

Sometimes, the story changes in midstream



Hal Phillips,
editor

Reporters will tell you that, sometimes, a news story begins and ends exactly as you might expect. Other times the research and conversations lead you to more interesting subjects, changing the story and the reporter's original line of inquiry.

Such was the case with this month's front-page story on factory direct sales, which started as an analysis of direct marketing in the golf course industry and wound up detailing the slow-but-sure consolidation of distribution channels.

The two phenomena are related, of course. As smaller independent distributorships are gobbled up by larger firms searching for ever more efficiencies, access to the marketplace narrows — especially for smaller manufacturers whose lines might not be lucrative enough to command space on the shelves.

This last point I discovered while researching the subject of direct marketing. The epiphany? All these smaller companies were going factory-direct because they **had** to go factory-direct. They were losing access to distributors, and thus losing access to superintendents.

Of course, many on the floor in the San Francisco will be golf course distributors. I look forward to hearing their strong opinions on the subject.

One name that kept cropping up during my research was Terra International, Inc. This Sioux City, Iowa-based firm has been on a spending spree lately, adding staff (the firm has gone from 27 to 62 sales representatives since 1992) and buying up distributorships: Turf World of Houston, Bi-State Turf of Danville, Ill., Androc Products of Medford, Minn., and Asgrow Florida with its 15 in-state locations.

Two things to keep in mind as we gather in San Francisco:

- First, firms like Terra will become increasingly common as the millennium approaches. Larger firms have growth on the brain and many will go public to fund strategic, market-segmented expansions like Terra's.

- Second, Chuck Champion of Kalo, Inc. was right: Some day superintendents will have the option of buying everything via catalog. The increasing sophistication of mower and irrigation technology will always bind superintendents to their distributors. But that relationship will become less important over time, as superintendents make more and more purchases over the phone.

Hey, that's a great idea! The Course Shopping Network. Where's Barry Diller when you need him? Maybe they can get time on the new Golf Channel...

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Letters

GREENS ROLLING SYSTEMS ARE NOT THE SAME

To the editor:

Golf Course News, over the past couple of years, published several stories on greens rolling techniques [GCN August & October '94]. However, we at Turflite know all superintendents have not been educated in comparing our True Surface Vibratory Greens Rolling System apart from other rollers. Quickly, here's the difference.

True-Surface units are installed on triplex mowers in place of the cutting units and they produce high-frequency, minimal weight vibrations. The following are a few key advantages of vibration:

- Low roller weight: We use a 55-pound roller that will not strain the frame or lift cylinders on the greensmower. Vibration will firm and true the surface better than physical weight.

- Speed: You can roll a green with units faster than it can be mowed with a triplex mower. No

operator training required.

- Controllable results: Vibration allows you to vary the results of the operation to match the requirements. Rolling speed can be controlled either with the hydrostatic foot pedal or with variable-speed kits. This feature allows you to control the green speed, and true the surface following aerification, spiking, topdressing or overseeding.

- Grow in: Vibration allows

new greens to be in playing condition 30 days earlier. Walk mowers were not used and greens were firm and smooth enough to use triplex mowers.

- Topdressing: Vibration following dragging or brushing virtually eliminates sand from the turf canopy. The sand falls through just before the roller gets to it, thus minimizing bruising.

Greens rolling, a practice re-introduced in recent years pri-

marily as a speed enhancing device, has now become an integral tool for overall greens management.

The development of the True-Surface Greens Rolling System is the next step. It is the direct result of the imagination, innovation and effort typical of golf course superintendents.

Steve Wilson, sales manager
Turflite, Inc.
St. Charles, Mo.

COMMERCIAL PUMP SETS RECORD STRAIGHT

To the editor:

I am writing to you in regards to your article in the October issue titled, "Irrigation design, pump house technology continue to meet, or exceed, industry standards." In the listing you provided of pump station manufacturers, Commercial Pump was not included. We feel this was a major oversight and would like to be included in any upcoming articles relating to our industry.

Commercial Pump has been manufacturing pre-fabricated pumping stations, automated control packages and control components for turf irrigation systems for over 13 years and

has over 1,000 customers.

