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WALKING THE TALK AT WIDOW'S WALK GC
Superintendent Jeff Carlson pushes all the environmental hot buttons — and wins

By MARK LESLIE
SCITUATE, Mass. — The Shakespearean student in him might look at this job as A Midsummer Night's Dream. The analyst in him might view it as an opportunity to fill a spreadsheet with figures. But the superintendent in Jeff Carlson views his position at Widow's Walk Golf Course here as "professionally satisfying," bringing "very high satisfaction as a golf course and grow-in superintendent and very, very high satisfaction when you add its restoration aspect."

The "restoration" to which Carlson refers is creating a living golf course from a "dead" piece of ground: a former gravel pit and dump site littered with cement blocks, old refrigerators and other assorted ugliness. The course, municipally owned Widow's Walk, has gained more public attention than almost any in the country because it will serve as a working laboratory to discover the impact of a golf course on wetlands, wildlife and habitat.

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A tale of bales of barley straw and algae

By MARK LESLIE

TORONTO — News flash: Folk remedy strikes at the heart of the pond algae problem.

While science and technology are striving to remove algae from ponds, some superintendents are accomplishing the task with a simple bale of barley straw.

"Generally speaking, I'd say it works," said Gordon Witteveen, director of golf maintenance for the Board of Trade's five golf courses here.

Witteveen, who has two or three bales of barley straw in each of his half-dozen ponds, said, "We've implemented it and had pretty darn good success."

"Two bales per acre of pond is sufficient, he said. He also suggested wrapping the bale with chicken wire or fishing net to prevent its falling apart when it decomposes. The bale floats, anchored by a string tied to a cement block.

"In Canada we can't use any dye or chemicals for aquatic weed control in non-self-contained ponds. If the pond is self-contained, you can use chemicals, but you must get a permit for every application," Witteveen said. "Mechanical harvesters, or long rakes can take algae out. Fountains work well, too. This [barley straw] is another tool."

But why would barley straw rid a pond of algae?

"This is my theory," said Dr. Eric Nelson of Cornell University, who has seen this method work. "It ties up nitrogen during decomposition of the barley straw. And since it's the nitrogen in the water that promotes algal blooms, they stop.

"I have not seen any research to prove this. But it makes sense. When you mulch plants with wood chips sometimes those chips pull nitrogen right out of the plant."

One difficulty could be in finding pure barley straw to begin with. But the farmers Witteveen works with have a large percentage of barley in their fields, he said.

Meanwhile, using the bales adds a novelty to the course, right? "Everybody is talking about it on the golf course," Witteveen said. "They're asking, 'What are these bales of hay?'"