**Super of the Year: Stay enthusiastic**

**By MARK LESLIE**

BRAMPTON, Ontario, Canada — Ask Bob Heron about his accomplishments and he first points away from himself, to his many assistants who have gone on to head superintendent jobs from North America to Loch Lomond, Scotland. Ask about his family and he embellishes about 29-year-old son Scott "whose resume is better than mine." But ask colleagues of Canada's 1998 Superintendent of the Year and they remark about a man who has greatly impacted this career field.

"Bob Heron has a good relationship with his members and he produces a pretty fine golf club," Gordon Witteveen of The Board of Trade head superintendent jobs from North points away from himself, to his many

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President Dennis Waiters, of the Fort Dodge Country Club in Fort Dodge, Iowa, was one of the first ones up here to accompany Sump to work almost immediately, riding on the superintendent's cart and quickly developing into a top-flight assistant Sump to get the flooded parts of his course back in play in two shakes of a dog's tail.

"I originally brought him out here to chase the geese," Sump said. "We don't have any geese now. We've got more turkeys than anything, and a few ducks. I got him to understand not to chase the turkeys or the ducks."

Being a retriever, Buddy loved to pick things up and bring out golf courses? Well, Steve Sump, superintendent at Hidden River Golf & Casting Club here has a PVC-seeking missile of a Labrador Retriever that can find clogged drainage caps through the deepest, murkiest standing water allowing Sump to get the flooded parts of his course back in play in two shakes of a dog's tail.

Buddy is an 18-month-old, 80-pound yellow lab who has lived in the Sump household since he was six weeks old. Buddy began accompanying Sump to work almost immediately, riding on the superintendent's cart and quickly developing into a top-flight goose deterrent.

"Buddy and partner Steve Sump quite a team at Hidden River Golf & Casting Club."

**BRIEFS**

**PTC AWARDS $175,000 FOR RESEARCH**

The Pennsylvania Turfgrass Council has announced allocation of funds to Penn State for the 1998-99 fiscal year. The $175,000 research grant brings to almost $2.5 million what the council has donated to Penn State over the years. The funds will support research projects in the departments of agronomy, entomology, and plant pathology. It will also support eight scholarships and awards granted to undergraduate and graduate students.

**IGCSA ANNOUNCES NEW DIRECTORS**

DES MOINES, Iowa — The following superintendents were elected to serve on the board of directors for the Iowa Golf Course Superintendents Association at the Iowa Turfgrass Conference here. President Dennis Watters, of the Fort Dodge Country Club in Fort Dodge, Iowa, will be assisted by new directors Ron Stephan, Joyce Hamilton, John Ausem and Tom Verrips.

**Pooch sniffs out golf course’s elusive PVC**

**By PETER BLAIS**

BRUTUS, Mich. — Think dogs are just good for chasing geese off golf courses? Well, Steve Sump, superintendent at Hidden River Golf & Casting Club here has a PVC-seeking missile of a Labrador Retriever that can find clogged drainage caps through the deepest, murkiest standing water allowing Sump to get the flooded parts of his course back in play in two shakes of a dog’s tail.

"R. Tee’s contributions to the game of golf locally, nationally and internationally have been many and continue to be ongoing," said golfing pal Paul Dermott of Oakdale Golf & Country Club in Downsview, who nominated Heron on behalf of the Ontario Golf Course Superintendents Association. "He’s a good player and always turns out a playable and well-maintained course for his membership. He’s always been a real proponent of bentgrass, and he was one of the first ones up here to experiment with some chemicals to eradicate poa annua."

Indeed, several innovations in golf course maintenance have been pioneered by Heron. He’s an upbeat guy and always has a positive personality, which makes him fun to be around. "He’s an upbeat guy and always has a positive personality, which makes him fun to be around."

"Bob Heron has a good relationship with his members and he produces a pretty fine golf club," Gordon Witteveen of The Board of Trade head superintendent jobs from North points away from himself, to his many

**Bubble Cover wins converts in Quebec**

**By MARK LESLIE**

TOORONTO — Be it laser shooting, Global Positioning Satellite technology or soil sensors, some of the greatest advances in the world of golf have been borrowed from other industries. Enter the latest: Bubble Covers, originally designed to lay over swimming pools to keep them warm.

Quebec superintendents have been experimenting with Bubble Covers to protect their greens from winter injury, and, according to Serge Gauthier, they have found success while saving money.

Speaking at the Canadian International Turfgrass Conference here, the superintendent at Islesmere Golf and Country Club in Laval, Quebec, said his experience with Bubble Cover over the last three winters has been extraordinary in terms of effectiveness, ease of installation and removal, and cost compared to using straw.

"I originally brought him out here to chase the geese," Sump said. "We don't have any geese now. We've got more turkeys than anything, and a few ducks. I got him to understand not to chase the turkeys or the ducks."

"Being a retriever, Buddy loved to pick things up and bring"
Heron: Innovator, teacher

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neered by the 56-year-old Heron, a Guelph native, 1964 graduate of Penn State University and 1979 president of the Canadian Golf Superintendents Association.

