Renovation work making its mark on industry

The slowdown in new golf course construction over the past year and a half has been well documented. For those of you keeping score at the 19th hole, golf has seen its first installment of a four-part series outlining the extensive renovation project that his club is undertaking this summer. From the planning process, to selling the project to members, the construction bidding, to the nature of the work itself, Kevin will provide complete coverage of the renovation issues that impact superintendents.

In addition, we will also cover individual projects that offer tips and showcase new techniques and products. For example, on page 16, we checked in with Rick Holanda at Aronimink Golf Club in Newtown, Pa., to learn how he and his club worked together with architect Ron Prichard and builder McDonald & Sons to implement a new master plan in less than two years while still accommodating play.

As we delve into renovation issues, we welcome feedback from our readers — superintendents, builders, owners and architects alike. Tell us about the projects you are planning or implementing. Share your renovation hints, suggestions or experiences with the industry by dropping us a line, giving us a call or dashing us an email (see contact information at right).

This month also marks the return of our Point/Counterpoint forum as we present the debate over the feasibility of organic golf (see below). The movement has gained some steam as an appellate court in New York recently decided in favor of pro-organic golf activists (GCN April 2002). Take a look and fire off your responses to us here at GCN.

Due to the return of Point/Counterpoint, our letters to the editor section has been mailed back to page 28.

The time for organic golf has arrived

By NEAL LEWIS

Golf has become a target for efforts to reduce toxins in our environment due to its substantial and highly visible use of pesticides. The public is becoming increasingly unwilling to accept the use of substances that are possible carcinogens over drinking water supplies, alongside streams and wildlife habitats, or near homes.

Environmentalists, for the most part, are adamantly anti-golf. However, as executive director of the Long Island Neighborhood Network, I am an environmentalist and a golfer who believes golf can be a great source of environmentally friendly recreation. We call our project Organic Golf, because our goal is not to eliminate golf courses but instead to eliminate the toxic pesticides from golf courses.

The increasing environmental pressure against chemical pesticide use and the greater availability of innovative organic products make this a good time to consider converting to non-chemical methods of golf course maintenance. However, before simply replacing synthetic fertilizer with organic fertilizer and calling it an organic management program, it is important to understand the underpinnings of a true organic approach to turfgrass maintenance.

Healthy soil is teeming with a diverse ecosystem of microorganisms. These microbes are the key to non-chemical methods of turf maintenance. Beneficial microbes feed on the microbes that cause disease, out-compete the disease-causing microbes, depriving them of food and water, and can be used to block pathogens, and make nutrients more readily available.

To be sure, golf turf maintenance represents the horticultural extreme. Yet, our industry has stepped forward to investigate our environmental practices through independent university research studies that the United States Golf Association has funded. We have learned to identify best management practices that significantly reduce risk to the environment, and we have also learned that the turfgrass community is an amazingly dynamic system with its own network of environmental safeguards.

There are currently several communities throughout the country lobbying for the elimination of all synthetic pesticide and fertilizer use on golf courses. Without question, these voices are being heard and the stones cast are sending ripples throughout the golf industry. I would hope that those representing our industry will listen to these concerns and address them in logical, open-minded, scientific and concerned fashion.

Our industry has learned an incredible amount regarding golf course management and the environment in recent years. Products with reduced toxicity, mobility and persistence are constantly being developed. Integrated pest management strategies and best management practices are being adopted by numerous golf operations. Improved equipment, mapping technology, record keeping and product storage and handling devices are available. Grasses have

Is organic golf realistic?

By MATT NELSON

Much of our society believes golf course maintenance is inherently bad for the environment. They see golf courses as artificial surfaces that are only possible through rampant and negligent use of fertilizers, pesticides and water. The perceived end result is the degradation of water resources and wildlife habitat and exposure risks to humans and animals.

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