Supers, mechanics none too pleased with mandated RFG

BY J. BARRY MOTHES

officially, the acronym RFG stands for reformulated gasoline. But some golf course mechanics and greens crews around the country might have their own spic...
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Ocean Course Purchase Agreements or otherwise, directly or indirectly, with any other person, entity or qualified organization participating in the auction, TOC agrees to grant ASNY $150,000 to enable ASNY to complete the environmental study...

The agreement, which included another $100,000 to ASNY at the end of its study, was signed by ASNY President Ron Dodson and TOC Vice President Daniel M. McCormack on Sept. 9, 1995.

Of course, that promise of $250,000 bit the dust with the other commitments. But ASNY personnel don’t wish to work with people who have shunned, and some would say “used” them. (The first bid had to include an environmental group and VIT courted ASNY to join in the process.)

Ah, commitment. They say lack of it is a reason for the high divorce rate nowadays. Who would have thought inhabitants of Golf Nation would witness it in their own family?

Meanwhile, some may have been shocked at the seeming complicity of the government in this matter. The Resolution Trust Corp., which was such a stickler for involving environmental organizations in the original auction of the Ocean Course, apparently went into an environmental slumber, if they disagreed with the sale of that property.

People in the golf industry, especially in recent years, have promoted awareness that they are the true environmentalists — the ones enhancing wildlife habitat着手.

One entity alone can now threaten all that goodwill. Who is it if the RTC gets another black eye in this bankruptcy mess which was arguably caused by the government itself? The golf community should have pressure to own one of its own to stand on the environmental high ground. But, one person falls off that high ground and so do compatriots from Honolulu to Halifax.

Like maintaining golf courses, designing them can be a stress on a family. It involves long days and sometimes long seasons for superintendents, long days and extensive travel for architects. Designer Barry Serafin, this month’s Q&A subject (see page 27), puts his career and family in this perspective.

“Right now, all my projects are in central Ohio [where he lives]. I have a 6, a 3- and a 1-year-old and I like to be home as much as possible. You have to keep your priorities straight. It’s so easy to get so involved it takes over your life. Once that happens, it gets in front of your God, in front of your family and things like that. Once your priorities get out of whack, so does your life.”

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Referring to his association’s request for proposals on the construction of putting greens (see story page 13), U.S. Golf Association Director of Research Dr. Mike Kight has said that architects and soil labs ought to back this. It should not be left solely in the hands of the USGA Research and superintendents, he argues.

“Who’s involved in new golf course construction?” he asked. “In the world, research is done by the architects, not the maintenance men. In effect, [the industry] is doing the same as asking the plant manager (caterer) to design a good furnance, etc. The USGA gets dragged into this because of our [green-spec] guidelines.”

Kenna added: “There’s very little research into the most important factor: Ensuring you have a good property to work with and that it’s built well.”

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There’s no accounting for taste differences in turfgrasses, says Turf Merchants Inc. Vice President Steve Tubbs. “In Las Vegas, a desert, they are managing a New Jersey perennial ryegrass year-round. That’s what they want. In Palm Springs, a desert, it’s the opposite. They love Bermudagrass and want perennial ryes just to overseed and then to die out. And those two spots are only 200 miles apart.”

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Texas A&M University’s Dr. Mill Engelke, a noted plant breeder, commenting on breeding turfgrasses: “It sounds like wedding preparations. You hear phrases like ‘The prospects are excellent.’ Then there is this potential’ and ‘Now we have to go through generations of breeding in characteristics.”

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affected and how much small equipment there is out there used by contractors and landscapers. All this stuff, especially on a golf course, is specialized and high-dollar equipment.

“I think there’s going to be a lot more fallout as the new gas goes on. If there are any problems with this in the long run, it could damage our fleet and you could be talking about a lot of money.”

With golf course work crews everywhere facing the brunt of the summer heat, mechanics also note engines using the new RFG seem to have problems starting and when temperatures hit the mid-80s and higher. On top of all this, prices for the new gas have been creeping up steadily the past six months.

“You’re paying a little more at the pump and you’re paying for nothing,” said David Pellerin, head mechanic for six years at Portland (Maine) CC. Pellerin said he recently discovered a melted head gasket for the first time in a National triplex bank mower and has had to make constant adjustments to mowers and RFG carts.

“I believe the gas is here, so we’re going to have to make the best of it. We’ll probably start by going to a higher octane.”

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