Our pal Paul, direct advice & the old Mark

Just a few things to jot down before we slip into the grey absconds of Rocker's darker recesses, never to be found:

- Before me on my desk sits the latest missive from old friend Paul Harvey, that geriatric lounge cannon with the long, non-sensical tongue. This time he discusses the golf course industry, the U.S. Golf Association (USGA), chemical manufacturers and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) are conspiring to keep poisonous pesticides on the market. The basis of Harvey's two brochures that March 14, is his recent statement to Jerome Blondell: "If people who sell pesticides are safe, they are making a big mistake." That's it — that's essentially the whole argument. Mr. Blondell is described as a spokesperson for the EPA's pesticide office, whatever that is. Harvey then refers to a pair of golf course studies now underway and five completed studies dealing with pesticides in the home. From this he deduces, "Golf clubs and their USGA cannot hide behind the EPA anymore." I imagine folks at the EPA and your average citizen will gibber until they know they're all carrying the same banner, according to Paul... Copies of Harvey's most recent foray into dementia can be obtained by faxing a request to 202-872-3600.

A quick note to all you distributors out there who read our story on page 1 in February's edition ("As distribution shrinks, firms go factory direct"): By acknowledging that many smaller firms are employing direct-marketing techniques, the reporter (in this case, me) was not urging people to go factory-direct, I was simply reporting on a phenomenon that no one was reporting on. I was not giving advice on the subject — something I wouldn't dream of doing, considering my unscandalous lack of experience in the distribution biz — I would urge folks to read this month's letter from Bill Liles (see below). If the consumer perceives there to be a

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Media and environmentalists take shots from colleagues

A h, the Golf Course Show. A time of education. A time to renew friendships. A time to entertain. And, this year, the Golf Course Show offers long-term environmentalists an opportunity for long, hard conversations at their colleagues:
- Case-in-Point One: ABC-TV consumer reporter John Stossel, admitting that "in many ways I've been part of the problem," added: "Here is where we in the press have done such a bad job... We practically run from scare to scare. We say this kills people, that kills people. We have focused on the dramatic in an interesting way — economics. It sells newspapers. It gets people to watch programming..."

- Stossel put pesticide risks into a context you rarely see mainstream reporters do, saying: "Do we ever put it in perspective and rank the risks? No. Buckets kill 50 people a year..."

- Case-in-Point Two: Audubon Society of New York President Ron Dodson, speaking on environmental groups: "Many have become top-heavy, bureaucratic organizations..."

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Letters

Chemicals are not a commodity

To the editor:

Your article on distribution (Page 1, April 1) was very appropriate at this point in time for the industry. Everyone is facing increased marketing cost, regulation, registration and competition. In face of these rising costs, manufacturers, suppliers and distributors must develop long-range plans and strategies to be successful and will survive, and those that don't will disappear.

The comments regarding fertilizer and chemicals as commodities is correct to a point. And that point is, in our particular industry — developing and marketing turf products — we must continue to upgrade and improve our products, services and to avoid becoming commodities, I therefore, would take exception with the conclusion in the article that specialty chemicals are essentially a commodity.

Your statement that "environmental marketing requires specialized product formsulations, packaging, technical information and distribution networks in order to reach our market and differentiates us from row crop agriculture. We have a distributor to end-user distribution system (unlike agriculture, which is distributor dominated/dealer/end-user distribution process) and if this system can continue to successfully meet the manufacturer/retailer needs, direct marketing by manufacturer will not happen."

So, how will those distributors now servicing this industry continue to be successful? By adding value to their services to customers. No big secret, but something few distributors put forth the effort to do. If current distribution system doesn't make change, they will lose the low-price segment that is larger and more efficient.

I'm sure you will receive several letters from the distribution trade, some of them our distributors. Our message will remain the same: Have a sound plan, quality people and sell the value of your products and services!

B. R. Liles, director
Ciba Turf & Ornamental Greensboro, N.C.

And for our next trick: Viewer mail

Barbara B. Beall, who is married to Glen Gails (N.Y.) Country Club superintendent Chris Fietsinghaus, submitted the following Trick Top 10 list, in the spirit of David Letterman. Behold! The Top 10 things she has observed being married to a superintendent:
10) He is the only person in the family who gets unresponsive when we have house guests at the end of his work day.
9) My husband has really strange tan lines.
8) He listens to what I say when he gets home, but listens to every word that Jennie Jones says on The Weather Channel.
7) All his co-workers look like the cast from Caddy Shack.
6) When he wakes up at 3 a.m., it's not to go and see his girlfriend, but to make sure the irrigation system turned on.
5) All the post-it notes pad in our house say "Pro Lawn" on them.
4) My husband has a spot on his shirt and he always says, "I'm going to get this stain out of my lawn." Even after it is washed.
3) "He never listens to what I say, when he is awake, he states, "Ah, the moody phase.""
2) When he is talking in his sleep, or, for that matter, when he is awake, he states, "I always wanted to be a computer engineer.
1) When he helps me vacuum, he always strips our carpet in a checkerboard pattern.

Mark Leslie, managing editor

USE THE MEDIA FOR YOUR PURPOSES

To the editor:

Golf course managers who recognize the power of the press can attribute a great impact on their businesses. The dissemination of positive information about your course and its services is cost-effective, and is read as accurate and objective. It reaches the masses while not perceived as a paid advertisement. Make sure, however, your club is very well prepared to handle the business fostered by writers, reporters and editors.

The advice here is to approach communication via editorial as the "last free enterprise in America." This is precisely why concerted efforts should be made to enhance positive working relations with the print and electronic media.

Billy Casper Golf Management, Inc., for one, prides itself in an open door policy with the media: event invitations, media opportunities, tournaments, special offers and capital improvements at the course are "picked up." Furthermore, editors can fill in or scrounge or budget advertising expenditures. Take note, managers: Get to know and support local editors and producers. They are influential. The community relations, word of mouth, frequency of name reinforcement, and golfer interest in your course are closely correlated. Try to maintain an increased traffic flow and a healthier bottom line.

Rich Katz, director
Billy Casper Golf Management, Inc.
Vienna, Va.