

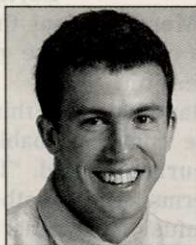
Renovation work making its mark on industry

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 development slid nearly 30 percent between 2000 and 2001.

Golf Course News has tracked this trend and the impact it is having on the golf course industry. While the business seeks a comfortable balance between supply and demand, renovation work has increased as golf courses try and stay on top in a fiercely competitive market. Some golf course builders and architects report that their renovation projects have surged more than 50 percent.

As a result, we are refocusing our coverage to reflect this trend. This month we are introducing a revamped section – Development & Renovation – where we will cover both new course development and the renovation projects, both large and small, that are proliferating across the country.

Kevin Downing, superintendent at Willoughby Golf Club in Stuart, Fla., and *GCN* advisory board member, kicks off the new



Andrew Overbeck, editor

section this month (see page 15) with the 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, to 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 insights 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, architects and owners 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.



POINT

The time for organic golf has arrived

By NEAL LEWIS



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, coat the roots and blades of plants blocking pathogens, and make nutrients more readily available.

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COUNTERPOINT

Is organic golf realistic?

By MATT NELSON



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.

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 helped fund. 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

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Organic golf?

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been developed that require reduced inputs and have better adaptation to certain conditions. Golf course superintendents' skill and awareness has increased steadily in the last few decades. But, we're a far cry from being able to go "organic."

First, consistently reliable organic substitutes for pest management have yet to be developed and/or proven to replace products currently used to combat the myriad of diseases, insects and weeds found across our country's extremely variable climatic

conditions. Testimonials don't cut it, we need scientific validation.

Second, golf is more than a game, it is big business. Our multi-billion-dollar industry supports many families and communities, most of which are inextricably linked to golf course maintenance. Golfers aren't likely to flock to golf courses with extended periods of widespread dead grass and playing conditions reminiscent of the early 1900s. If all-organic regulations are imposed, those are the conditions you can count on.

While you may hear of organic golf course management success stories from places like eastern Long Island or the Oregon

coast, bear in mind that there are certain climates where turfgrasses experience significantly less pest pressure and environmental extremes than others. Without even judicious pesticide use, golf courses in St. Louis and Washington D.C. will croak every year from *pythium*, leaf spot and patch diseases and mole crickets and nematodes will chow through Florida's turf like one gigantic buffet line.

Safeguarding environmental quality should be the primary goal of the golf course industry. Our future depends upon it. Golf courses have and will continue to play an important part of landscape conservation

in urban areas. They also are valuable community assets that must recognize diverse interests. But organic golf course management is by no means a reality. Perhaps someday our level of understanding regarding plant science will enable us to get there, but until that time realistic golf course management will continue to utilize management strategies and technological innovations proven to offer agronomic value and the least risk to environmental quality. ■

Matt Nelson is an agronomist for the USGA Green Section's Northwest region and is based in Twin Falls, Idaho.

Organic golf arrives

Continued from previous page

Compost and compost tea are vital for promoting diverse soil ecology. Compost provides both a wide variety of microorganisms and a source of organic matter to feed them. Compost can be incorporated into the soil when building a new golf course, when reconstructing features on an existing course, or when applied as a topdressing material. This results in healthier, greener turf, a reduced need for irrigation, and increased disease and pest resistance.

Compost tea is easier and cheaper to apply than compost, and its microbial makeup can be tweaked when it is brewed to help fine-tune the soil microbiology. Golf courses using compost tea on Long Island are reporting dramatic reductions in the number and severity of outbreaks of diseases such as dollar spot. A comprehensive organic program will require other inputs that may be unfamiliar to some superintendents. Microbial inoculants, kelp extract, rock dust minerals, beneficial nematodes, earthworm castings, plant growth hormones and vitamins are all being incorporated into golf course maintenance programs.

Critics of organics insist that there is a lack of university-based research involving many of these products. However, there is decades-old research that demonstrates that compost has turf disease-suppressive qualities. Enhancing microbial activity is the presumed mechanism for compost's effect, and is the design of many organic products. Unfortunately, when it comes to brand-name products, universities rely upon funding from large corporations to determine what they will study. Manufacturers of organic products may first need to achieve a significant level of financial success before they will be able to fund the research that will prove the effectiveness of their products.

New golf courses represent the best opportunity for establishing an organic program. Compost can be incorporated into the soil throughout the root zone. Grass cultivars that are resistant to disease can also be selected. For example, in the Northeast where dollar spot is a major problem, L-93 bentgrass is a good choice for greens. It is because new golf course construction presents an opportunity to do things right from the beginning that the courts have required that the organic alternative be considered. However, existing courses that are being converted to organic maintenance practices demonstrate that it is never too late to change. ■

Neal Lewis is an attorney currently serving on a committee overseeing construction of organic golf courses in Suffolk County (NY).

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