



Pat Jones is editorial director and publisher of Golf Course Industry. He can be reached at pjones@gie.net or 216-236-5854.

BONE DRY

My old buddy Joe Livingston summed up what it's been like trying to keep bentgrass greens alive in Texas this summer: "I was seriously hoping a bus would just run over me and end the grind of this thing."

The "thing" is a mean-spirited drought that has chomped down on Texas and the surrounding region like a pit bull on a mailman's ass. And, according to long-range NOAA projections, it may not let loose for another year or more. The famed *La Niña* may be settling in like an unwelcome relative in your back bedroom.

The view out the window on my flight into Dallas was sobering. From the air, places that should have been verdant greenspace looked more like the color of Kansas wheat at harvest time. It's brown and brutally hot.

Joe's facility, the fabled River Crest CC in Ft. Worth, is lucky to have both an adequate budget and ironclad, century-old rights to pull water out of the nearby river, so green isn't an issue.

Stress is, though: "We've had one inch of rain the last 100 days and it's been over 90 [degrees] since about June 15. Everything is right on the edge all the time." A check of the weather history proves his point: there were 70 days of 100-degree or higher temps in the DFW area, the hottest stretch since they started keeping records in 1895.

Joe's relying on a regimen that includes foliar, venting, raised cutting heights and great communication with members. He also has a veteran staff featuring a couple of guys who were there before Livingston was born. The place looked awesome against all odds.

Texas superintendents are no strangers to drought. It's the nature of the beast down there, just as it is periodically in many parts of the coun-

try. But the intensity and potential duration of this one combined with increasing scrutiny of "cosmetic" irrigation makes it a different breed of cat. Unrelenting, long-term drought.

While I was in Texas, I spoke to a group of golf/turf customers at the annual BWI Expo during their big event at the Gaylord Texan near DFW. All of them were singing the same sad song: This is bad and it's not likely to get better soon. "We're in survival mode," said one guy who was hiding in the back of the conference room. "I can't remember what rain feels like."

(Unnecessary side note about the venue for the BWI meeting: There will never be a drought at the Gaylord Texan. They have a damn-near full-scale replica of the Alamo, the San

feeling the brunt. More than 15,000 trees in Houston's Memorial Park are dead or dying and the removal cost alone will be an estimated \$5 million. God only knows how much it will cost to reforest the area or whether city fathers can justify it if another drought's right behind it.

At the risk of dredging up the whole Global Warming thing, suffice it to say that this issue is not going to go away in Texas or anyplace else for that matter. Trying to grow grass at a tenth of an inch in a blast furnace while relying on nearly 100 percent irrigation is just not sustainable.

The solutions aren't easy. Turf research – particularly seed breeding for things like drought-tolerant species – is hopelessly underfunded at the

"We're in survival mode," said one guy who was hiding in the back of the conference room. "I can't remember what rain feels like."

Antonio Riverwalk and an actual river inside this ginormous terrarium of a hotel. The place seemed like it was Texas under glass as imagined by Walt Disney on acid. But I digress...).

Houston is getting hammered too. A recent Wall Street Journal article quotes Charles Joachim, the superintendent at Champions GC: "It's like we've had a big 'H' (high-pressure system) parked over us all year and we've had to watch the rainy weather rotate counterclockwise around Texas, like the spokes on a bicycle wheel." Up the street at the Tour 18 "tribute" course, the replica of the 17th at TPC Sawgrass is perfect except for one thing: no water left around the island green. Oops.

And it's obviously not just golf that's

moment. A lot of top-tier courses have efficient irrigation systems that do use water more wisely, but most facilities don't. We have managed to gain some political traction in places like Georgia where a massive effort driven by Mark Esoda and a handful of leaders resulted in some recognition that golf uses water more wisely than others. Yet, in most regions, golf course water usage will continue to be restricted more randomly and more heavily because regulators, legislators and the public at large just don't see the benefits.

In bone-dry Texas, the short term looks like more of the same. The question is what the long term will hold in the Lone Star State... and in your home town. **GCI**