GOLF COURSE NEWS

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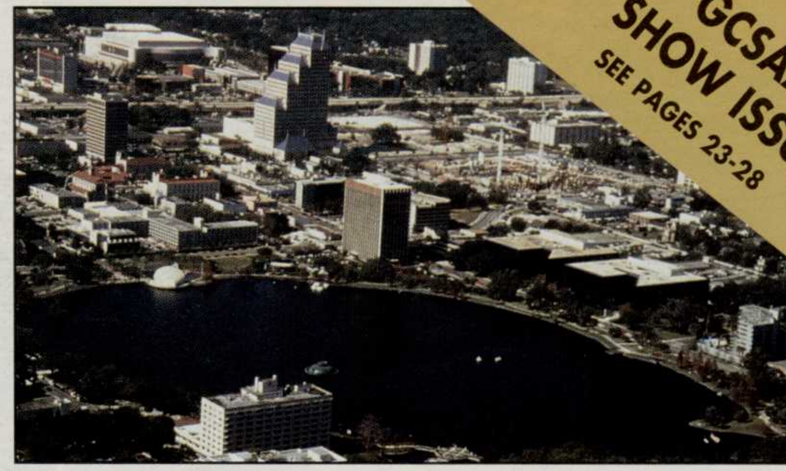

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VON HAGGE'S STAGE

Architect Robert von Hagge allowed his artistic sensibilities to dictate his design vision at Torreon Golf and Country Club here in Show Low, Ariz. The first hole is pictured above. See Q&A on page 17.

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PERIODICAL

Compost tea slowly gaining golf converts

By ANDREW OVERBECK

With mounting environmental pressures and increasing chemical costs, some superintendents are turning toward sustainable agricultural techniques.

On the forefront of this trend is compost tea, a higher-tech version of a centuries' old technology that "brews" compost to create a concentrated liquid "tea" that delivers beneficial microbes and low levels of nutrients to turfgrass. The brewers, which have been commercially available since 1998, are used most heavily in agricultural settings. While there is no scientific evidence to directly support it, superintendents using compost tea report less disease pressure, less need for fertilization and irrigation and all-around healthier turf.

"Three years ago I was getting dollar spot that was unbelievable," said Charles Clarke, superintendent at Woodbury Country Club in Woodbury, N.J. "I was getting five days of control out of Bayleton and seven days out of Daconil. Two years ago I started spraying with compost tea every seven days and by the end of the summer I saw results. This year I was getting 15

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Golf's 'big three' weather slowdown

By ANDREW OVERBECK

It's no secret that 2001 was a tough year for the golf business. With the economy flagging, budgets tightened, new construction slipped and golf rounds were down. The events of Sept. 11 have simply exacerbated the situation.

Steve Keating

While many companies are struggling to maintain the status quo, the big three turf equipment manufacturers definitely felt the contracting golf economy land on their bottom lines with a resounding thud.

William Robson

Textron, which was still computing year-end numbers when *Golf Course News* went to press, posted a net loss of $330 million in the third quarter alone. John Deere's net losses mounted to $64 million on the year. Only Toro managed to post positive growth for 2001 with net income up 11.4 percent to $50.4 million.

While these numbers represent entire corporations of which the golf and turf divisions make up a fraction of the total business, representatives from all

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Chensoff's Calusa Pines elevates golf in Naples

By A. OVERBECK

NAPLES, Fla. — In order to compete in the ever-expanding Naples golf market, developer Gary Chensoff knew that he had to create something radically different in order to elevate his new project above other area courses.

Chensoff, who was also involved in the development of the Rees Jones-designed Naples Grande Golf Club, has succeeded both literally and figuratively here with the November opening of Calusa Pines Golf Club.

Enlisting the services of Hurdzan, Fry Design, Course Doctors and superintendent Eric von Hofen, Chensoff transformed 550 acres of flat land into an undulating property that has 58 feet of elevation change and features the highest point of land in south Florida.

The eighth hole at Calusa Pines is framed by a 27-foot tall bunker.

In order to reach such heights, Course Doctors, working with local mass excavator LeeMar, blasted through tons of rock to dig 72 acres of 25-foot-deep lakes. Part of

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NGCOA, Club Car ink partnership deal

By ANDREW OVERBECK

CHARLESTON, S.C. — The National Golf Course Owners Association has signed an exclusive agreement with Club Car, Inc., to form a "premier partnership."

In addition to providing pricing incentives for NGCOA members, Club Car will sponsor golf car fleet management programs and educational seminars and work with the association to grow its membership. The agreement will run for a term of five years and has replaced the NGCOA's previous deal with Yamaha Golf Car Co.

Moving beyond a pricing deal was a key part of the agreement, according to Club Car's vice president of marketing Chris Plummer.

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Aquaflex to improve efficiency

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the area has received the proper amount of water.

"It allows you to fine tune irrigation practices," said Reinisch. "It identifies the exact time that the turf is irrigated enough and keeps you from over doing it."

As a result, said Reinisch, courses will be able to save water, energy and time. When applying fertilizers and chemicals it will also keep them from being washed away.

