Off The Fringe

Business briefs

Pickseed buys SRO

Industry consolidation continues — this time in the seed segment. Pickseed Companies Group announced on New Year’s Eve that it has purchased Seed Research of Oregon (SRO) from its parent company, Land O’Lakes. SRO will operate as an independent business unit of the Pickseed Companies Group in its existing Corvallis, Ore., facility.

In another transaction involving the two companies, Land O’Lakes purchased Seeds Ohio, a regional seed distributor based in West Jefferson, Ohio, and owned by Pickseed.

Penncross celebrates a big B-day

It’s the big 5-0 for Penncross and time to wish the creeping bentgrass a big, happy birthday. For 50 years now, superintendents have chosen Penncross creeping bentgrass for their greens, tees and fairways, making it the most widely used bentgrass variety in the world, according to Hubbard, Ore.-based Tee-2-Green, which has marketed the variety since 1973.

Tee-2-Green plans to commemorate Penncross’ anniversary with a series of events. It has started the celebration by producing a 50th anniversary video for the Tee-2-Green Corporate CD, which will be mailed to 15,000 industry professionals in the show issue of “Golf and Environment,” the self-proclaimed “superintendent’s video magazine.” Tee-2-Green will also feature Penncross in its booth at the upcoming Golf Industry Show, as well as showcase the creeping bentgrass in a series of advertisements that will run in industry trade publications.

In 1946, Penn State University Professor Burton Musser established a research and development program to produce seeded bentgrass varieties that were aggressive and quick to grow. Since then, Penncross has become the most widely used bentgrass variety in the world.

GIS Project ‘Bridges’

SUPERINTENDENTS, BUILDERS, ARCHITECTS UNITE TO BUILD PUTTING GREEN INSIDE ORLANDO CONVENTION CENTER

By Thomas Skernivitz, Managing Editor

he “Building of the Green” at this month’s inaugural Golf Industry Show should look a lot like the building of “The Bridge on the River Kwai.” Unlimited hard work and pride will go into crafting the centerpiece of the conference. Deadlines will have to be met. And just when things finally get rolling — in this case, a few Titleists rather than a train — the good guys will have to blow up the whole magnificent project.

For Alec Guinness and the gang, it all worked out in the end: The 1957 film won seven Academy Awards. GIS organizers, meanwhile, are hoping for a jolly good show of their own in Orlando.

Starting from scratch on Monday, Feb. 7, and with only five days to finish, a diverse collection of golf course professionals — from architects to builders to superintendents — will build and cultivate a real-life putting green smack in the middle of the Orange County Convention Center.

If all goes well and 5,000 square feet of sod takes, the three factions will celebrate their work the ensuing Saturday by engaging in a show-closing putting contest. The losers get to immediately start tearing down the entire project. Then again, so do the winners.

“Nobody’s ever done a green in five days — from cement floor to living green — and then had to make it disappear almost instantly,” says Lee Hetrick, executive director of the Golf Course Builders Association of America (GCBAA). “Usually a green’s going to stay where it’s been put.”

“It will definitely be challenging.”

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Off The Fringe

Business briefs

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disease-tolerant while also having exceptional vigor and quick establishment. He wanted a new variety with the ability to tolerate various climates and also exhibit overall excellent appearance, color and adaptability. The result was Penncross.

Toro, Deere post big numbers

Deere & Co. and The Toro Co. both had big years in 2004 - as in record years.

Moline, Ill.-based Deere & Co. announced worldwide net income of $1.406 billion, or $5.56 per share, in fiscal year 2004 vs. $643.1 million, or $2.64 per share, in 2003. Worldwide net sales and revenues grew 32 percent to $5.207 billion for 2003's fourth quarter, and increased 29 percent to $19.986 billion for the year. Net sales of the equipment operations were $4.612 billion for the quarter and $17.673 billion for the year, compared with $3.375 billion and $13.349 billion for the periods last year.

Deere expects equipment sales for 2005 to increase by 2 percent to 7 percent.

Bloomington, Minn.-based Toro reported record 2004 net earnings of $102.7 million for its fiscal year ended Oct. 31, breaking the previous year's mark of $81.6 million. Toro reported net earnings of $6.9 million on net sales of $335.9 million for the company's fiscal 2004 fourth quarter, a 23-percent increase over 2003. The company said a significant contributor to the revenue growth for the year was an 18.1-percent increase in international business.

"Our record sales and profit performance reflect solid growth in each of our business segments," said Kendrick B. Melrose, chairman and CEO. Melrose said the company expects continued growth in 2005.

PTI expands again

Pursell Technologies Inc., a manufacturer of controlled-release fertilizers and pesticides, expects to double its production capability with the opening of a new plant in Sylacauga, Ala. The manufacturing expansion is the third in recent years for the 100-year-old company. Some of the firm's products are Polyon polymer-coated fertilizers, Trikote polymer-coated and sulfur-coated fertilizers.

