

## My green crystal ball: Get kids hooked

By DAVID PURSELL

• President & Chief Executive Officer of Pursell Technologies Inc.

There is no doubt that the game of golf is very important to the Pursell family. First of all, it creates a livelihood for my family and me. Secondly, it is an activity that everyone in my family enjoys, including my wife and six — yes, six — children. How many sports can you play with your father, your son or daughter, your wife, or your buddies, and play for your whole life?

But the thing I enjoy most about this game is working within an industry that services golf courses and other entities that sell to golf courses. I have some great relationships with superintendents, GCSAA, media, suppliers, architects, builders, equipment manufacturers, and even competitors.

Pursell Technologies, Inc. was founded in 1904 by my great-grandfather. I have no idea what year we made our first golf-course sale, but I suppose it was a long time ago. I do know that in the 1950s, when slow-release fertilizers were introduced, we were there. We have continued to grow, watching all the trends develop.

And now, as we sit on the brink of a new millennium, people are wondering where the game of golf is heading? I am no soothsayer, but I will share what my gut tells me as to what I expect over the next ten years.

Golf will become less and less an elitist sport, mainly due to the vast number of courses and initiatives such as The First Tee,

which I am very high on.

The average age of a beginning golfer is said to be 29. My eight-year-old twin sons are already hooked, I suspect, for life. The difference is exposure, which boils down to opportunity. If we can expose people to this great game at an earlier age, then we are creating a more viable market place for us all.

Think how much better this world would be if kids could learn

and play golf with their moms or dads, instead of playing Nintendo or running around with their buddies.

But until that takes place, golf as a livelihood will get tougher and tougher, due to nominal growth in numbers, too many new course openings, and too many competitors in a given market arena.



David Pursell

There are simply too many folks trying to take a bite out of a pie that is not growing significantly in size.

Alas, there is a solution. It starts by supporting initiatives such as The First Tee. Or, take a son or daughter (or grandson or granddaughter) out to the course or driving

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## Superintendents getting what's due

By HAL PHILLIPS

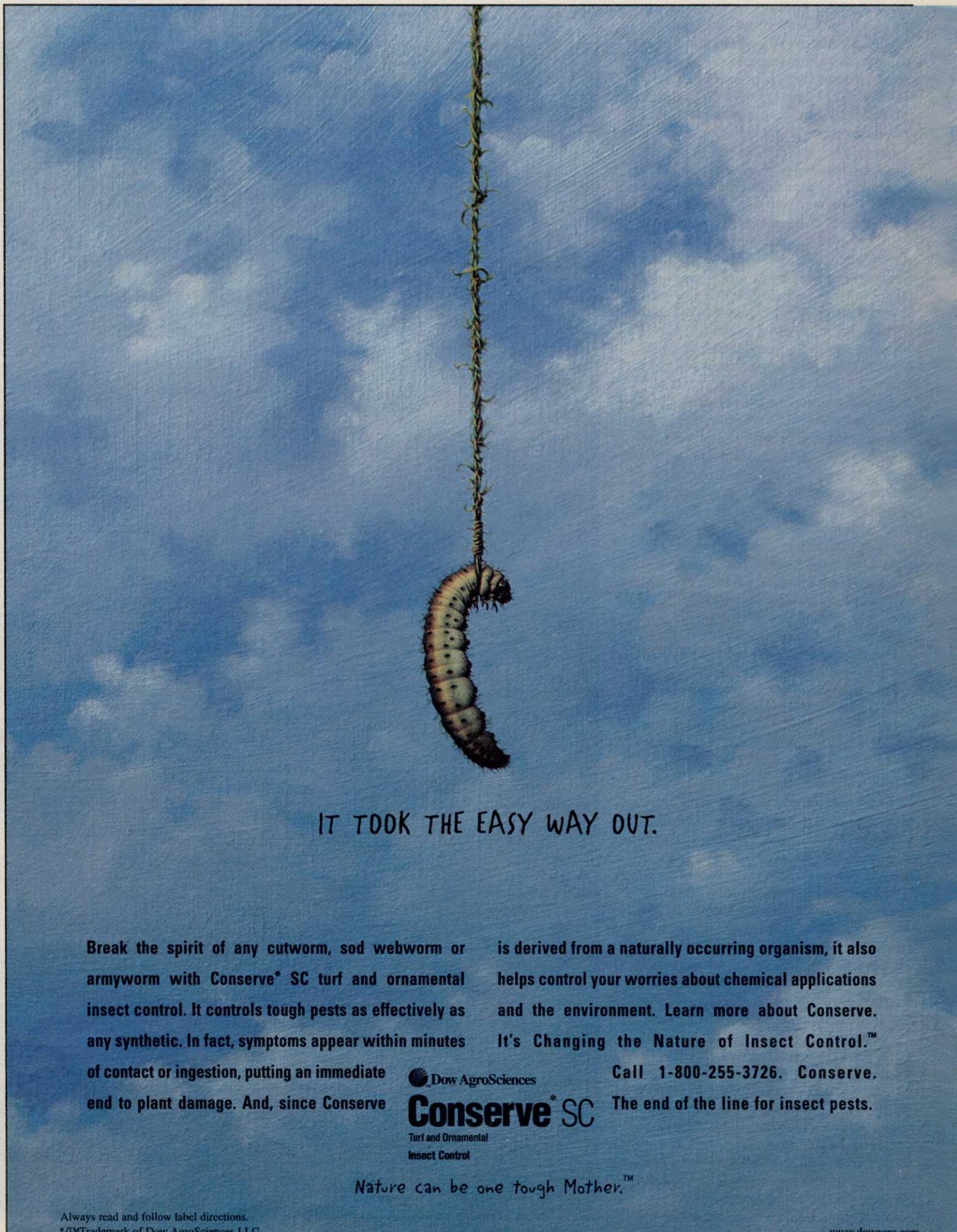
• President, Phillips Golf Media and ex-editor of Golf Course News

