

## Necessity is the mother of invention

I first met superintendent John Farley in 1998, when he was working at Fairways and Bluewater Resort and Golf Club on the island of Boracay in the Philippines. Being on an island in a developing country made certain resources scarce (including water), so Farley had to use his creativity to make things work.

He recycled anything that would decompose to make his own compost, carved notches into the wooden tee markers so they would double as cigar holders and made trash cans out of sections of PVC with poured concrete bottoms that were wrapped in seamless wicker. He also showed me a prototype of his hand-held spot herbicide applicator he called "Clappy the Weed Killer."

Farley, who now works at Teal Bend Golf Club in Sacramento, Calif. (see story page 9), was just the first of many innovative superintendents I would meet.

In this month's issue, *Golf Course News* showcases several superintendents who have used their inventive smarts to stay



Andrew Overbeck, editor

ahead of the game. Frank Dobie, superintendent at The Sharon Club in Sharon Center, Ohio, uses the latest in plumbing technology to take a look underground and find blocked drain tiles in his greens. While you can rent a "See Snake" from your local plumber, Dobie plunked down eight large and bought one for his club. He said the unit has saved the club time and money and has improved the quality of its greens – which he added also leads to increased job security (see story page 9).

Job security was one of the things on superintendent Paul White's mind when he took over the superintendent's position at Olde Mill Golf Club in Portage, Michigan.

After looking at the fungicide budget and noticing no improvement in the quality of the greens, he decided that he needed to discover something that would help strengthen his turfgrass. "The place was going downhill," White

recalled (see story page 9).

White decided to see what biostimulants could do to im-

further. Mihailides, who invented his underground hose reel in 1999 while a superintendent at Boulder Hills Golf and Country Club in Rhode Island, now works for Reelcraft Indus-



prove turf quality. He set up 45 different 1,000-square-foot test plots in a fairway to test various products. While the tests are still ongoing, he now uses an enzyme-based product called Vital Reactions on all of his greens and has experienced better turf conditions while also using fewer chemicals.

Former superintendent David Mihailides has taken his devotion to his invention one step

tries as a sale representative (see story page 24).

Having invested a lot of time and much of his life savings in the development of the product, Mihailides eventually realized he had no choice but to make the innovative product sell. "I am enjoying the success of my invention," he said. "It is exciting."

Who knows, "Clappy the Weed Killer" may have a future yet.

### POINT

## Audubon program is losing its appeal

By KEVIN J. ROSS, CGCS

No one can debate that Audubon International's establishment of the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program (ACSP) for golf courses in 1991 was a great idea. However, the program hasn't exploded like some thought it would. Over the past few years, the program has started to lose the appeal it once enjoyed.

With approximately 17,000 golf courses in the United States, a mere 13 percent (about 2,000) have joined the program to some degree. These are certainly not very big numbers for a 12-year period. As far as ACSP certified golf courses, slightly less than two percent (about 300) of the total golf courses in the United States have reached that status. Yet Audubon International has a goal of signing up 50 percent of the courses in the U.S. within the next five years. I certainly wish them luck, but how do they expect to add another 6,500 courses over the next five years?

Why is the ACSP for golf courses losing its appeal? In today's depressed economy the \$150 annual membership fee is a lot of money for some clubs – especially if they have no intention of working toward ACSP certification. Maybe if the membership fee drops to \$25 per year, they might have success in obtaining more members.

Then what about becoming certified? Most clubs cannot justify the man-hours spent on the work needed to become certified. The main focus of a golf course operation is the condition of the course. Few superintendents can say, "Everything is perfect on my course, so let's work on ACSP certification."



Kevin J. Ross, CGCS

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### COUNTERPOINT

## Audubon program makes good business sense

By KEVIN A. FLETCHER

The golf industry is going through an environmental adolescence of sorts. Like many industries, golf has accomplished much when it comes to protecting the environment, but many opportunities for improvement remain. While a growing number of superintendents are embracing their role as environmental stewards, the percentage of those making this commitment remains small. More than 2,000 golf courses have committed to environmental leadership through either the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program (ACSP) or the Signature Program. Yet, this represents only 13 percent of all the courses in the United States.

Part of the problem may stem from a misperception that the ACSP takes too much money, time or labor. This is simply not true. In fact, it can save you all three.

The ACSP has a \$150 per year membership fee – which, as one superintendent stated, is easily covered by recycling bottles and cans on your course. Likewise, while some members elect to invest money in ACSP projects, the return on this initial investment can be significant.

For instance, Village Links of Glen Ellyn in Illinois watched an initial investment of \$5,000 toward ACSP projects yield \$30,000 in savings. For most members, however, it takes very little money to accomplish the goals of the program and earn certification, yet the return on investment remains. Finally, the program is designed to dovetail seamlessly with many of the day-to-day activities of golf



Kevin A. Fletcher

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## Ross on Audubon

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A superintendent once commented to me that his club's response to achieving certification was, "If it's a lot of work for just another plaque on the wall, forget it. People play golf here for the condition of the golf course and not how many birds are on the property. Concentrate your efforts on golf course conditioning." Perhaps this is a little harsh, but it is certainly to the point.

