usually the fault of the sand supplier, Cupp said. "Normally speaking, it's a loose operation that some sandpit owner delivers. Now, thanks to litigation, the contractors know it had better be right."

That the delivered sand differs from preliminary lab tests, and even from one truckload to the next, can be attributed to nature and to the fact the supplier may be working in a different spot than when he provided the sample to the lab.

"There are a lot of reasons for a change in the sand," said architect Michael Hurdzan of Columbus, Ohio. "Sand changes in the vein. The washing operations may be done differently. The shaker apparatus may wear out or not be as efficient."

"Also, we order 10,000 or 12,000 tons of sand for an 18-hole golf course. As long as a pit is meeting specs for big contractors, a lot of them [suppliers] are not going to worry about us little guys."

Hurdzan also pointed to the addition of organic matter to sand as "multiplying the potential for complications. Organic matter is even more variable — in weight, moisture, carbon-nitrogen ratio, amount of organic matter to ash, even the decomposition state of it," he said. "All of that influences the performance properties... Peat actually decomposes in the mix"
All precautions said lost if top dressing inconsistent with root zone

By MARK LESLIE

"The biggest problem right now with USGA greens is when superintendents don't use the absolute — and I mean absolute — same material in their top dressing process for the years to come," said architect Rees Jones.

"In the course of history," Jones decried the practice of superintendents to use the same sand suppliers they have always used simply because they trust them. "This happens all the time," he said. "Huge mistakes are made a lot. These suppliers don't change their mix from course to course. They're not specifically customizing top dressing for each course, as we have specifically customized it for each course."

Top dressing greens with a blend that does not comply with the root-zone mix "can create a new perch water table that chokes off everything we've done," Jones said.

"Ideally, you top dress with what you build the greens with," agreed Steve MacWilliams, vice president of Turf Diagnostics and Design in Olathe, Kan. "The primary rule is: Don't top dress with a finer material, which would layer out the green in the top two to three inches. You can go in with coarser sand."

The superintendent should go to the trouble of getting the sand and mixing it himself, Jones said, suggesting it is a good idea to purchase a small blending machine.

MacWilliams passed on some tips concerning top dressing materials:

- When top dressing is delivered, bag a portion of it and store it away. It may come in handy if there are turf problems and you want to see if the problem was the top dressing.
- If superintendents are communicating with their associations and a sand company starts delivering bad product, the association can go to the supplier and lay down the law.
- If superintendents make it known they are quality-controlling their top dressing, the supplier knows it must supply good material.

In addition to stressing a compatible top dressing blend, Jones said, "Superintendents have to change their watering practices on USGA greens. They need to be flushed by heavy watering and then not watering, rather than lightly watering all the time. The biggest mistake I see is a superintendent lightly watering them. That water stays on the top. The roots come up to the top. And you start developing a slick thatch that you have to keep aerifying out."

Builder beware!

Continued from previous page

"After the machine is properly calibrated, it should be tested every 1,000 tons. The test would entail basically the organic matter to make sure it is being metered in proper proportions and sand size. If something is off, and that is not unusual (especially the percentage of organic matter), put a hold on that stockpile until a complete physical analysis is run on it." Watkins tests the blend every hour on site.

Other suggested cures for the root-zone material problem:

- Pre-qualify the material before it goes to bid to the superintendent, said Mike Friccer, president of Dakota Peat.
- "Never let a blending company purchase the materials," Watkins said. "It puts a person in a compromising position if they are furnishing the materials."
- Make sure the lab being used is competent in dealing with soils.
- Developers should reserve the right to see all tests and information pertaining to a project, according to Watkins. "They should give them the right to require proof of purchase on the sand and peat moss, and verify it by going directly to the mining company or manufacturer to inspect all documentation."

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