VGM Golf aims new program at superintendents

Scotts Co. latest to get on board
By Michael Levans

WATERLOO, Iowa — What started out as a buying group for pro shop managers has moved its way into the maintenance shed.

VGM Golf Inc., part of an alliance called VGM Group, has developed a Superintendents Division that the organization said will save courses money on everything from fertilizer to hole cutters while keeping — in most cases — existing distributor relationships in place.

"As our membership of pro shop managers grew, and our members asked for more and more services, it was a natural for us to add superintendents," said Mike Sawyer, VGM Golf's national sales manager.

It's VGM's goal to roll its more than 1,500 members — mostly pro shops — into the Superintendents Division.

Here's how it works: VGM Golf never touches the product. Instead, it negotiates a sales program with manufacturers based on volume and passes the savings on to its member courses — the more member courses the better the deal. In turn, VGM negotiates lower minimums, extended dating, cash rebates, freight discounts and related member premiums.

The VGM member contacts its sales representative or distributor, place an order, give a VGM number and the member is locked into the negotiated price.

"We don't resell, so we keep the sales rep involved," said Sawyer. "Many times distributors hear the term 'buying group' and think they're out of the picture. That's not the way we work. We try, whenever possible, to keep the distributor in the picture." One-time fees to join the superintendents group are $360 for a 9-hole facility and $480 for an 18-hole facility. Savings vary from product to product.

"I assume we might have a price increase," said Sawyer. "Because, just like anything else, the more our members save the more our service is worth. We do, however, grandfather our current facilities. If you're in at $480 now you'll be in at that price 10 years from now."

At press time, VGM had firm on up...Continued on page 62

Single-ri dele golf car market heats up
By Michael Levans

EXETER, Pa. — Pride Golf, a new division of scooter and lift chair manufacturer Pride Healthcare, has entered the single-ri dele golf-car market with a bang.

It was recently announced that Pride Golf's car, the second single-ri dele to enter the golf market from the home medical equipment industry, will be the vehicle of choice for disabled golfer Casey Martin, should he earn a berth in this year's U.S. Open at The Olympic Club in San Francisco.

Pride was chosen following a recent testing session held by The United States Golf Association (USGA) in Denver. "They [USGA] were looking for a cart for Casey and if yours met certain specifications they invited you to send a cart out for testing," said Pride spokesperson Craig Otto.

"We sent one out, they put it through the pace and it turned out that it was the most suitable cart for him. It's a great way to get started," Otto added.

Pride will soon be entering the market with two models. No details were available at press time.

NEW PRODUCT OF THE MONTH: REDEXIM CHARTERHOUSE'S TIDY TURF

Kingston, Pa. — Redexim Charterhouse has introduced a product that allows turf professionals to combine the tasks of dethatching, sweeping and fair mowing into one machine. The Twit Tidy features a unique floating head that can be easily adapted to one of the machine's three key functions. First, the machine is a dethatcher that removes thatch and opens up the surface to revitalize turf. A change of attachments allows the Turf Tidy to function as a powerful sweeper, vacuuming up clippings, cores and other debris. The flail kit attachments turn it into a flail mower that cuts long grass down to a manageable length. For more information, contact 800-597-6664.

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Textron/Ransomes: The dust settles, new structure emerges
By Trevor Ledger

Ipswich, Suffolk, England — Now that the dust has settled on Textron Inc.'s takeover of Ransomes PLC, a clear picture of the group's strategy and structure is emerging.

The new company is called Textron Turf Care and Specialty Products and is headed up by the former president of Ransomes, Peter Wilson. As president of the new worldwide organization, Wilson is based in the company headquarters here in Ipswich. The American arm of Textron Turf Care and Specialty Products is based in Racine, Wisconsin, USA, with Jacobsen's Phil Tralies as president. Tralies will report to Wilson.

Peter Wilson is naturally excited with the developments at what is now a very well placed market competitor. "It creates a very strong company from both a financial and technical viewpoint," said Wilson. "It gives us a wonder-ful range of products and we obviously have a leading range of brands."

Does this mean that the company will need to rationalize production due to product overlaps? Wilson doesn't think so.

"We obviously do have products which overlap at the moment, but we've made a commitment that we have the right resources to ensure that where we have leading brands, be they Ransomes, Jacobsen or whatever, we will continue to ensure that we retain market leadership."

"As we continue to develop new products we will obviously be looking for commonality across the different brands but also to differentiate between them in different ways. The very fact that the new company is lumped together via its name and the common business of fine turf care suggests...Continued on page 64
Plant Health Care, Griffin Industries form strategic alliance

PITTSBURGH—Plant Health Care Inc. (PHC), a microbial biotechnology company, has formed a strategic working alliance with Griffin Industries, Inc., of Cold Spring, Ky., makers of Nature Safe Nutrient. Under the alliance, the companies will cooperate on the research and development of unique microbial biofungicides and biofertilizers designed specifically for use in the commercial turf and horticulture markets.

The companies plan to combine the beneficial bacteria, mycorrhizal fungi and biocontrol technologies developed by PHC, with the animal protein meal technology produced by Griffin to make the first multi-purpose biofungicides on the market.

According to the companies, the first product produced under the alliance is in university and field trials and is expected to be available later this year.

"Scientists have understood for years that strains of certain soil microorganisms, such as Bacillus, Pseudomonas and Streptomyces species and mycorrhizal fungi greatly improve plant resistance to many soil-borne diseases," said Wayne Wall, PHC’s president and chief executive officer. "Our scientists are developing and testing 'microbial cocktails' that will provide an alternative to chemical products for disease control and improved plant resistance to disease."

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VGM aims at supers

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programs with Western Golf, Standard Golf, Fox Valley Paints, Washer Systems of Iowa, Pickseed West, Bushnell, Skin Research Lab, Club Pro Products, PermaSign, DME Rangefinder, Wittek and The Kirby Marker System.

But the jewel in the crown, said Sawyer, is VGM's recent deal with The Scotts Company.

According to Alan Figley, national accounts manager at Scotts, involvement with VGM increases the company’s visibility, especially courses that may not be using Scotts products.

"We see this as an extension to our direct sales force," said Figley. "And for our current clients who are VGM members, we view this as a new opportunity since those clients will be able to purchase more product than they were in the past."

However, according to Figley, there was another, albeit unforeseen, bonus in joining the alliance.

"The development of a supplier alliance was something that didn’t cross my mind at first," he said. "We have a buyer alliance formed by the volume purchasing, but we realized that the suppliers that belong to the group become a family, too. We haven’t realized the full potential of that yet, but we realize that there’s additional opportunity there. Sometimes it takes a third party to bring something together."

According to Sawyer, VGM is in negotiations with more than 12 vendors to land new programs. "One of the things we’re most hopeful of right now is turf maintenance items, since they are the biggest ticket item. In the next six months, we should have one of those vendors in place," he said.

Single rider

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Waukesha, Wis.-based Ortho-Kinetics Inc., one of Pride’s chief competitors in the home medical equipment field, is ready and waiting to take Pride on in the golf market. Ortho-Kinetics launched its Fairway Division at the beginning of this year.

Although geared toward the physically challenged golfer, the single-riding walker is being marketed as a way for courses to get back to the 4-1/2 hour round.