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INSIDE

Reduce water use

USGA Green Section director James T. Snow outlines golf's latest water conservation efforts.....9

Technology to the rescue

Smart keys and GPS aim to simplify operations and boost profits for course managers.....21



RENOVATION WORK SURGING

Superintendent Rick Holanda at Aronimink Golf Club in Newton, Pa., took advantage of a mild winter to complete his renovation project a year ahead of schedule (work on the eighth hole is pictured above). His story appears on page 16 in the refocused Development & Renovation section, along with the first in a continuing series of articles by Kevin Downing detailing his experience renovating Willoughby Golf Club in Stuart, Fla. (see page 15).

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COUNTERPOINT

Editorial Focus: Mowers

Mower makers shelve new technology

By ANDREW OVERBECK

While mower manufacturers continue to develop GPS, electric motors and autonomous capabilities, they have yet to incorporate these technologies into any new products. Instead of testing the waters with risky and expensive technology, manufacturers have concentrated their short-term efforts on improving and tweaking existing products.

"A lot of the excitement over new technology was fed by the Internet euphoria that you could do anything," said John Wright, director of marketing for Toro. "A lot of companies have spent money trying to do anything and it didn't pay off. Superintendents have told us that they don't want more technology. They want stuff that works and makes their jobs easier—not more complicated."

Toro and other manufacturers have not given up on the promise of new technology (see story page 11), but they are cognizant that any breakthrough product will have to offer



John Wright



Gregg Brenningmeyer

Continued on page 11

NGP, AGC merger to go forward

Investors, analysts question combined company's viability

By DEREK RICE

SANTA MONICA, Calif. — Nearly two months after announcing its intent to merge with American Golf Corp., National Golf Properties (NGP) announced the two companies would merge into an as yet unnamed corporation.

As part of the deal, NGP will absorb American Golf's \$126 million in debt and would cease to be a real estate investment trust (REIT).

In the days following the announcement, financial firms seemed underwhelmed by the news, and investors were left to ponder the future of a company that is willing to assume so much debt.

"I'm unhappy to see this, but I'm not surprised," said Dan Boyle of Schwerin Boyle Investments, which is an NGP shareholder.

PricewaterhouseCoopers, which is the independent auditor for both NGP and American Golf, has raised concerns about the viability of both companies in light of their financial difficulties

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Rutgers gains rights to PureIntro technology

By ANDREW OVERBECK

NEW BRUNSWICK, N.J. — Rutgers University has reached an exclusive agreement with Japan Tobacco to develop and commercialize transgenic turfgrass varieties using a pioneering plant transformation technology.

Japan Tobacco's PureIntro employs plasmids derived from Agrobacterium tumefaciens, a bacterium that has the unique

ability to insert a portion of its DNA into the cells of plants. According to officials at Rutgers,

PureIntro technology is more precise than the Scotts Co.'s "gene gun" and it will allow turfgrass producers more access to transgenic varieties.

"Agrobacterium has been used by researchers for years in

transforming dicots but it has never been used in monocots," said Jim Costagano, manager of technology and licensing at the Center for Turfgrass Science and the Biotechnology Center for Agriculture and the Environment at Rutgers.

Dr. Barbara Zilinskas, a plant scientist at Rutgers, received permission from Japan Tobacco in 1997 to begin work with PureIntro in turfgrass and was

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Dr. William Meyer

First National expands Native American lending

By DEREK RICE

MARTINSVILLE, N.J. — Rumors of the demise of funding for golf course development projects are greatly exaggerated, according to Jerry Sager, managing director at First National, who said the departure of some of the bigger names has led to that perception.

"I keep hearing that and I think it's focused because Bank of America left and Daimler Chrysler Credit quit and GMAC stopped doing [golf course loans]. I don't think that's fair," he said.

Along with First National, Sager said, other key lenders have been in the golf business for many years.

