

Aiming for a different sort of relevance



Hal Phillips, editor

The real fear in writing a farewell column is pure ego: You're flat out terrified that people will immediately forget about you, perhaps before they even finish the column. This is the anxiety my keyboard and I carry with us this month. This is my last column as editor of *Golf Course News* and, I'll admit it, I'm desperate to hold your attention all the way through.

Unfortunately, I've nothing terribly sexy to dangle before you, no revelations hidden in the final paragraph, no scandals to disclose... Except for that pending corporate merger I've known about for weeks. But that was "off the record," and why share a stock tip that could prove so lucrative?... I suppose I could divulge the names of those superintendents who stockpiled now-banned mercury-based pesticides a few years back. But that's not even illegal... Come to think of it, there is that swing tip Tiger shared with me on the beach in Cancun, but who would believe me?

There are a few things I should get off my chest, while I still have the forum. To keep it interesting for you, I'll try to be as provocative as the bounds of good taste will allow:

- Discussions of slow play bore me to distraction. Has anyone admitted to slow play, ever? It's always the foursome ahead, or the foursome ahead of them, blah blah blah... Until golfers stop taking themselves so seriously, the situation will never improve.
- On a related note, how many times have you heard guys bitch about "that woman" in the foursome ahead. Or about the inappropriate clothing "those kids" are wearing. Aren't these the demographic groups golf has targeted as vital to its growth, the groups we must attract if the industry is to expand? Golf must eventually reconcile its interest in growth with its reverence for tradition. Do we want golf to grow, or would we rather everyone wore a collared shirt?
- For a state with so many golf courses, Florida has precious few good ones.
- All the self-appointed purists out there routinely take pot shots at golf cars, the profits from which have made possible

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Letters

WHEN IT COMES TO MAINTENANCE, ISN'T LESS MORE?

To the Editor:

In response to your editorial in the April 1997 issue concerning the new A&G varieties and Dr. Beard's comments, the point I find most disturbing is that in this day and age of trying to introduce products to the marketplace that require less input for maintenance, the new Tee to Green A and G varieties are looked upon as being acceptable, even though they would require a superintendent to provide additional maintenance in the way of extremely low mowing, added aerification, verticutting, and top-dressing to provide an acceptable surface. This would be equivalent to one promoting a new car that performs well but requires the owner to change the oil every 500 miles.

There are other varieties on the market that are significant improvements over Penncross that provide every bit as much as an advancement in improved putting green turf without excessive maintenance. One variety that easily meets this criteria

is L-93. L-93 is not a niche grass, it doesn't need excessive maintenance like the A's and G's, and it has shown to provide exceptional turf performance.

L-93 is the number one variety in the NTEP trials for 1995 and 1996 and has produced exceptional disease resistance. Your editorial was based on comments made by Dr. Beard as presented at the Canadian Turf Conference in March in Montreal. As a man of science, why would Dr. Beard omit mentioning the No. 1-rated NTEP variety? Why would he not mention an improved variety with impressive qualities?

Dr. Richard Hurley,
Executive Vice President,
Lofts Seed

DAKOTAN FIRM SURVIVES TO TELL ITS TALE

Ed. — Severe spring flooding was merely the latest meteorological hardship endured by residents of the Red River Valley, where a tough winter touched off a chain of destruction. While the golf industry does not boast a great many firms in this region, higher

The game's greatest resource

TORONTO, Ontario — What would Gene Sarazen tell Donald Ross if the venerable elder golfer were to meet the venerable deceased golf course designer?

"Your traps are too far away from your greens."

That tidbit came from Mr. Sarazen's grandson Jeff, who stood in for him in accepting the 1997 Donald Ross Award from the American Society of Golf Course Architects here.

It was a brief acceptance but a fitting one from one of the game's grand classics — people, that is, not courses. Gene Sarazen is now 95 years old, and for those many decades he has exemplified what is good about the game.

Those at the ASGCA's Donald Ross banquet were sorry he could not attend. And it gave stock to pause and reflect on who we have in this industry, how long we will have them, and who stands in the wings to take their place as golf's next generation of "venerable old men."

It is good news. Think about it: This sport/game/hobby is blessed beyond all others, I believe, in its number of men and women of character. A list would more than fill this page, single-spaced and tightly wound. There are seminal humanitarians, people of integrity, and many with brilliance and skill beyond hitting golf balls. Honoring them with awards is wonderful. And yet, not enough awards exist to honor them all.

Thank you, Mr. Sarazen, for the generation you have stood tall among your peers, and in society in general.

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Dr. Noel Jackson of the University of Rhode Island is a favorite speaker among superintendents. An entertaining Scotsman. Three quips from his recent speech in Maine:

- A micron equals 1/1000th of a millimeter, or "about half the height you guys are mowing at."
- "Fusarium patch disease is big in England 12 months of the year. Why? Because every week over there you get three days of rain and four of wet weather."
- The first adjustable bedknife? Check out the upper gums in the mouth of one of your neighbor's sheep.

