Providing users with more detailed data, Toro’s recently released Lynx irrigation control system has begun to make waves. By John Torsiello
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I
t may be a bit too early to label
it as a game-changer, but Toro’s
Lynx Control System has been
making waves in the golf course
turf management industry since its
formal launch early this year.

After spending more than two
years in development and a year in
testing, Toro’s Lynx Control System
sets new levels for ease-of-use and
integration, says John Fuller, the
company’s senior product manager.

“Simply put, customers will be able
to do more and spend less time and
effort using it,” he says.

Perhaps a bit biased, Fuller doesn’t
hold back judgment when he says,
“It’s a game changer for us and the
industry.”

So what sets Lynx apart? It dif-
fers from other systems in several
key areas.

According to Toro, the system’s
software is presented in a “flat” dis-
play, where all of the information
needed is available to the user for
a given operation without having
to open and close additional win-
dows, thus reducing the amount of
time the user spends going between
screens, thus improving efficiency.

The control of the system is based
on a “hierarchy” that is organized
along the same lines as a golf course.
Areas (greens, tees, fairways) fol-
lowed by holes (1 through 28), fol-
lowed by the individual sprinklers.

This is not necessarily a new con-
cept, Fuller says, but the way the hi-
erarchy is presented to the user, with
the ability to view the system at any
of the three levels (area, hole, sprin-
kler) by clicking on a plus/minus box
(similar to Windows Explorer), gives
a superintendent a level of control
and ease of access that they’ve not
had before, Fuller says.

Lynx also allows a superintendent
to control a facility’s irrigation sys-
tem by either minutes of runtime or
application amount, and shows the
 corresponding values.

For instance, if a superintendent
enters a runtime in minutes, the
 system will calculate and display the
 corresponding minutes of runtime.

Users can decide to run their
 systems by either minutes or inches,
for each individual area of the golf
course,” Fuller says. “But in either
case, they get to see the correspond-
ing minutes/inches, and this helps in
understanding just how much water
is being used in each area.”

Superintendents can create and
edit their own digital map and em-
ploy it in controlling their irrigation
 system.

“Digital maps have tended to be
more static in the past but the golf
course changes over time – the ad-
dition of a sprinkler head, moving a
tee box, modifying a bunker,” Fuller
says. “Now the map can change as
the course changes.”

In addition, Lynx calculates and
executes sta-
dition runtimes to the second rather
than rounding to the whole minute,
with the turf getting precisely the
amount of water it needs.

A “pump profile” allows a su-
perintendent to limit the amount
of irrigation that takes place on an
hourly basis, based on the amount of
electricity that the pump station will
consume. This allows him to avoid
penalty charges for consuming excess
electricity during peak hours.

The system is tightly integrated
with the company’s Turf Guard soil
monitoring system, which allows
the sensors to report when an area
needs water and when it doesn’t.

“It’s all about better information,
better decisions, and more efficient
watering,” Fuller says.

Cost for a Lynx system is in keep-
ing with typical purchase prices for
golf irrigation control systems, ac-
cording to the company, and varies
based on the size of the system and
field hardware selected.

There is sure to be some reaction
to the new Toro irrigation control
system from other high-end tech
control companies. Fuller quipped,
“Our competition is nervous. They
were hovering around our booth at
the Golf Industry Show.”

Rob Tanaka, superintendent at
Oak Creek Golf Club in Irvine,
Calif., which has been a Lynx test-
ing site since last November, has
been happy with the new system.
Lynx’s system architecture is differ-
ent than what the company offered
superintendents in the past and
it includes a number of technical
improvements.”

Tanaka believes Lynx allows for
significant integration, adaptability
and simplicity, which he says are
key improvements in irrigation
control. “As superintendents, we
want to have a system that is easy to
operate but also something that we
can dig deeper into for information
when we need it,” he says. “This is

Lynx’s software is
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additional windows.
a well thought out system that allows a great efficiency of use and reduces the amount of time we need to spend on running our irrigation. We can look at the different facets of the system—weather conditions, course mapping—and make changes very quickly if we need to. Simply put, it's very user friendly.

Training staff to either manage or merely understand how the new system works has been easy, Tanaka says.

Lynx should create efficiencies in Tanaka's water management program, which he adds will translate into cost savings for his course in the long run.

Old Chatham Golf Club in Durham, N.C. has been another test site for Lynx. Head golf course superintendent Brian Powell says his experience with the system so far has been positive. His facility has been a test site for the system since last winter. From his experience using the system, he describes it as easy to use, intuitive and flexible.

"It is a time saving, powerful tool that can be expandable when needed," he says. "I'm a second generation golf course superintendent and I have not seen anything that has the strength and easy-to-use features that Lynx has."

Powell says Lynx's user interface almost invites a superintendent to want to explore ways to tweak a golf course's irrigation system, and to obtain greater water and irrigation efficiency by targeting specific areas of the facility.

"One of the greatest benefits is that you can create programs in a fraction of the time it takes other systems to create," Powell says. "It's very powerful in that regard. I honestly don't see any disadvantages at this point. We are setting up ours to use permanently."

Asked whether he would recommend course superintendents and general managers consider investing in a Lynx system, Powell says, "Absolutely. As a matter of fact, I have already done just that."

When Darren Davis, director of golf operations at Olde Florida Golf Club in Naples, Fla., and his staff were planning for renovations on the course's existing irrigation system, they went to work, doing their homework on finding what they felt was the best irrigation control system on the market. They became sold on Lynx after close examination and analysis.

"This summer, 18 years after the original installation, we embarked on a significant irrigation renovation and upgrade to the course," Davis says. "In 1992, I made the decision to install a Rain Bird hydraulically actuated system at Olde Florida. At the time we used the Maxi control system, which we eventually upgraded with the Cirrus software system. In 1992, a significant factor in my choice to go with a Rain Bird system was my familiarity and preference for the Rain Bird software. I was comfortable that both the Rain Bird and Toro products would perform, but Rain Bird was selected because I felt the control software was significantly less complex. It is extremely easy to learn and operate."

Despite being quite pleased with the overall operation of the Rain Bird system, Davis decided to make a switch.

"With the development of the Lynx software, Toro has designed a product that I am extremely comfortable will provide the ease of use of my Rain Bird system," he says. "I am fortunate to have an excellent Toro distributor in my area that provides exceptional service. But prior to Toro developing the Lynx system, to be honest, I was leaning towards renovating the golf course with Toro irrigation heads and utilizing the Rain Bird control system. However, the Lynx software made the decision to go with a complete Toro system an easy one."

He adds, "Some of my peers that have been using existing Toro software and have seen the Lynx software have told me that the new (Lynx) system allows them to do all of the things that they were able to do with their previous Toro systems, but with more ease. For me, having been a Rain Bird user for so many years, the Lynx system will provide a very smooth transition to the Toro system for myself and my staff."

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