

**HOWARD JOHNSON'S PROMOTES ERNST**

MILWAUKEE — Howard Johnson's Enterprises, Inc. has announced the promotion of Joe Ernst to director of commercial sales and technical services. Ernst will be responsible for the management of all commercial sales and marketing for the company. Ernst, who brings 18 years of experience to the job, has been named employee of the year. Jerry Schroeder, previously with the Van Diest Supply Company, has been named territory manager Western region. Schroeder will be headquarter in Kearney, Neb.

AMERICAN EXCELSIOR'S CABALKA REAPPOINTED TO ASTM

ARLINGTON, Texas — American Excelsior Company, a manufacturer and distributor of erosion control products, including Curlex excelsior blankets, reports that Dwight Cabalka has



Dwight Cabalka

been reappointed as chairman of the ASTM subcommittee on Erosion Control Systems, D18.25, Sediment and Erosion Control Technology.

Created in 1996 with Cabalka serving as its first chairman, subcommittee D18.25 is contained within Committee D-18 on Soil and Rock. According to the International Erosion Control Association (IECA), subcommittee D18.25 is responsible for developing standards for erosion control materials and systems based on the ASTM process.

CARNEY BRINGS EXPERIENCE TO GROWTH PRODUCTS

WHITE PLAINS, N.Y. — Growth Products Ltd. has added Patrick Carney to its staff of technical sales representatives. Carney's territory will encompass the states of Kentucky, Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, Wisconsin and Minnesota. Prior to his hiring at Growth Products, Carney was a Certified Golf Course Superintendent at Owl Creek Country Club in Anchorage, Ky. The Indiana University Southeast graduate has held similar positions at various courses throughout Indiana and Kentucky.

NATURE SAFE NAMES GARCIA AS NEW REGIONAL MANAGER

COLD SPRING, Ky. — Nature Safe Natural & Organic Fertilizers has named Vic Garcia as its new regional sales manager. Garcia will be in charge of the Midwest and Northwest Regions. He has over ten years experience in the turf industry. Garcia resides in Fishers, Indiana.

Scotts reshuffles the deck, turns to distributors for golf market

MARYSVILLE, Ohio — Scotts Company has reorganized its North American Professional Business Group, a move the company said will strengthen distribution and technical sales support, integrate brand management across market segments, and reduce annual operating expenses by approximately \$2.1 million.

According to Scotts, the savings will be equally split between reduced head count and lower shipping costs.

In mid-December, Scotts' ProTurf division head count was winnowed from approximately 100 to 40 employees, a reduction of 60 percent.

In turn, Scotts will now sell into the golf market via four independent distributors: Turf Partners, Inc., a subsidiary of Eco Soil, in the Midwest and Northeast; BWI Companies, Inc. in the Southwest and Southeast; Wilbur Ellis Company in the Pacific Northwest, and Western Farm Services, Inc. in California.

"We've maintained some of those

people for the Tech Rep. group to work with the distributors," said Kristen Bibby, Scotts' manager of its investor relations office. "So there will still be tech reps, but it will be a Scotts' tech rep. working with a sales person from the distributor."

Scotts is retaining a field sales force and field-based technical group to provide distributor training, address questions from customers, and maintain involvement in university trial work.

The reorganization consolidates several prior divisional marketing, sales management and customer service, into a single group staff. In addition to cutting costs, the consolidation integrates brand management across all customer segments in the Professional Business Group for the first time.

Scott Todd will lead the new Turf and Ornamental Organization. Most recently Todd was vice president of the horticulture division within Scotts' Professional Business Group.

JAMES HAGEDORN NAMED TO NEW POSITION AT SCOTTS

MARYSVILLE, Ohio — The Scotts Co. has named James Hagedorn to the newly created position, President, Scotts North America.

Hagedorn, 43, will be responsible for directing the sales, marketing and operations of Scotts' North American Consumer Lawns, Consumer Gardens, Consumer Growing Media and Professional business groups; the newly formed Consumer Pesticides Business Group; and the Business Process Development unit.

In addition, Hagedorn continues as a member of the board of directors. Hagedorn most recently served as executive vice president, Scotts' U.S. business groups, having joined the company in 1995 following its merger with Miracle-Gro.



John Deere opens \$38 million skid steer operation

LOUDON, Tenn. — John Deere's Worldwide Commercial & Consumer Equipment Division has opened a new, \$38-million business operation incorporating engineering and assembly 30 miles southwest of Knoxville, Tenn.

The 300,000-square-foot Commercial Worksite Products (CWP) facility will house production of the company's new line of skid steers, the first designed and delivered by John Deere.

Deere plans to market the new line of skid steers into the golf market, as well as the landscape, rental, nursery and seed and sod markets.

"With our long experience in the skid steer business and our engineering and manufacturing expertise, we felt it was time for us to design and build the product ourselves," said Chuck Mogged, general manager of the CWP business.

