The high-tech addition of the decade? Border collies

By Mark Leslie

There have been dog super-heroes in the past: Timmy's Lassie, Rusty's Rin Tin Tin, Sergeant Preston's King. But today, in Greenwich, Conn., the Dog of the Hour is Richard Marcks' Tac. Tac accomplished what no human in town could do: He drove several hundred geese to a new address — out of town.

A 7-year-old border collie, Tac (short for Sharp as a Tac) has ridded Fairview Country Club of 600 troublesome geese — and enjoyed every minute of it. "This is the hottest thing since peanut butter," said Marcks, property manager at Fairview. Twelve other area golf courses have bought border collies to rid their properties of geese since seeing Tac at work.

Buying the trained dog was Marcks' brainchild. "Within a month we had the course clean," Marcks said. Tac, fully trained to herd sheep, took quickly to the course. "Is there a population problem? Absolutely," he said. "Will it double in the next five years? Absolutely. If the trend continues and you think there are a lot of geese now, just wait."

David explained that the major concern is not with migratory geese, who simply pass through on their way south or their return north. Rather, it is the resident geese. A true migratory bird does not breed on the course. "It's turned into an unbelievable business. I never expected it to grow so fast, or get so big," said Richard Marcks, who first dreamed up the idea of sicing a border collie on the geese which had so troubled and spoiled Fairview Country Club in Greenwich, Conn., where he worked as property manager.

Marcks, who in March moved to Crumpin-Fox Club in Bernardston, Mass., saw the success of his simple idea turn into Geese Police Inc., a multimillion-dollar business servicing hundreds of corporate and municipal clients — and golf courses — whose parks, grounds, playgrounds and racetracks are beset by the messy geese.

"Actually, we only have three or four golf courses," said David Marcks, Richard's brother whose Geese Police offices in Howell, N.J., serve as the nationwide headquarters. "Most usually end up buying their own dog."

When Richard Marcks' story ran in the March 1994 edition of Golf Course News, An entire industry has been born.

Kick 'em out now, or watch out in the future

By Mark Leslie

HOWELL, N.J. — David Marcks of Geese Police Inc. said golf courses and others who delay dealing with their geese problems will see those problems exacerbated.

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Kocher, Jett, people power the difference at Pinehurst #2

By Terry Buchen

PINEHURST, N.C. — Tournament and championship veterans Brad Kocher, director of golf course maintenance, and Paul T. Jett, Course No. 2 superintendent at ClubCorp's Pinehurst are excited about this year's U.S. Open. They have an able and efficient staff prepared to show off their talents.

"We have 24 of the best maintenance employees a golf course could ever want on our payroll, plus 14 student interns," said Jett.

So many people volunteered to work on the Open that "we had to stop all requests last October," said Jett, who kept the volunteer staff to 48. "We could have had 100 volunteers, without question, which shows the industry-wide dedication to Pinehurst and the U.S. Open."

A hospitality tent — complete with air-conditioning and television monitors — is set up across from the maintenance offices for staff and volunteers. Lesco will sponsor a breakfast every morning and Zeneca will go split the continued on page 16...
Move geese now rather than later

Continued from page 13 until its third or fourth year of life, and not successfully until its fifth or sixth year. When it does, it lays four to six eggs. But robust residential geese, instead of expending their energy migrating, lay more and bigger eggs. And the survival rate is over 80 percent.

So, he said, if the residential population is not sent packing, the golf courses and other properties on which they live become home to a skyrocketing number of geese. "It's called 'imprinting,'" David said. "Once they have bred on your property, they will return to breed on your property and so will their young."

While migratory geese fly through New Jersey in early October and return in late January to early February, the resident geese "get stubborn," David said, around February. Instead of flying far from the property when chased by a dog, they will fly just a few yards away because they are pairing off to breed. In March they start laying eggs. In April the goslings are born and aren't able to fly until the second week of August. The adults, meanwhile, molt the second week of June and are grounded until the second week of August. They can't fly, "so anything you have on your property in April or May you're stuck with for the summer," David said.

During that time, all the border collies can do is chase the birds out of harm's way and sensitive areas.

Once mid-August arrives, "they get moving and it's back to the easy part," he said.

The birds' timing varies from place to place, but being Geese Police remains a year-round job, David Marcks said.

Golf courses have long struggled with controlling geese, trying solutions from lighting firecrackers and firing guns to scare them away, stringing rope around waterways, floating frightening-looking balloons above ponds and spreading products on the turf surrounding the water. None seem to have lasting effects.

Now a health study may turn this battle into one of emergency. Working with Monmouth (N.J.) County health officials, scientists at Monmouth University and Johns Hopkins University have reported that goose droppings will translate sickness to people in the forms of diarrhea and cryptosporidium which entails a 15-pound weight loss.

"Each goose produces 1-1/2 pounds of droppings per day, and that's where the problem lies," said David Marcks.

Tac and Marcks have gone out on the speakers circuit, demonstrating how they gave the ex-resident geese a new address.

Among the new converts to the Border Collie Remedy are Tamarack, Redding and Sterling Farms country clubs, and Scarsdale and Richter Park golf clubs.

Westchester County's Parks and Recreation Department is buying two dogs for its five courses and The Hampshire Club has just ordered one, Marcks said.

"Many superintendents have tried other kinds of dogs but they don't listen well," said Marcks. "The border collies are trained to respond to voice and hand commands and to a whistle.

"Geese will drown a dog. But when a border collie gets in trouble, you can just call them back out of the water." The Connecticut and New York clubs have been buying the dogs fully trained from a woman in Shipman, Va., who has 25 dogs in her kennel. With so many sales to golf courses, she now trains them on geese as well as sheep.

Marcks said it costs him $1,000 a year to keep Tac. As well as good workers, border collies make "great companions," he said. "She rides with me on the golf car. And the public relations with the membership is great. They all want to stop and talk to the dog. There's no greater ice-breaker.

Marcks has already prepared for the future, Tac giving birth to pups seven months ago.

"Training him can be a little bit of a pain," Marcks conceded. But cleaning up for geese can virtually be torment.