• Heron performed “some of the early work” with Roundup on eradicating annual bluegrass in fairways.

• In 1981 he was ahead of his time in experimenting with winter covers.

• Last year he undertook his latest experiment, incorporating Georgia pine straw into the Beacon Hall property — a move he feels will reduce maintenance costs over the long term.

Winter covers, Heron reported, “are not a panacea for growing turf. But if everything else is equal and your management program is adequate, they will solve some problems. I personally prefer perforated versus solid covers.

“Whether the green is in shade or the open makes a big difference to how fast frost comes out of the ground and how fast the turf greens up. But the real trick is when you take them off.”

Leasing equipment, he said, has become “a good way to stay current. And it keeps your maintenance costs down because you’re not repairing old equipment all the time.”

Heron replaces his equipment every four years, or has an option of re-leasing it, or buying it from the lease company and selling it to other golf courses.

“Once the lease is established, we have the freedom of negotiating new equipment deals without having to go to the board of directors or general manager all the time for approvals,” he said.

“Once we select equipment, we like to shop around and get the best deal from a lease company.”

In Beacon Hall’s case, it was a new golf course with a very limited membership, “so there wasn’t the capital to buy $500,000 to $700,000 in new equipment,” Heron said.

The Georgia pine straw is another story — Heron’s dream child after a number of visits to the Carolinas, Georgia and Florida.

“We brought in three loads last year just to spread around in our pine tree areas,” he said.

“The reason was, our red pine trees don’t produce the same quantity as the loblolly pines down there. So, to enhance the walk, improve the aesthetics and playability, we have spread it in the woods. It makes it easier to find your ball. Maintenance costs are reduced because you don’t have to trim grass around trees. And it improves the health of the trees because of less competition.”

The new G varieties allow you to “start the season with a slightly tighter height of cut,” he said. “I believe it’s best suited to our climatic conditions. We think it will give us a much tighter turf and allow us to get down tighter earlier in the season. That’s important with our short season, especially at a good golf course because people like the ball to roll at 10 every day.”

Heron expects to overseed two or three times a year for the next three years to accomplish his goal. Increasingly, he said, business rather than cultural practices command most of his time.

“When I was in school it [the job] was the science, the art and the business,” Heron said. “The business was probably 20 percent, the art, 50 percent, and the science, 30 percent. I think now it’s turned around to the point where business — people management — has become 50 percent of our job; and science and art are maybe 25 percent each.

“It has become a big business, and we have to be fiscally responsible because we’re dealing with a lot of money at private golf clubs. That separates the good superintendents from the
Bob Heron
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not-so-good superintendents."
Another key ingredient setting
superintendents apart is enthu-
siasm, Heron said.
"The ones who have done the
best are those who have had the
enthusiasm. If you don't have
the enthusiasm in this business,
you don't have a chance," he said.
"A lot of us will make a com-
fortable living looking after golf
courses, but never will be mil-
lionaires. It's a labor of love, re-
ally. I look forward to it every
day, even in the wintertime. That
becomes more difficult as you
get older, but if you can do it..."
Heron has tried to instill that
enthusiasm in his assistants and
employees as well.
"Enthusiasm and motivation
are two very important words
in my vocabulary," he said. "We're
only as good as our worst em-
ployee. Motivating and dealing
with the various types of em-
ployees is crucial. Turf students,
who have an interest in the busi-
ness, make it easier. But it's im-
portant to keep the high school
students, or retired people en-
thused, motivated and focused
about what we are trying to do.
"Positive reinforcement is good.
We try to catch them doing some-
thing right and make sure they're
aware of it. In the golf business
we're blessed with being able
to pay what other industries do.
So it's important to make it enjoy-
able and also have them under-
stand what is expected."
The assistant superintendents
Heron is known for grooming
are special to him.
"I've given them as much re-
sponsibility as I could, whether
delegating on a day-to-day basis,
budgeting, overall planning, or
purchasing equipment," he said.
"In other words, keep them in-
formed about everything re-
quired to do the job."
He suggests that young people
aspiring to work in the field en-
ter a university turfgrass pro-
gram and "be prepared to put in
their innings — spend a lot of
time working on a golf course. It
is becoming more difficult be-
cause we have done a good job of
providing a good environment
for a lot of those types of people.
"And it's no secret that the
market at the moment is satu-
rated with good quality young
people. The good ones, the
cream, will still come to the top,
but it's becoming more difficult
to get a job, even withstanding
the fact that more courses are
opening. Some want to run be-
fore they walk, but it does take a
long time to learn all there is to
learn about the business."
Will it pay off for them? For
Heron, who started working on a
course at the age of 15, it did.
"I don't think there is anything
I would prefer to do than look
after a golf course," he said.
In fact, he laughed, sometimes
wife Carolyn, a certified financial
planner, says that "if she were to
do it all over again she would like
to be a superintendent."
Though daughter Cory Whit-
ing is studying for a master's de-
gree at the University of Guelph,
son Scott has taken after his fa-
thers — in a big way. A Penn State
alumnus like his father, he has
worked at Pebble Beach Golf
Links in California, Devil's Pulpit
in Caledonia, East Sussex National
in England and Capilano Golf and
Country Club in Vancouver. He
just got his first head superinten-
dent position, building a Doug
Carrick-designed course on
Bigwin Island in Huntsville.
For father, son and all super-
intendents, Heron said, the job
is a challenge.
"It's a real challenge dealing
with adversity," he said. "It's a
challenge sometimes dealing
with members and their idiosyn-
crasies. Being a bit of a competi-
tor is important, too, because
you're always competing within
yourself and other golf courses.
"I think it's important to be
competitive in this game. There's
not a golf course anywhere, in
my opinion, that could not be
made better. I think you have to
have that philosophy."