Thank you for allowing us to introduce ourselves. We look forward to the prospect of contributing to your next golf course irrigation article.

Whittnae Schultz
Marketing Administrator
Commercial Pump Services, Inc.
Swanton, Ohio

Ed. We regret the error. The staff here at Golf Course News was under the impression that *Commercial Pump Service, Inc.* had continued its strategic marketing alliance with *Hartland, Wis.-based Watertronics, Inc.*, and so listed only the latter. According to Schultz, this agreement has since expired.

Golf and its opponents are finally listening; to each other

Could January's meeting of the environmental and golf communities at Pebble Beach signify a new leaf? Can the association (National Wildlife Federation) whose former President Jay Hair once declared, "This big, booming business, agriculture, is also killing the world; I mean that literally" have come to its senses? Indeed, it co-organized the conference.

Can the organization (Sierra Club) which once accused the Farm Bureau and other groups of conducting a "massive and brutally destructive anti-environmental onslaught" have recognized the fallacies of its past? Indeed, it was represented at the meeting.

Can the group (Friends of the Earth) whose founder, David Brower, once said: "Loggers losing their jobs because of spotted owl legislation is, in my eyes, no different than people being out of work after the furnaces of Dachau shut down" actually speak coherently less than three years after that Sept. 23, 1992, statement? Indeed, the Friends' current president, Brent Blackwelder, is an intelligent guy who even knows something about golf — he reportedly attended college on a golf scholarship.

Hey, anything can happen when reconciliation — no, make that a willingness to listen — is in the air.

"In many ways they ought to be allies," said Paul Parker of the Center for Resource Management of Salt Lake City, conference co-organizer. "One thing that may surprise people is the fact that a lot of environmental people are golfers and a lot of golfers are environmentalists. There is a common bond there."

The fact that a lot of golfers are environmentalists would surprise exactly no one in the golf industry. But the fact it might surprise environmentalists illustrates, in part, the great divide that has existed between the two groups.

Boy, is there a lot of garbage (an appropriate term) at issue between them. But unless you're dealing with the devil, if you want to cohabitate, it's best you at least meet. So, meet they have. Now we shall watch and decipher the fallout from the Pebble Beach session (see story, page 4).

The sensible people in both communities would harbor the same hopes as Ron Dodson, president of the progressive New York Audubon Society, which has worked cooperatively with the golf industry for several years now.



Mark Leslie,
managing editor

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Wanted: Tolerance by golf industry, sanity by environmentalist groups

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Dodson's expectation going into the conference was for "a cordial meeting. People will gingerly feel each other out. At similar meetings in the past, we usually find out there is a great misunderstanding on both sides. The environmental groups totally misunderstand golf course management and what goes on at golf courses, but they're open to hearing about it from a well-spoken individual. On the other hand, golf and development people find out that people who work for environmental organizations aren't all a bunch of flag-waving kooks, either.

"There is some middle ground. And, hopefully, the most important part of the meeting will be outside the meeting hall... forging personal relationships."

So, let's pray for a turn toward tolerance in the golf industry and toward sanity among the environmental activists in the midst of what has historically been an ever-simmering pot.

Compared to the meeting on wildlife research held in Washington, D.C., by the U.S. Golf Association Green Section with environmental groups, the Pebble Beach enclave included organizations that in the past were anti-everything, that have made their financial mark by "saving the world from gloom and doom," Dodson said.

But many of them are facing tremendous financial problems right now. Sierra Club has greatly retooled its national environmental agenda, has laid off a number of people and is cutting back on areas in which it has been involved. The National Audubon Society has laid off half its staff and has forced its executive director to step down.

The only major group not losing money and members is the Nature Conservancy.

In their introspection, perhaps these environmental groups will take a strong look at real science, an even stronger look at real life, and come to the conclusion that golf courses can be one of the very best friends for the land and the wildlife these groups claim to care for so much.

And if everybody plays their cards right, perhaps — just perhaps — the golf and environmental communities will finally tool their talents toward good and just actions and projects.

