

# GOLF COURSE NEWS

THE BUSINESS NEWSPAPER FOR THE GOLF COURSE INDUSTRY

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## INSIDE

### Cause for optimism

Attendees at the NCGOA Solutions Summit emerge with plans for reversing golf's downward trend ..... 3

### Foliar feeding frenzy

More courses are spoon-feeding greens to reduce the amount of nitrogen used, but more research on efficacy is needed ..... 6

## COURSE MAINTENANCE 6

- Organic fertilizer companies offer unique technologies
- SUPERideas: Farley's invention keeps tree bases tidy
- Tools of the Trade at Rink's Hickory Stick Golf Club

## DEVELOPMENT & RENOVATION 10

- Pete Dye discusses technology, design changes
- Guest commentary: Ron Fream on renovation at Augusta
- Sunday River finalizes land deal with Harris Golf

## COURSE MANAGEMENT 13

- KemperSports revisits Harding Park management
- Private Club network takes home awards, signs deal
- Heritage Golf adds two Washington courses

## SUPPLIER BUSINESS 16

- Flowtronex augments IWM product line with reverse osmosis and oxygenation
- Syngenta to test products and solutions at Pursell Farms
- New product roundup

## POINT

The USGA's James Moore and Dr. Michael Hurdzan debate the merits of USGA greens vs. California greens.

Page 4

## COUNTERPOINT

## BASF packs specialty portfolio

By ANDREW OVERBECK

RESEARCH TRIANGLE PARK, N.C. — With the integration of its TopPro Specialties subsidiary, the pending approval to market fipronil insecticides and the expected registration of two new fungicides, BASF's professional turf and ornamental group is poised for rapid expansion.

The group also recently reorganized its upper management, sales force and customer service teams. Former TopPro vice president Stephen Briggs is the new director of BASF's Specialty Products Department (SPD) which includes the turf and ornamental group.

"When BASF acquired MicroFlo [TopPro's parent company] in 1998 they didn't have a specialty group so they kept it as a subsidiary in Memphis, Tenn.," said Briggs. "With the American Cyanamid acquisition in 2000, they now had two specialty groups that were going to the same or similar markets with similar customers. It was decided based on customer input and efficiency within the organization

Continued on page 17

## Investors snag Western Golf

New owners move company to Southern California, hand reins to longtime exec. Heath



Western Golf Properties Inc. manages eight golf courses, including Stonewall Golf Club in Gainesville, Va., pictured above.

By DEREK RICE

SANTA ANA, Calif. — A group of private investors based in Southern California, including former western operations executive Bobby Heath, acquired Phoenix, Ariz.-based Western Golf Properties Inc., an 18-year-old management and development company, last month. Financial terms were not disclosed.

As a result, the company planned to relocate its headquarters to Santa Ana location.

The new owners selected Heath to become the company's presi-

dent, effective in March. Heath, who will replace Western Golf founder Joe Black, said he hopes to guide the company through what are rough times for the golf industry.

"We are faced with an increasingly competitive environment at each property, making the focus on driving revenue paramount, while adjusting operating costs as necessary to achieve net operating income," Heath said. "That being said, my vision is to infuse a heightened level of business and marketing savvy into our current

management style."

Officials at Western Golf declined to discuss the transaction in detail before *Golf Course News* went to press. In a statement, the

Continued on page 14

## Carlson leads on county green standards

By ANDREW OVERBECK

VENICE, Fla. — When superintendent Tom Carlson here at The Venice Golf and Country Club achieved Audubon certification, he wasted little time sharing the club's accomplishments with the surrounding community.

From giving Sarasota County water management and environmental officials tours of the course to making presentations at other area clubs during member-guest outings, Carlson has

been busy spreading the word.

However, his latest community

sory committee that is creating future golf course development and management standards for Sarasota County.

"When I came to Venice Golf and Country Club I made it clear that I was not comfortable living up to standards, I wanted to set standards," said Carlson. "I hope these actions lead to sustainable community development."

Sarasota County's Board of Commissioners charged



Carlson is restoring natural wetlands at Venice G&CC.

effort will have a much broader impact. Carlson is part of an advi-

## In spite of drought Black Hills blooming

By DEREK RICE

RAPID CITY, S.D. — In the shadow of the Black Hills in South Dakota, architect Ron Farris is putting the finishing touches on the Golf Club at Red Rock, nine holes of which should open this month, against Farris' advice.

"You'd love to have as much maturity as possible on a golf course," he said. "It's not perfect, but that's mostly because of the drought last year."

Red Rock is one of seven active South Dakota projects according to the National Golf Foundation. The crown jewel of this group, Farris said, is the Graham Marsh-designed Sutton Bay Golf

Continued on page 12

Continued on page 20

## Western Golf sold

Continued from page 1

company said its long-term focus will continue to be on driving revenue at the property level, while assuming a more aggressive growth strategy. Part of this strategy is to take equity positions in deals as the right opportunities present themselves.

"We understand how the golf business has changed over the last few years. Owners need partners in their business, in addition to operators," Heath said. "We intend to focus our growth on course owners who want long-term vision and support from an established, sound business network."

The exact reasons behind the sale are not clear, but Western Golf is currently one of the defendants, along with Thunderbirds Golf Course in Phoenix, in a pending \$20 million lawsuit filed by the family of 15-year-old Nils Beeman. Beeman died last July after contracting a virus suspected to be linked to water-handling procedures at Western Golf-managed Thunderbirds. Last August, 84 people in Maricopa County contracted the Norwalk Virus, with the common denominator being the water at Thunderbirds. In November, the medical examiner's office determined the cause of Beeman's death was asphyxia due to vomiting caused by the virus, making him the lone casualty of the outbreak.

His death led to widespread changes in the way water is handled on golf courses, not only locally, but nationwide. However, the negative press generated by the incident led to severely decreased rounds at the course, which was sold to a pair of local businessmen for \$4.8 million in a foreclosure auction last December (GCN, Feb. 2003).

Western Golf first became affiliated with Thunderbirds prior to its opening in 2001. The company served as a construction consultant for the course, which was designed by PGA Tour Design Services Inc. with cooperative efforts of local professional golfers Tom Lehman, Howard Twitty and Billy Mayfair.

Intrawest Golf took over management of the course when the course's lender, Bank One Corp., foreclosed on the property in September for defaulting on a \$6.6 million loan, but the new owners ended that contract at the time of the sale and said they plan to run the course themselves as MGC Properties LLC. ■

## PCN seeing success

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of Graves' two companies. At the World Conference on Club Management in February, Private Club Network was recognized as New Product of the Year. Creative Golf Marketing was recognized as Membership Marketing Firm of the Year for the third straight time.

"We couldn't be more pleased

to be recognized with these awards, especially three years in a row," Graves said. "We feel it validates the services we're able to deliver to our clients."

Graves said he hopes to eventually have 250 member clubs in Private Club Network.

"Obviously, the industry continues to weaken and the prominence of my two companies creates a strong demand," Graves said. ■

## Heritage Golf

Continued from previous page

extremely fortunate to be able to add them to our portfolio," Husband said. "Our mission all along has been to associate the Heritage name with the finest golf properties in the country. We continue to fulfill our mission with the addition of Washington National and Trophy Lake to our

family of clubs."

Washington National is a John Fought-designed 18-hole daily-fee course with a University of Washington theme. Trophy Lake, designed by Fought and design partner Tom Lehman, is located near Olympic Range and Mount Ranier and offers both golf and fishing at its location. Both courses opened in 1999. ■

— Derek Rice

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