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Toro teams with ProShot

Adds GPS to its stable

By MICHAEL LEVANS

MINNEAPOLIS, Minn. — Toro has added a critical piece in its effort to solve the technology puzzle with the inking of its alliance with ProShot Golf, a provider of GPS-based information and communication products to the golf industry.

According to the agreement, Toro becomes an equity partner in ProShot and will share engineering expertise and gain access to its distribution network. ProShot will assist in the integration of GPS technology into Toro equipment and provide support to the golf course owners, managers, and superintendents.

The goal, said Toro, is the development of a modular, desk-top-based, course-wide decision-support system for turf and irrigation.

"ProShot has taken a practical application within our market, tracking golf carts, and they've made that work," said Debra Bly, new technologies marketing manager for Toro's Center for Advanced Turf Technology, an internal think tank consisting of agronomists,

'GPS is just one of the many enabling technologies that go into a semi-autonomous vehicle.'

—Toro's Debra Bly

engineers, plant nutritionists and marketing people designed to cross the boundaries of Toro's professional business group. "We can take that and build on it instead of trying to build on other applications we've looked at in other industries."

"GPS just happens to be one of the technologies you might use to help solve customer problems," said Dana Lonn, director of the Center.

A first step, said Lonn, could be the integration of ProShot's GPS technology with Toro's GIS-based T-Map, the electronic map utilized in Toro's irrigation control.

"With T-Map we can tell the superintendent where the sprinkler heads are because they don't move around," said Lonn. "Now the ProShot component will allow us to track things that are moving around the course. You can bring that information back via radio, real-time, with bi-directional radio link to all those machines. You can now move data out from the central computer onto the golf course then move it from the course back to the central."

Today that technology is used primarily for cart location and player interaction with the clubhouse. Lonn suggests that the information could

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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-Seed/Tee-2-Green'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 Lofts Seed, Germain's, W-L Research, E.F. Burlingham & Sons, Olsen Fennell Seeds, Seed Corporation of America, Green Seed, Willamette 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

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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, 35-degree bucket rollback and a sloped rear deck for 360-degree visibility.

Integration: According to ABT, the company is now transitioning to the integration of acquired companies. To be called "Project ABT," the company is about to organize its acquisitions and assets into a single, customer-driven, team-based business.

The plan was created using cross-functional employee teams, 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.

ABT NAMES BLUM TO NEW POSITION

HENDERSON, Nev. — AgriBioTech Inc. (ABT) has named Tony Blum to its newly created position of vice president, director of communications, planning and development. Blum will report to Kent Schulze, president and chief operating officer. Blum joined ABT in February, 1998 following service in market research, planning and communications positions at the former Northrup King Co., now part of Novartis Seeds and Mycogen Seeds. He has also held management positions at Jefferson Davis Associates Inc. and Marketing Directions, both marketing research firms.

ABT RAISES \$15 MILLION IN CONVERTIBLE DEBT

HENDERSON, Nev. — On January 4, AgriBioTech reported that it raised \$15 million in long-term debt that it will use to pay off short-term debt, complete pending acquisitions and boost working capital. AgriBioTech said the debt is convertible into stock at a fixed, undisclosed price. The company said details of the financing will be made available once the offering is completed. The company is seeking to raise money through debt and equity and it's also trying to sell a stake in itself of at least 20 percent. In October, the company hired Merrill Lynch & Co. to help find a buyer. A month later, it hired Deutsche Bank Securities — whose parent, Deutsche Bank AG, is one of AgriBioTech's creditors — to help also.

"Our overriding goal for 'Project ABT' is to create the most customer-focused, customer-driven company in the seed industry because we know that if our customers succeed we will too," said Kent Schulze, president and chief operating officer of ABT.

With integration will come the question of company/brand identity. According to ABT, it will hold firm with some existing company brands and plans to

launch new, ABT brands.

"We have strong brands, and we respect and are grateful to the former owners for creating these strong brands," said Schulze. "We intend to use some of these strong brands going forward to take advantage of the equity in them and also create a strong ABT brand. ABT will use our existing and new brands to achieve our strategic goals in the various channels in which we compete."

As far as its goals are concerned, ABT management said it planned to first achieve a 45-percent market share; second, reach \$500 million in sales by 2000; and third, acquire an industry-leading elite germplasm and R&D position. The company said it's two years ahead of its original plan in achieving the first two of these goals, and has achieved the third.

"We want to create the kind of R&D-based seed company that brings improved products to the market so that custom-

ers' needs are served," said Thomas. "Our products of the future will in all likelihood cost more, because of our R&D investment in them, but we believe our customers will benefit. We want to bring the R&D and biotechnology revolution and all the good things that it means to turfgrass users in the United States."

"It has changed the way our industry will operate forever," added Seed Research's Pape.

Toro/ProShot

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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

"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."

— Toro's Dana Lonn

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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