Pebble Beach, located on California's environmentally prominent Monterey Peninsula, was a perfect place to

hold the conference. Vice President of Grounds Ted Horton is doing a magnificent, wide-ranging job on a huge tract of land and several golf courses, with programs ranging from composting to effluent use to oceanfront and cliffside stabilization to recycling... And if you're there at the right time of year you can stand just off the 7th tee, look down the cliff and watch

harbor seal pups being born or sunning themselves on the rocks — undeterred by the nearby golfers.

People who consider themselves "true" environmentalists have been at odds with government environmentalists in the state of Washington. The "true" environmentalists claim the mountain goats, which they say are not native to a state park there, are destroying a plant which is native. They say the goats were imported in the 1920s for hunters.

A National Geographic from the 1800s tells of the many mountain goats in the park, but these "true" environmentalists refute that statement. They are calling for the government to kill the mountain goats — since relocating them has proven dangerous.

OK. My point is: We have already established the thinking that animals are more important than men. See the snail darter, the spotted owl, any number of cases.

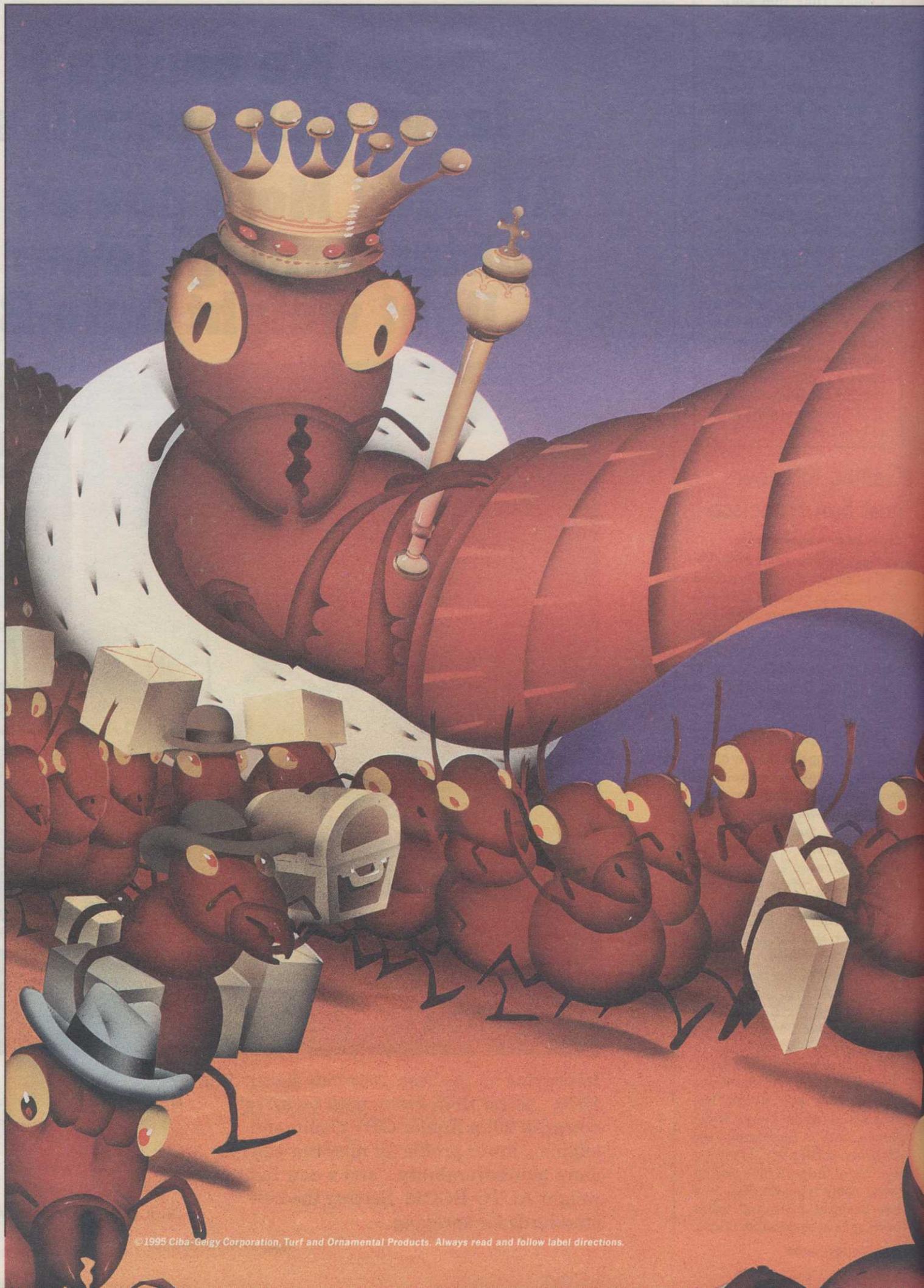
Now, they are making the statement that a plant is more important than an animal.

