New Turfgrass America eyes national market

By A. OBERBECK

GRANBURY, Texas — In a move to expand beyond their regional reach, three Texas turf companies and a Florida grower have formed an alliance creating a new full-service firm here. The new entity, Turfgrass America, combines Thomas Brothers Grass, Crenshaw and Dogut Turf and Milberger Turf Farms with Apollo, Fla.-based Elsberry Greenhouses.

While the merger was completed May 14, Milberger and Thomas Brothers have been considering the move for a year and a half. As we all looked at the

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Z-Net may revolutionize slow-growing grasses

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. — Tannenbaum Golf Course on Greers Ferry Lake near Heber Springs may have written its name into golf course history when it opened for public play in June. No scoring records were broken. The big story was a process that doubles the speed of growth for zoysiagrass, an excellent turf many superintendents have not used because of its notorious slow growth.

Z-Net, a new patented growing method developed in Japan and brought to America by Winrock Turfgrass America, produces complete grow-in during just one growing season — about twice as fast as standard sprigs or plugs, according to Winrock President Frank Whitbeck.

"Z-Net worked beautifully," said Tannenbaum course superintendent Scott White. "We grew in our zoysiagrass fairways and roughs in a little bit longer than the four to six months they predicted. But last summer was a hot summer and it was hard to get anything to grow. Right now it's 90 to 95 percent

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Fertigation, filtration systems said growing in popularity

By PETER BLAIS

Demands for improved playing conditions have led many courses to install fertigation, acid-injection and filtration systems as part of their pumping stations. Tanks, tubing and controllers for both fertigation and acid-injection systems (which improve water quality) can be rigged up to a pump station at a cost ranging from $7,000 to $15,000, a dramatic reduction from the $20,000 to $30,000 price tag common just a few years ago, said

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Country club fertility on a public's budget

By DAVID WILBER

The subject of turfgrass fertility is an ever-changing and often complicated road of twists and turns. But by being aware of several essential areas, turfgrass managers at public, resort and daily-fee golf operations can untangle the knots that might otherwise keep them from having the best possible fertilizer program.

There is a myth that only the private club is spending enough money to do the fertility management job correctly. From the standpoint of many golf facilities, public and private, fertility management and fertilizer purchasing is often a guessing

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Gary Kaye, a principal with Golf Engineering Associates Inc., a Phoenix-based irrigation designer, said filtration systems are becoming increasingly common, particularly in areas with water suffering from clam, mussel and suspended solids problems. These can clog the gear-drive rotors on irrigation systems, which are much more sensitive and back up more easily than the old impact sprinklers.

"Filtration is becoming more and more necessary, rather than the luxury it used to be," Kaye said. "If you are going to buy a pump station for $75,000 to $100,000 minimum, an extra $10,000 for filtration is not a big expense."

Pump stations in the Southwest and other arid areas pump anywhere from 1,800 to 4,000 gallons a minute, providing water to as many as 2,000 irrigation heads. With that cost, spending an additional $10,000 for a filtration system and/or a similar amount for a fertigation/acid-injection system is a wise investment, Kaye said.

Filtration consultants say pump stations don't make these systems, but they will provide them if requested. "They are used to dealing with customers who want a turnkey package," Kaye said. "A typical course owner just wants to be able to call the pump manufacturer and say, 'Look, I need a pump station, I have dirty water, and I want fertigation.' He just wants the pump station sales person to provide it. He doesn't want to shop around for high-tech filters and fertigation systems."

"If you are a client and I'm your consultant, I'm going to set you up with a pump station so that, when I'm gone, you can come in later and add anything you may buy out there. You may get a good deal on a fertigation system from a manufacturer I never heard of. But I want to get the pump station set up so that a year or two later, it's easy for the client to plug in anything he wants."

Fertilization and acid-injection systems are generally located a short distance down the discharge line from the main pump, and generally in the same pump station building. The filtration system, on the other hand, is generally an integral part of the pump station itself, Kaye said.

Some fertigation systems are relatively low-tech, allowing superintendents to "just turn the dial that lets you inject as much as you need," Kaye said. Other systems are very sophisticated. "They actually take a sample of the water downstream and program the controllers to release more or less material at various times of the day," he added.

Older pumps can be retrofitted with fertigation systems. "It has to be worth it, though," Kaye said. "You don't want to take a 50-year-old pump that's on its way out and modify it for $5,000 so you can do something."

When seeking pump-station bids, Kaye generally contacts two national companies and one or two local manufacturers.
Rain Bird introduces confined-area rotor

IRVING, Texas — When Four Seasons Resort and Spa here needed a way to monitor lightning and pumping systems during the Byron Nelson Classic, it turned to HotWire, a new product from Flowtronex. HotWire immediately alerts users to potential system problems. The device informs the user of a specific problem through a paging system easily programmed through Windows '95 or '98.

With HotWire, Four Seasons and other courses can monitor up to four specific functions, such as a power failure or a hard fault, by assigning each a one-to-five-digit code. If a problem occurs, HotWire dials the pager service and punches in the code to appear on the end-user’s pager.

At only 4 inches tall, 3 inches deep and 1 3/4 inch wide, HotWire fits inside a pump station control panel on even the smallest stations.

As HotWire beta tests continue, superintendents have become more excited about its widespread applications. Recent comments include:

Said one course manager, “We’ve been frustrated by these problems forever, and now you’ve given us a way to deal with them.”

Other features of the new Rain Bird TG-25 rotor include:

- The water-lubricated gear drive designed to provide years of reliable service.
- A diffuser screw reducing the spray radius up to 25 percent without changing the nozzle.
- Interchangeable, color-coded nozzles that can be replaced without special tools.

Keeping problems from becoming major crises

Fertigation

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Fertigation systems will inject anything a superintendent can apply with a sprayer (fertilizers, chemicals, pesticides, fungicides, etc.) onto the course. “But putting in a fertigation system doesn’t mean getting rid of your sprayer or walk-behind spreader,” Kaye said.

“There are some things the fertigation system just can’t do. You will always need to put that special material on the green or tees by hand. But for things you put over the entire course regularly, fertigation is great.”

Acid-injection systems are generally separate units requiring equipment that will not be corroded by acids.

Fertigation and acid-injection systems have evolved over the past 20 years from units placed atop a 50-gallon drum to very sophisticated items.

“Golfers’ expectations are much higher than they used to be, especially in arid areas, where superintendents need all the help they can get,” Kaye said. “And these things can help.”

Different areas of the country have different needs. While many Southwest courses may require the entire filter/fertigation/acid-injection package, areas with high-quality water may not need filtration and/or acid-injection systems.

“You have to analyze each site individually,” Kaye said.