When GCN debuted back in 1989, the idea that superintendents should be visible, respected components of every golf course operation was still forming — in places like Lawrence, Far Hills and wherever committed forward-thinking supers, course owners and green committee chairmen plied their respective trades.

Three years later, when I joined *Golf Course News* as editor, this push to professionalize the position of superintendent had taken on a more concerted dedication. It had become a movement.

As I viewed it, this effort was what politicians term an "apple pie issue." That is to say, superintendents were clearly underappreciated in golf's great scheme; duly recognizing these men and women as the cornerstones of any successful golf course organization was a no-brainer — a cam-

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## Phillips

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-paign anyone with said brain could get behind.

Today —10 years on, and 24 months after I left Golf Course News — this professional initiative has borne considerable fruit. We can all agree that superintendents are paid better and wield more leverage during the hiring process; they are recognized as

the linchpin of golf's environmental stewardship; on new projects, they are routinely hired earlier in the construction process.

Further, their ultimate patrons — be they club members or daily-fee golfers — possess far more perspective when it comes to agronomic issues and how they might affect play. Superintendents and turf science have even begun to take their rightful place in the mainstream media spot-

light, as this year's Open at Pinehurst No. 2 — whose newly refurbished greens sport the latest in heat-tolerant bentgrass — will illustrate. Indeed, the Open would never have ventured so far into the transition zone without this sort of agronomic advance.

Bringing the Open down to Dixie is just another example of how dramatically the business has changed during the 10 years GCN has doggedly and objec-

tively published golf's news and views. Courses are now developed at a sustained rate of 400 per calendar year (a figure unimaginable circa 1989) and new public-access facilities outnumber new private clubs 4 to 1, nearly reversing the ratio we observed during the '80s.

This proliferation of daily-fee courses, combined with other factors, has fundamentally altered the balance of power at individual

course facilities; it has placed more power in the hands of owners who observe, for example, the success of off-site club retailers and wish it for themselves.

Management companies, in turn, see profitable daily-fee operations and snap them up. Business decisions like these have diminished the economic power of head golf professionals — the very people against whom superintendents have traditionally measured themselves in terms of prestige and professionalism.

It's ironic that as head pros struggle to find their place in golf's new world order, supers continue their upward mobility. Why? Because the course itself is and always will be the star of any golf facility. While owners might think they can sell clubs, owners recognize they'll never understand 15-15-15 fertilizer applications. And because they concentrate on the golf course itself, superintendents will always play a role of singular importance — a role unlikely to diminish as standards of conditioning keep rising.

Whether the golf course industry continues to boom or suffers the dreaded market correction, superintendents will always be primary to successful course operations. Why? Because superintendents manage golf's most important element, its ultimate asset. After 10 years of awareness training, today's owners have a pretty good handle on this.

There is still work to be done, of course; professionalism is not a static goal. Agronomic advances will keep coming; they will demand more of superintendents, not less.

If I learned nothing else during my tenure at GCN, I learned that superintendents are a determined bunch. So I'm confident that 10 years down the road, superintendents will have met these challenges and the others progress will surely bring. I'm just as certain we'll be reading about them in Golf Course News.

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range, and tell them to invite a friend or two.

Spend quality time, point out some wildlife, teach them about rules and honesty. And if you really want to impress them, hit a few flop wedges that back up six feet.

Fret not, for the game of golf will never die. I personally believe there may be golf courses in heaven — or possibly hell depending upon how one is playing when their time is up. But until that final calling, I will personally enjoy every single day I am able to work and participate within the confines of this great game, and this great industry.



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