What's next? The amoeba is more important than the plant?

Switching gears: Vast changes in agronomics over recent years have been driven by increasing numbers of golfers and golf cars, says *Golf Course News'* Golf Course Builder of the Year Paul Clute (see story page 71).

"What worked many years ago on clubs that had 18,000 or 22,000 rounds a year — the drainage and soil structures — won't work today," Clute said.

You could still build those
Continued on the next page



\$500M Chinese-style theme park in would include golf

Golf at a Chinese theme park?

A property owner in Blooming Grove, N.Y., is talking with the Beijing-based China State Construction Corp. about a half-billion dollar Chinese theme park project that would include expanding the existing nine-hole Lake Anne Country Club to 18 holes as part of the park.

The plan for what has been described as a Chinese-style Disneyland has had a chilly reception from local officials. Developers hope to begin construction in 1996 with completion set for 1999. Reportedly, "many major Chinese companies" as well as financiers from Asia and America are interested.

Meanwhile, on Long Island, the new operator of

a 210-acre estate in Sands Point is considering expanding an existing nine-hole golf course to an 18-hole layout.

The former home of the Guggenheim family will open in 1995 as The Village Club of Sands Point. Kemper Sports management will operate the course and recreation center for the owner. In addition to the Robert Trent Jones Sr.-designed layout, the facility includes a driving range, mansion, tennis courts, beach, hiking and bicycle trails.

The village bought the facility from IBM in November 1994. IBM had owned the property since 1953 and used it as a personnel development center.

Leslie on golf & the environment

Continued from previous page

greens and fairways that way today if you had caddies rather than carts, and if your play was at 18,000 to 20,000 rounds. And the superintendent could maintain the grass at a premium level. But start putting 45,000 rounds and carts, that generates the need for change.

"So now we've moved into more porous greens that drain better, and soil blends that don't compact as readily. The

reason is to get the optimum growing medium that will allow the grass to survive and repair itself from the traffic."

Research and advances in agronomics are in response to two things, Clute said — increased number of players and "clearly, over the last 20-some years, the greater expectations by the [television-watching] golfer.

"The only way I see that changing," he added, "is for more of the televised events to show some other, less-than-lush conditions."

•••

Across-the-Big-Pond Influence has reversed and is now heading east to the United Kingdom, Clute lamented.

"We would hope that we could educate the American golfer to a more natural condition, where even the fairways tend to change color and brown," he said. "But it's as if our manicured look is giving their way.

"It still may reverse, with more awareness of the environment and our need to be stewards of the environment in general.

"I'd like to see that happen, certainly. Meanwhile, the manufacturers of golf supplies and irrigation continue to improve efficiency, so courses do use less water and still look good, and pesticide manufacturers continue to make their products better and more friendly to the environment."

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In the November-December 1994 issue of *Audubon* magazine, Fen Montaigne interviewed Mikhail Gorbachev about Green Cross International, his group organized in 1993 to deal with environmental issues in a "nonconfrontational style."

Gorbachev said: "[Our] main idea is the search for a path toward a new civilization. And a new civilization would mean, above all, solving the problems that exist between man and the rest of nature. If these problems are not solved, the rest is nonsense."

•••

A personal note: Thanks to Joe Pantaleo of Fort Lauderdale Country Club, Rick Bright of Country Club of Coral Springs and Artie Lancour — my playing partners as we won second place in the Southern Florida GCSA's scramble in November. You guys are all winners and deserve a Red Badge of Courage. Thanks, also, to President Bob Klitz of Deer Creek Golf Club, Mark Richard of Greynolds Golf Course and host super Tony Ursolo of Golf Club of Plantation for the invitation to speak and for your Florida hospitality.

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