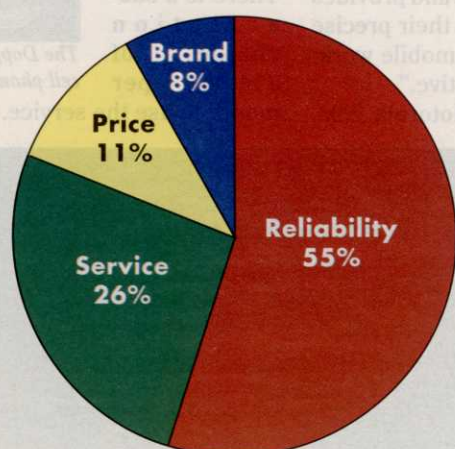
"Texttron's certainly been around a long time and we've been doing golf course loans for 20 years. I don't think we've changed to the market at all," he said. "Quite frankly, I don't think Texttron has either. I think we've both been quite consistent."

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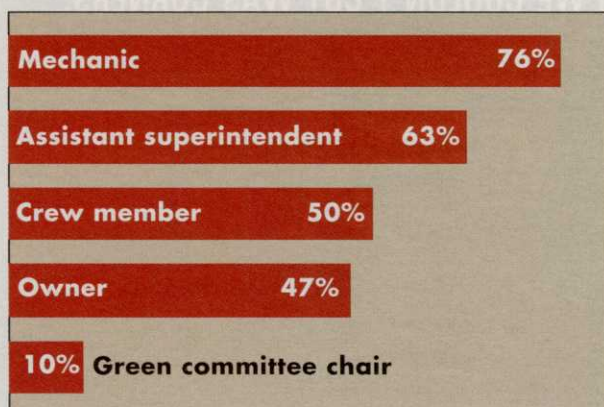
GOLF COURSE NEWS

NEWS POLL

WHAT IS THE SINGLE MOST IMPORTANT FACTOR WHEN PURCHASING MOWERS?



WHO DO YOU INVOLVE IN THE PURCHASING DECISION?



♦ Many people will impact my decision on buying equipment. The owner needs to feel confident about the equipment I am buying, I need to know if the mechanic can work on it and I need to know from crew members if it is useable in the field.

— Pat Shay, superintendent, Thousand Hills Golf Resort

♦ The single most important factor when purchasing mowers is the service. If you can't receive adequate service from the distributor, no amount of savings will make up for this shortfall.

— Kevin Goolsby, superintendent, The Sportsman Golf Resort

Manufacturers tweak products

Continued from page 1

the same reliability, quality and value for price as models currently on the market.

"I don't think you could say we are moving away from new technology," Wright said. "It is just a matter of reading when the industry is ready for a big jump. There are a lot of things that can be done, but you have to have an economic model in place to make new technology viable."

Larry Jones, product manager for fairway and rotary mowers for Textron Golf Turf and Specialty Products, agreed.

"We are challenged with creating the latest in technology but also focusing on the customers' needs and wants," said Jones. "But at the end of the day it has to present value to the customer."

With that value proposition in mind, manufacturers are making incremental improvements to existing product lines.

"There is a significant risk from the manufacturing standpoint in moving too quickly with breakthrough technology," said Gregg Breningmeyer, director of sales and marketing for John Deere golf and turf. "So it is not surprising this year to see new products being different iterations of current technology."

JACOBSEN'S NEW LF 1880

Textron's new Jacobsen LF 1880 lightweight fairway mower features patented new floating lift arms that allow for more vertical movement while keeping cutting units in the same plane. According to Jones, the new mower can handle more undulating surfaces while delivering the same quality of cut.

"It keeps the cutting units from spreading farther apart and leaving uncut grass," he said. "We will be adopting this technology to our rotary mower lines."

The company also made minor improvements on its AR 2500, 9510 and 5111 rotary mowers.

TORO IMPROVES ROTARY MOWERS, ERGONOMICS

Toro also made improvements to its Groundsmaster 4500- and 4700-D rotary mowers by adding cutting decks from the Groundsmaster 3500 and the engine from the Reelmaster 6000 series.

"If you can use things that you have already developed or introduce fine-tuned

Editorial Focus: Mowers

Equipment selection process critical to effective operation

By KEVIN ROSS

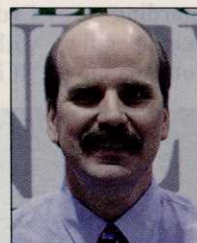
One of the most important decisions a superintendent has to make in managing a golf course operation is proper equipment selection. Justification for purchasing expensive equipment, like mowers, must be matched to needs and budget.

