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More and more designers trade fees for ownership slice
By Peter Blais

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Environmental General Session

Continued from page 1

Miller has built a reputation for generating exciting, heated discussions on issues ranging from AIDS and health care to the ethical implications of finding a $20 bill on the sidewalk. On Feb. 8, he'll turn his Socratic skills to the golf course industry and the environment at the GCSAA's Environmental General Session. The silver-haired professor will steer, prod and provoke a panel of golf course superintendents, turfgrass specialists, horticulture professors and leaders of several environmental groups to explore the relationship between golf course maintenance and development and the environment.

Miller's presence at this year's Environmental General Session should be one of the highlights of the GCSAA's annual conference and show. "I've seen him fill two and a half hours without anyone in the audience moving," said Cynthia Kelly, a GCSAA liaison speaking for Dave Searis, a certified superintendent from Blue Hills Country Club in Kandas City. Mo. Searis chairs the GCSAA's Government Relations Committee which developed this year's program. "He won't let one person monopolize a discussion."

This year's Environmental General Session was moved to an evening slot, from 5:30 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. The idea was to give the scheduled 90-minute session a higher profile and a larger potential audience. It seems to have worked. More than 2,000 people have already signed up to attend the panel session on Feb. 8, at the Orange County Convention Center, according to the GCSAA.

Rounding out Toro's Reelmaster® family are, from left, the lightweight but powerful 5300-D and 5100-D, plus the 6500-D, another proven performer.

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Miller will use what is known as the Socratic method to get the diverse panel talking, which means the discussion should be spontaneous, unrehearsed and emotional. He will generate a scenario or scenarios — a developer wants to build a new 18-hole golf course on land that includes sensitive wetlands, for example — and let the panelists go at it.

"We're looking for things that are interesting and controversial," said Searis of the GCSAA. "We don't want to just have our members preaching things that people want to hear. We want to hear the other sides. We want to educate superintendents about things they are not learning. The whole idea is that superintendents are able to take back information from these conferences and apply it to real-life situations on their own golf courses."

Miller will be working with a panel that features a healthy cross-section of interests and opinions about golf courses and the environment. Veteran, certified superintendents like Tim Kelly, a GCSAA liaison speaker at Collier's Reserve in Naples, Fla., and Peter Leuzinger of The Ivanhoe Club in Mundelin, Ill., will share a stage with Mark Massara of the Sierra Club, horticulture professor Frank Rossi of the University of Wisconsin-Madison, a representative of a chemical company, Curt Spaulding of the Rhode Island-based Save the Bay organization, and Todd Miller of the North Carolina Coastal Federation.

Is there hope for better understanding and more agreement between the golf course industry and environmental groups? In a way that will satisfy the interests of both?

"I think the golf and environmental process is making some constructive inroads," said Spaulding of Save the Bay. "So I think the dialogue, so far, has been instructive. Do I think there's been a significant change in the field, so that golf course developers and clubs have changed practices based on this dialogue and education? No, I don't think we've accomplished that yet."

Rossi has been outspoken about pesticide use in the turf industry. He's currently working with fellow panelist Pam Porter of the Wisconsin Environmental Decade on a grant program to eliminate lawn care pesticide use in the Great Lakes Basin. Rossi said he thinks some superintendents have become more sensitive to the use and handling of pesticides in the past several years. But he said there is still much more that can be done on issues like chemical pesticide mixing, loading, re-entry and exposure.

"I don't think the golf course industry or superintendents have communicated their message very well," Rossi said. "Golfers know very little about a golf course's affect on the environment.

"And when we had a summer like the one we just had in the midwest with no rain and extended heat, everything goes out the window with these guys [superintendents]."

Rossi said he wishes a golfer, maybe even a professional tour golfer, were on the panel also.

"I don't know exactly where Arthur Miller is going to take this," said Rossi. "He's a very complex guy and I'm sure he's going to challenge all of us. My hope is that he's going to do his homework."