Past presidents speak up
Former GCSAA presidents offer insights, advice on eve of International Conference and Show... 39

Development abroad
GCN’s monthly international report focuses on Asian and European soil... 73-76

Engelke breaks bentgrass care mold
By MARK LESLIE
PALM BEACH GARDENS, Fla. — With his sights keen on growing the cool-season bentgrass into the Deep South, Dr. Milt Engelke has broken the mold of turfgrass care and developed a regimen he feels will, once and for all, make his dream come true.

He already points to success here. Working with Old Marsh Golf Club superintendent Steve Ehrbar, the Texas A&M professor said, “We feel strongly that we will be okay with the regimen.”

What does it entail?
• Lean water management, irrigating every other day.
• Frequent flushing.
• Watering, not syringing.
• Keeping the nutrition level up in the summer... Continued on page 29

Golf Course News’ Builders of the Year

Orlando ‘99: Sun, No Socks, and Seminars
The GCSAA International Conference and Show rolls into Orlando from February 8-14. Bring comfortable shoes, socks optional. Special preview section found on pages 39-45.

Meditrust to sell off Cobblestone Golf Group
By PETER BLAIS
DEL MAR, Calif. — As part of a major reorganization, financially troubled Meditrust, a Massachusetts-based real estate investment trust, plans to sell Cobblestone Golf Group of Del Mar. Cobblestone’s management, headed by Chief Executive Officer Bob Husband, is among the half-dozen finalists in the bidding to acquire Cobblestone.

Meditrust, which bought Cobblestone in late 1997 for $241 million, said the reor... Continued on page 80

ABT: Changing the paradigm one phase at a time
ByMICHAEL LEVANS
HENDERSON, Nev. — Adhering to its coolly-calculated, three-phase business plan — acquisitions, integration and transformation — AgriBioTech Inc. (ABT) has single-handedly changed the seed business over the past three years.

As 1999 shifts into gear, the company is ready to jump into its integration phase, the second step in its ultimate goal of consolidating and transforming the turfgrass and forage seed sector in the... Continued on page 89
ABT/integration
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United States.” In its wake, the small, independent seed companies, which once dominated the market, are left to ponder the idea of selling. Those that remain independent could eventually be relegated to the sidelines, jumping into the game only to fill the gaps ABT has left uncovered.

“They are a force,” said Turf-See’s Tom Stanley. “They probably have half of the forage and turf market under their control. We just have to find our niche and be one of those companies that do well in niche markets. Whatever crumbs are left over we’ll be there to pick them up.”

“Consolidation of the industry isn’t really that bad,” said Tom Pape, vice president and general manager of Seed Research of Oregon. “Hopefully what will happen is that the margins will improve in our industry, taking some of the smaller brokers out of the picture.”

ABT Acquisitions: Since January 1995, ABT has acquired 33 companies in the sector, and has three pending acquisitions it expects to close soon. As a result of the acquisitions, ABT is now the sixth-largest seed company in the world and the largest forage and turfgrass seed company with $475 million in annualized net sales.

Some of the familiar names that have been acquired by ABT include Loft’s Seed, Germinal’s, W.L. Research, E.F. Burlington & Sons, Olsen Fennell Seeds, Seed Corporation of America, Green Seed, Williamette Seed Company, Peterson Seed Company, Kinder Seeds, Zajac Performance Seeds and Van Dyke Seed.

ABT has acquired other seed and seed-related businesses that focus on and serve golf course superintendents in the West and Southwest: Las Vegas Fertilizer and Garden West Distributors.

“ABT’s acquisition plan called for building a large, vertically integrated company with a national platform in production, distribution and research and development [R&D],” said Dr. Johnny Thomas, ABT’s chairman and chief executive officer. “We are proud of all our acquisitions because they share our vision and each bring strong components to our platform.”

Deere/Skid Loaders
Continued from page 83

ness unit. “As we place more emphasis on commercial and golf and turf products to increase sales overall, skid steers are going to be a big part of our growth.”

The plan was created using cross-functional team members, while organization and implementation plans are being finalized by other such teams. Implementation will begin over the next weeks and months and accelerate during the process.

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Deere/Skid Loaders
Continued from page 83

ness unit. “As we place more emphasis on commercial and golf and turf products to increase sales overall, skid steers represent a natural outgrowth of our Division.”

The new line of skids is comprised of four models: the 240, 250, 260 and 270. They will feature Deere’s patent-pending vertical lift system, a 45-degree dump angle, 36-degree bucket rollback and a sloped rear deck for 360-degree visibility.

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eventually aid irrigation, control spraying, or assist sensors measuring course status, such as moisture and plant nutrition.

While an autonomous or semi-autonomous vehicle controlled from the superintendents’ desktop might be a few years away, Lonn and Bly certainly aren’t ruling out the development of such a device.

“GPS is just one of the many enabling technologies that go into a semi-autonomous vehicle,” said Bly.

“That definitely falls into our course,” said Lonn. “The most difficult problem that no one has solved yet is the collision avoidance problem. But I don’t think GPS is quite accurate enough to get you what you need.”

In the meantime, Lonn said that Toro’s Center for Advanced Turf Technology will be working to add modules that will allow superintendents to use technology to make better decisions around the course.

“It’s like buying a home computer system,” said Lonn. “You buy the base and you’ll be able to plug in what you want.”

“You do this in pieces,” added Bly. “It’s constantly evolving.”

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