There are a few areas of the program that have affected the golfing environment. One of the first practices the ACSP advised was the "reduced maintenance" approach. The main idea was to eliminate acreage on a golf course by taking out-of-play areas and naturalizing them. The initial thought of reducing maintenance and cutting labor costs seemed to catch on quickly. Many superintendents embraced this idea and proceeded to naturalize. Now many golf courses have reverted back to maintaining these areas. There are many different reasons for this reversion, but the primary reason was speed of play. When natural areas begin to constrict the playing area, players spend more time looking for lost golf balls instead of playing golf.

What about promoting wildlife on the golf course? This has been an area of dispute for many courses. The problem stems from promoting wildlife species that cause destruction of property. Some of these destructive species include beavers, muskrats, elk, deer, voles, mar-

mots, prairie dogs and geese. For example, the prairie dog (aka ground squirrel) is a tremendous pest throughout the Western United States. Their burrowing creates numerous problems throughout the golf course from bunkers to rough areas. Many golf courses have to eradicate this species each year to minimize damage. The word "eradication" doesn't sit very well with the ACSP.

Another dubious promise is that the ACSP will save courses money. If that was true, everyone would jump on the bandwagon. According to Audubon, you can save money by reducing chemical, water and energy use. No professor in turf school, or anyone I've worked for the last 30 years, told me I had to join the ACSP to make those decisions. Many superintendents have practiced Integrated Plant/Pest Management (IPM) for years, and this management plan covers the aforementioned areas in detail.

So where does this leave the program? The ACSP certainly is not being discussed very much between peers. Some superintendents I've talked with are even getting tired of hearing the phrase "steward of the environment." Maybe too much environmental jargon was thrown down our throats too fast. Whatever it is, for the program to succeed, Audubon International must go back to the drawing board. ■

Kevin J. Ross, is director of golf course management at the Country Club of the Rockies in Edwards, Colo.

## Fletcher makes case

Continued from previous page

course management. As a result, it does not add a great deal of labor or time.

It's time for the golf industry to replicate other industry successes and seize the opportunities to reduce water and resource use, reduce maintenance costs, eliminate waste, and lower energy bills – all in the name of good environmental stewardship. With 75 percent of superintendents expecting either no increase or reduced operating budgets in the coming year (according to a Dec. 2002 *Golf Course News Poll*), reducing costs is more relevant than ever. The ACSP can help courses realize these savings.

Let's explore some of these environmental savings opportunities. By focusing on cultural practices and Integrated Pest Management programs through the ACSP, courses can see dramatic chemical use reductions. Less chemical use means money saved on product purchased, as well as on time and labor for preparation, application and clean-up, among other things.

According to our annual "Managed Lands Survey of Golf Courses," at least 75 percent of ACSP members have recorded a reduction in pesticides costs. Less pesticide use also reduces potential for spills and contamination, and avoids associated cleanup costs, regulatory fines and increased insurance premiums.

What about water use? The ACSP helps you save money by eliminating non-targeted water-

ing (i.e., sidewalks, pathways and ponds), ensuring well-maintained irrigation systems, incorporating evapotranspiration and weather data into irrigation schedules, etc. Our "Managed Lands Survey" indicates that 89 percent of ACSP golf courses have improved their irrigation systems or the ways water is applied and as a result, a majority of those courses report a direct reduction in water costs. Reduced irrigation use also leads to reduced electricity costs.

What about maintenance costs? Our "Managed Lands Survey" reveals that ACSP member courses increased the non-mown areas of their course by an average of 22 acres per course without sacrificing play – resulting in reduced mowing time, gas and equipment maintenance.

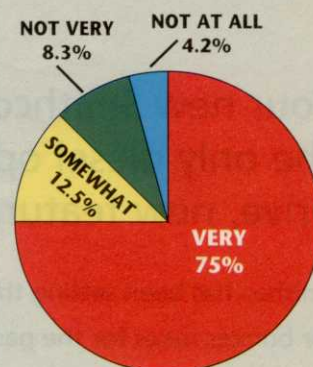
There are other intangible business benefits the entire industry should consider. For instance, policy-makers and regulators like to see successful voluntary environmental action in an industry. However, if the 13 percent ACSP membership rate is a reflection the golf industry's level of environmental commitment, it's easy to see why many agencies, environmental activists and communities still speak of golf courses negatively. Having 50 percent of all courses take action and see positive environmental results through efforts like the ACSP can help to reduce the potential for increased regulation, and less regulation means lower regulatory compliance costs.

The golf industry has the opportunity to become an environ-

## GOLF COURSE NEWS POLL

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**How important is environmental stewardship to golf's economic viability?**



mental leader among industries, driving good environmental stewardship and recognizing the financial savings that come as a result. Audubon International's education, certification, and stewardship programs can serve as fuel for that engine. It's time for golf course owners, managers, superintendents, and others in the industry to throw away the outdated argument of "environment versus economy" and learn what other industries have learned – good environmental stewardship is just good business. ■

Kevin A. Fletcher is director of programs and administration for Selkirk, N.Y.-based Audubon International.

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