N. Georgia Tech to graduate first turf students

By Peter Blais

LARKSVILLE, Ga. — The new golf course turf management program at North Georgia Technical Institute (NGTI) will graduate its first two students this spring.

"We want to put people in the industry as quickly as possible with as much knowledge as possible," said lead instructor Joshua Jackson. "People come to a technical school to get hands-on training. We have more than $100,000 worth of equipment and 70 acres that have been made available to us. We're looking at building a putting green and a practice facility that will be open to the public. We're also looking at building a nine-hole course."

The program arose from a needs survey that revealed a half-dozen courses within 20 miles of the school and a growing landscaping market that witnessed an expansion from two to 15 businesses over the past few years. A healthy turf market coupled with the fact the school (located an hour and 45 minutes northeast of Atlanta) already operated a 140-acre sod farm, indicated a technical school turf program might be a welcome addition to NGTI's offerings.

"Frankly," Fierst said, "his [anti-golf] comments have not been recently, and he has tempered them. I don't see it as a concern. He's not militant. But, by and large, I never sensed that [anti-golf sentiment] is Mr. Harvey's personal heartfelt belief."

The course manager at Oak Park Country Club here for 23 years, Fierst said Harvey's comments "cause a little bit of concern, but don't have enough meat in them to push anyone who is really interested in knowing the whole picture to cause trouble."

Harvey's writers, Fierst believes, write "a wonderful part of the American landscape" and a person who loves the game of golf, the superintendent at the famed radio broadcaster's home course defended Harvey's past tirades against golf courses.

Alan Fierst, who Harvey has mentioned a number of times in his daily news broadcasts — including Dec. 2 when Fierst's crews were mowing grass for the first time ever in that winter month — said he does not believe Harvey thinks poorly of golf courses. Harvey has drawn the ire of the golf industry for years after making such claims as there are no birds on golf courses and superintendents are dying from mixing pesticides.

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Harvey's writers, Fierst believes, write his news "for his constituency, who don't need a lot of wide-ranging information. "He has a lot of control over what he reports, but he has internalized it as his own belief. No. He reports what he feels is newsworthy and of value to his constituency, at the level of intellect and depth those people choose to go to."

Saying he is not giving an alibi for

Continued on page 26
Continued from page 13
credit hours along with five
related offerings. Students can
requirements involve core courses in math, English, office and skills
development, business management and computers, along with 10 hours of turf-related offerings. Students can
take a certificate in turf management and computers.

In developing NGTI's
environmental horticulture
program, Jackson said he
pulled together the best of his
own college experiences and
borrowed from such successful
programs as Horry-Georgetown, Lake City (Fla.),
Clemson University (S.C.),
Texas A&M, Auburn University
(Ala.) and the University of
Western Kentucky. Among the
offerings he developed are
classes in soil science, fertility,
turf management, insect/weed
disease control, irrigation
and drainage, horticultural
science, pest control and
safety. He also incorporated
hands-on experience such as
the operation and calibration of
golf course equipment.

"We even teach the theory of
something like backing up a
trailer, something anyone
entering the golf business will
to have to do at some point,"
Jackson said. "No one likes to
feel stupid when faced with
doing something for the first
time. We want people to have
the experience so that when
they are faced with doing it in
the field, they are at least
comfortable with it. It's a
simple thing, but a lot of
schools don't recognize that
can be important.

"We also stress communica-
tions and public speaking." Jaxonk said. "Once they are
working, students will have to
make presentations on why
they need a new piece of
equipment, want to undertake
an addition, or why they need
eew employees. They have to
be able to eloquently state
what they want and why.

Those wishing to go beyond
NGTI's one-year certificate
program and obtain an
associate's degree in applied
science can move on to
Gainesville College or Truett-
McConnell College.

NGTI launched its golf turf
program in March 1998 and
will graduate its first two
students this March.
All eight NGTI turf students
are working at golf courses,
sod farms or practice areas,
and range in age from 19 to 56.
Jackson said.
Most have some previous
secondary education. Jackson
expects future students to be a
mixture of recent high school
graduates and those with
previous work experience.

"Our big push will be next
fall," Jackson said. "We've
really been emphasizing
recruitment at the high
schools, which should be a
fertile area for us since all our
classes are held during the
day. We've had several
requests for night classes and
have been exploring the
possibility."

Jackson anticipates most
NGTI graduates with limited
turf experience, will enter the
industry as spray or irriga-
tion technicians, second- and
first-assistant superinten-
dents.

Others could work in related
fields such as the sod, land-
scape or lawn maintenance
industries, athletic field
management as well as
chemical, seed or equipment
sales.