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Talking about the gene gun and molecular genetics, former New Mexico State University Prof. Arden Baltensperger at Seeds West, Inc. said: "One of the ladies who works here crossed sunflower and bean."

What did she call it?... A sunbean.



Mark Leslie, managing editor

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(MORE LETTERS ON FACING PAGE)

ground allowed Dakota Peat & Equipment to pull through:

To the Editor:

A series of natural disasters struck the Red River Valley of the North region during the winter and spring of 1997. This region borders parts of North Dakota, South Dakota and Minnesota. Eight blizzards hit the region during the season, including an ice storm and blizzard in early April that knocked out electrical power to more than 150,000 people in the area.

The record snows from these storms resulted in the flood of the millennium on the Red River. Record flood crests were reported all along the Red River Valley. The flood burst through dikes in Grand Forks, N.D., and East Grand Forks, Minn., on April 18 and 19.

By the end of the weekend, more than 50,000 people had been evacuated, most of the business community had been shut down, and some of those businesses were destroyed. The river crested at 54.11 feet in Grand Forks, more than 5.3 feet higher than the previous record crest in 1979.

Dakota Peat and Equipment of Grand Forks was one of the more fortunate businesses in the area. The company did suffer some damage to three buildings in the region during this series of disasters. Many employees were displaced by the flood waters and the mandatory evacuations. These employees were given time off to take care of personal needs and make suitable alternative living arrangements.

But business activity never stopped at Dakota Peat and Equipment. The company's location on the edge of the city kept the main offices and plants high and dry from flood waters. Shipments of Dakota Peat and Dakota Equipment continued to go out during the height of the disaster.

As a matter of fact, peat shipments for the rebuilding of Lambeau Field, home of the World Champion Green Bay Packers, were sent out the week of April 21. By Thursday, April 24, Dakota Peat and Equipment was back operating on a regular basis.

Mark Landa
Dakota Peat & Equipment
Grand Forks, N.D.

Phillips comment

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golf's fantastic course growth in the 1990s. Indeed, many of the spectacular courses built in the past 20 years — Princeville on Kauai or Sugarloaf here in Maine, for example — simply are not walkable and would never have been built if it weren't for golf cars.

- Of course, carts made

residential golf possible, too. When traveling from green to tee, there's nothing like a five-minute drive through the time-shares. Ugh.

- From a design standpoint, I believe holes that require blind shots are perfectly sound — if they're located at a private club. At a resort course, where someone is likely to play only once, blind shots are unfair. It's a question of repeat play.

- When I took this job, I never dreamed I would know so much about grass.

- Or compost.

- I'd like to thank Arnold Palmer for backing me up during the Masters, when he suggested (on a USA Network telecast) that Augusta go back to Bermuda on the greens. In a column I wrote for the GolfWeb late last year, I said the same thing: Those greens

were not designed for modern bents. Indeed, with modern bentgrasses in place, the greens at many older courses are pitched so steeply and contoured so flamboyantly as to be unfair and at odds with the architect's original intent.

- Here's a corollary: While modern turf grasses are undoubtedly healthier and easier to maintain, their ability to be cut at such low heights

has made modern greens, by necessity, flatter and more boring to putt on.

- The Golf Course Superintendents Association of America must decide, at some point, whether it represents the superintendent's profession or merely its members. Until the folks in Lawrence sort this out, their power and credibility in golf will suffer. If they take the broader view, their leadership position and (dare I say it?) their coffers will only be enhanced.

At this point in the farewell column the editor is obligated to tell readers why he's leaving and where he's going, provided he has a place to go. To the delight and relief of my wife and young son, I do have a place to go.

I'm starting my own media relations company, On In Two Communications. As the name suggests, On In Two will specialize in golf, formulating and executing media campaigns for firms interested in promoting themselves nationwide. That's a fancy way of saying: Helping companies get good press. Here's hoping my knowledge of the golf business and my experience with the media will prove useful to companies seeking to raise their industry profiles.

Well, I've bared my soul. I've tried to hold your interest with my "compelling" industry views. And I've made known my future plans. It's time to sum up:

Five years have passed since I arrived here at *Golf Course News*. In that time, the golf industry has flourished and so has our publication. Courses have opened in record numbers, allowing *GCN* to grow and expand the way a good business journal should grow and expand when an industry is strong.

This vigor, which is global, has allowed *Golf Course News* to launch an Asia-Pacific edition, an international edition, a national conference & trade show, a development newsletter and a web site. All this has happened on my watch; I'm proud of the job our staff has done. I feel fortunate to have been given the opportunity. And I'm grateful for having not screwed it up.

I will miss the staff here — Publisher Charles von Brecht, Managing Editor Mark Leslie and Associate Editor Peter Blais. I'm confident the quality of this publication will not suffer after my departure.

However, like many who come to this industry, I've come to enjoy golf too much to leave it. In that sense I'm lucky. I don't have to say "good-bye," just "see you later."

GOLF COURSE NEWS



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