How does one go about selecting the equipment needed? There are many different factors which go into this process. While superintendents will differ in their criteria of selection, some of the important factors include:

- **Price** – For many, price is the bottom line. Unfortunately, comparing equipment only by price can be very misleading. Two machines with different prices might look the same on the surface, but a complete look at the units will reveal differences, especially when it comes to components. For example, a less expensive machine might not have as good hydraulic motors as the more expensive machine.

- **Service/Support** – The ability of the company to back their equipment with service and support, whether it is parts, training, or updates is of extreme importance.

- **Warranty** – Most equipment warranties are very similar, however reading the fine print can reveal important differences. It is critical to investigate warranties



Kevin Ross

because components such as hydraulic motors, drive engines and even tires can carry different warranties.

- **Reliability/Track Record** – There is no doubt that word of mouth in this industry can make or break a piece of equipment. A machine that has been rock-solid in the field has a major advantage because superintendents cannot afford down time.

- **Serviceability** – Having the equipment technician crawl all over a potential equipment can reveal many important issues that can make a difference. For example, by taking a closer look, mechanics can evaluate everything from how easy it is to get at the oil drain plug to how difficult it will be to change a fan or drive belt.

THE DEMO GAME

Another important factor in the decision-making process is the equipment demo. A one-week demo should be enough for a superintendent to see how it performs under their course conditions.

During the demo process, it is critical to get input from assistants, mechanics and seasonal staff. First have the technician do a total inspection and set-up. Make notes on advantages and disadvantages so when the next brand rolls in, comparison will be easier. Next, select the staff members that will be using this machine the most, and have the equipment technician perform the proper training. The unit should then be put to the test in all conditions (wet, dry, etc.) over different terrain (flat, hills, etc.).

When each demo is finished, have a brief meeting with the operators to discuss the machine's performance and make notes for future reference. After all machines have been evaluated, have a final meeting for staff input, and review the notes for each. Using the demo information with the aforementioned selection process factors, a superintendent can then evaluate their equipment selection with confidence in making the proper decision.

Editorial Focus: Mowers

Electric, autonomous mowers still hold promise

While manufacturers are currently focusing on improving existing products, they are still evaluating the market for new technology.

All three companies are considering electric mowers. Textron's E-Plex greensmower is already on the market and Toro and John Deere are evaluating the potential of electric models.

John Deere's director of sales and marketing Gregg Breningmeyer said the company is testing an electric model, but the main challenge remains coming up with a system that can give the superintendent all-day power.

"Replacing hydraulics and diesel-powered engines is something everyone would like to do," he

said. "The problem is that current battery and fuel cell technology is insufficient to give a full day of power. In golf course applications electric motors are close to the ground and get splashed by fertilizer, so durability is an issue."

Toro's director of marketing John Wright is skeptical about the size of the electric market. "The market is not there yet," he said. "This is not a big industry to begin with and if you can only sell 50 of something, the investment is not worth it."

Textron remains bullish on the future of electric products and has answered the power challenge with snap-out battery packs that it said could keep an

Continued on page 29



products into the market, then your customers are not starting over with a new machine," said Wright. "The idea here is to have innovation with limited newness."

The company also improved ergonomics and operator comforts on its Greensmaster 3150 greens mower.

JOHN DEERE EXPANDS B-SERIES LINE

John Deere's new B-Series walk-behind greens mowers have also been improved for this year.

"We have made a good product better," said Breningmeyer. "We have made it easier to adjust the reels and to take them on and off. We also added a true 18-inch machine and a new 26-inch machine to the line. They are the lightest walk-behind greens mowers out there."

Breningmeyer also said that a major new product is in the works for release next year, but gave no other details other than it would be "riding mower."

FOCUSING ON FOCUS GROUPS

According to manufacturers, these product tweaks and developments are largely a result of feedback sessions and focus groups.

Jones said the LF 1800 was tested on golf courses for two years before its release this season. "Superintendents put the unit to the test and the final design is a result of their input," he said. "This allows us to ensure the reliability and value of the machine when it goes on the market."

In a market where innovation can equate risk, this strategy will be key to the introduction of any new products or changes.

"Toro has the largest install base out there to pull from," added Wright. "We will continue to tweak our products as we learn from our customers about the changes and modifications they would like to see. We will also gauge their response on new products and prototypes." ■