"Enthusiasm and motivation are two very important words
in my vocabulary," he said. "We're only as good as our worst
employee. Motivating and dealing with the various types of
employees is crucial."
Bubble Covers bring extraordinary results

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“This was effective in most cases, but was time-consuming, and removal was also very time-consuming,” he said. “But the main problem is, it’s a living material... Also, in a mild winter, the greens did not come out so well.”

Gauthier and his colleagues in the Northern regions considered that a perfect method of winter greens protection would include:

- control of water;
- isolation, such as an inorganic temperature buffer;
- ease of installation.

When a Bubble Cover salesman knocked on his door in late 1995, Gauthier jumped on the idea. “I knew it would be perfect,” he recalled.

The product is sold from 4- to 28-foot widths, and Gauthier spent $26,400 at 11 cents per square foot. He figures the Bubble Covers, which should be usable for at least six years, will save $5,336 or more per year.

Using straw cost $7,000 per year for the straw and $4,560 in labor and disposal costs. The Bubble Cover costs only $1,824 in labor, and the $26,400 spread over six years equals $4,400.

Gauthier spelled out the process of covering his greens with the bubble material, which is so strong the bubbles do not pop even when jumped upon.

First, the plastic netting is laid over the green. Mouse repellent is sprayed over the green. The Bubble Cover is spread out over the netting and is clamped down with long, fluorescent-pink staples so they can be easily found come spring. All this is held down by a permeable greens cover.

“This top cover,” he said, “is very important and we have to pull it all the way back from the green. If not clamped down well, wind will tear it out.”

In his experiments Gauthier placed household heat monitors inside the greens, with a sensor near the middle of the green and the monitor in a Ziploc bag at the edge of the green.

Crew member Daniel Fontaine nails down the cover over one of the greens at Ileensore Golf & Country Club.

The method is not perfect. Sometimes water infiltrates under the cover. But we are fine-tuning it. We are pulling the top cover even more taut. And some results are incredible.’

— Serge Gauthier

The temperature never dipped below 5 or 6 degrees Celsius (32 to 34 Fahrenheit), which poa annua can survive, he said. A bonus of the Bubble Covers is that they are fairly translucent which helps kick-start the grass in the spring when the top cover is removed.

Since each cover is tailor-fit to a specific green, it is labeled for use the next year.

“The method is not perfect. Sometimes water infiltrates under the cover,” Gauthier said. “But we are fine-tuning it. We are pulling the top cover even more taut. And some results are incredible.”

BIGGA chairman calls on supers to ‘uphold golf’s heritage’

By MARK LESLIE

TORONTO — Golf course superintendents have a duty to the game and must uphold its heritage, something that maintaining “unnatural conditions” does not accomplish this, according to Gordon Child.

Child, a retired superintendent and chairman of British & International Golf Greenkeepers Association (BIGGA), said golf course caretakers should agree to certain basic principles of maintenance.

“One thing that does irritate me greatly is golfers telling us how we should achieve what they want,” Child told his colleagues in a session at the 50th Canadian International Turfgrass Conference & Trade Show held here in March.

Saying that his “basic principles” are based on golf’s traditions and not necessarily for every superintendent, who may face environmental conditions that require other maintenance measures, Child spelled them out.

“First, we don’t realize how little fertilizer grass needs,” he said. “I believe we only need to use limited phosphates. In the UK [United Kingdom], some of the best golf courses you see are on very low phosphate readings and some of the worst are on high-phosphate readings...

“The Old Course at St. Andrews uses very little phosphate, yet the course stands up to a lot of play.”

St. Andrews, he said, also “encourages the fine grasses to dominate, and they do.”

Child added that applying nitrogen more is far less expensive than phosphate and is more consistent and reliable. Another element Child cites is “free drainage.”

“Irrigation is far too readily used,” he said, even though grass will not live without it.

He suggested that superintendents keep their courses dry, “but never ever to the point of burning the turf itself.”

Referring to the many schools of thought about top dressing, Child said, “We should think of top dressing in relation to the root zone.”

Saying that a “pure sand green” builds up humus and therefore is not pure sand for long, he said that changes the way of dealing with the question of top dressing.

“I think we should add some sort of humus into the root zone,” he said.