SYSTEM COST

The system varies in cost depending on the size of the installation. The one-time software cost is substantial, with one independent sensor with remote costing between $5,000 to $6,000. Outfitting a whole course with sensors on every green and fairway, valve controls and two or three weather stations could cost between $80,000 and $90,000, said Reinisch.

The company has 10 support managers in its offices in Florida and California, and aims to have 50 to 60 courses using Aquaflex by the middle of the year.

"We install, support and monitor the system in addition to training the superintendent," Reinisch said. "We will add support managers and distribution partners as we add courses."

Reinisch's next goal is to team up with golf irrigation companies to expand market share and develop a better distribution network. "We want to help them make their systems better," he said, "we don't want to compete with them." ■

DiMino to increase Lesco's profits

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CLEANING HOUSE

DiMino will initially focus on improving Lesco's efficiency.

"I feel you have to have positive discontent," said DiMino. "In this case, for a $500 million business, Lesco should be performing better from a financial standpoint. But we are going to address that and become more efficient and effective at what we do."

"While he runs out ahead of us," said DiMino, "my job is to make sure that this year's plan is executed and accomplished. I am looking forward to the challenges of reshaping the inside of the company so we can enjoy better profits and customer relationships." ■

Lesco posted third-quarter sales of $144.1 million, up from $139.6 million in the third quarter of 2000. Net income for the quarter, however, slipped to $0.3 million from $4.2 million.

"We have to ensure that supply chain management is run effectively and that all assets are geared towards creating more value for the customers, the shareholders and the employees," DiMino said. "We need to take away products that don't sell and keep the product lines fresh. We have a lot of SKUs (stock keeping units) that are not selling."

While DiMino said it was to early to tell which products were going to be discontinued, he maintained that "none of them would be missed."

"It will be a constant improvement. It may be as simple as going to our own brand as opposed to carrying someone else's version of it. We may just change the formulation, or we may drop the product altogether," he said. "This will make for a healthier Lesco."

STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT

With DiMino on board, CEO William Foley will be free to develop a more robust long-range plan for the company.

Big three look for stronger 2002

Continued from page 1

three manufacturers said demand for golf equipment slowed on the year.

THE GOLF SLUMP

The reasons for the slump are clear: a late, wet spring, fewer new golf courses, deferred purchases, and slashed budgets.

"In the upper Midwest and Northeast, especially, cash registers did not ring until May or June. And although rounds were not down much for the year, once a course gets into its season a little ways they tend to postpone capital equipment purchases if it looks like 'old Betsy' is running okay," said William Robson, director of marketing for Textron Golf Turf and Specialty Products.

According to Toro's director of investor relations Steve Keating, the 2001 slowdown was inevitable.

"The golf business struggled last year," he said. "But we are conservative enough to know that the 500 new courses a year was going to come to a stop. When you have an over abundance of courses, flat participation, and an economy that keeps folks from spending money, you are going to have a downturn."

TURNAROUND IN SIGHT?

The companies are optimistic that the downward trend of 2001 will not continue into 2002. While there are signs that the economy may be turning the corner, industry executives hope that aggressive leasing packages, new products, and product turnover will lead to marginally better sales.

"To a certain degree the golf industry is a captive market," said Chuck Grief, manager of market development for John Deere's golf and turf division. "They have to mow and maintain the golf course if they are going to do business. We are not looking at growth like we have seen in the past, but 2002 will be better than 2001."

Chuck Grief

Those buyers who deferred purchases last year are still out there this year, said Robson. "Whenever there is a dip in demand from deferred purchases, then that comes back the following year," he said. "We are looking for a strong 2002 in terms of overall demand."

John Wright

According to *GCN*'s News Poll (see page 3), 35 percent of courses will be spending somewhat or significantly more on equipment in 2002 for many of the above reasons.

"Our budget is slightly more than last year," said Steve Adams, president of Adams Management Group. "We know that when business gets competitive, a well conditioned golf course may be your only competitive advantage. It is the last place we will cut back."

However, 28 percent of the courses reported that their budgets will decrease due to poor 2001 revenues.

"My equipment budget will be significantly less because we opened about six to eight weeks later than normal due to spring flooding," said Larry Meyer, superintendent at Slayton (Minn.) Country Club. "We also had other unexpected expenses during the year."

As a result, Toro's director of marketing John Wright expects 2002 to still be a challenging year.

"Buyers will still be cautious," he said. "We will do well as a company because we have a strong product line and we are going to have an improved financial offering. But I think the golf industry as a whole is going to be in for a few challenging years."

RUNNING A TIGHTER SHIP

Equipment makers have consolidated manufacturing plants in the past two years in order to maximize efficiency. Textron closed its aging Racine, Wis. plant and moved its Jacobsen facility to Charlotte, N.C. Toro shut down its Evansville, Ind., and Riverside, Calif., plants and is in the process of moving certain operations to El Paso, Texas.

"You have to stay lean and mean," said Keating. "You have to look at overall manufacturing capabilities and have the right factories in the right places." ■