Jack-ed Up

IT DOESN'T GET ANY MORE EXCITING THAN CADDYING FOR THE GOLDEN BEAR

By Joe Traficano

Growing up in a small Illinois town, my friends and I dreamed of playing professional baseball, basketball and football. Golf was a game we played just for kicks, one that we never practiced as much as the others. We fantasized about hitting a home run to win the World Series. We pictured ourselves scoring a touchdown in the Super Bowl. But when it came to sinking a putt to win a golf tournament, well, I can't say that ever made the wish list.

As a former superintendent and a salesman for West Coast Turf, I still have dreams. And better yet, I actually had one come true last year.

My story begins with the construction of Outlaw, the sixth golf course at Desert Mountain Golf in Scottsdale, Ariz. Like the other five courses, Outlaw was designed by one of the game’s legends.

I had already met Jack Nicklaus. In fact, because of his longtime affiliation with Desert Mountain, where I worked for seven years until last December, we enjoyed an honest working relationship. But my construction colleagues at Outlaw had never met the Golden Bear, and they were ecstatic knowing he would be visiting the site quite often during its construction. Jack wound up visiting Outlaw seven times, with each outing lasting close to four hours. I was impressed with his attention to detail but was more in awe of his design and basic construction knowledge. There were numerous times when he would look at a hole, throw out an idea, and then ask me if I could maintain that type of contour or slope.

The construction team could sense Jack’s appreciation of our efforts. Upon finishing a visit, he would sit back with all of us and chat about golf, sports and life in general. Once he left, we couldn’t help but say over and over, “We just sat with the greatest golfer of all time.”

During the last month of the project I asked if I could caddy for Jack at the grand opening. I figured, how hard could it be? I had caddied several times before, and I play the game.

So, on March 22 Jack shows up to play Outlaw as part of its grand opening. I meet him at his car and the first thing out of his mouth is, “So, are you caddying for me today?” I answer, “Yes, I am, and we are going to have some fun.” He slaps me on the back, smiles and walks right into a press conference.

That’s when I start to get nervous. I keep saying to myself, “What were you thinking? You are going to carry the golf bag of Jack Nicklaus. What were you thinking?” Making me even more apprehensive is the fact that CBS is there to film a show on his life. And there are 2,500 or so members walking with us on the course.

Jack finishes the press conference, does a golf clinic to warm up and off we go to the first hole. In order for everyone to hear him comment on each hole, he is wearing a microphone throughout the round. He pars the...
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first two holes and everything is going smoothly. I keep reminding myself about the three golden rules. But on the third hole he hits his ball long. It rolls off the green and he asks for another ball. I’m standing probably 5 feet away from him, so I toss him a ball. Just as I let it go, he turns away and I hit him in the finger. I thought, “I broke Jack Nicklaus’ finger!”

He looks at me and says, “What do I look like, a target?” As we walk down the fairway, I hand him the putter and he taps me on the backside. “I was only joking with you,” he says, before starting to laugh. Right then and there I know the three golden rules do not apply to me.

The next four holes go as planned. I have a nice rhythm going until the eighth hole, when my fantasy comes to an abrupt stop. Jack crushes his drive. It takes a huge kick forward and lands some 370 yards off the tee. The hole is only 470 yards, so my math indicates he has only 100 yards to the pin. Well, I had forgotten to factor that the hole location is minus 10 yards. I give him the incorrect yardage and just as he is going to swing, I realize my mistake. It’s too late to take back. I pray for a split second that he doesn’t hit a good shot. But I’m watching Jack Nicklaus. And sure enough, he hits it exactly 100 yards, which is 10 yards too long. The ball bounces over the green.

Easily audible because of the microphone, Jack proceeds to rip me about my lack of math skills and tells the crowd that I should stick to growing grass. I hand him another ball. He puts it pin high.

As we’re walking off the ninth tee, he senses that I’m slightly agitated with myself. He puts his arm around me and says, “Don’t worry about it,” and that he was just having fun on my account. The next eight holes go by without a hitch.

Like everything in the world, all good things must come to an end. My legs are screaming and my head is pounding. But my heart is saying, “Let’s go another 18 holes.” I do not want this day to end.

As we approach the 18th green, I hand Jack his putter. He takes a moment to thank me and wants to make sure that I tell the maintenance staff what a great job they’ve done and that the course has turned out exactly the way he envisioned in his design.

Once on the green he takes 20 minutes to publicly thank everyone involved with the construction of the course. He thanks me again for a job well done with the course while also noting my lack of caddying skills... despite a nice effort. Meanwhile, I’ve gained newfound respect for the caddies on the pro tour.

The day comes to an end with the two of us shaking hands and wishing each other good luck. He jumps in his car and drives away. My dream day is over for the moment but will last forever in my mind.

By the way, he finished two under for the day.
While little Parker Shoun was making noise around the house in his fire engine, the Triangle Turfgrass Association was making an even louder statement with something else on four wheels.

Superintendents and industry members from the Raleigh, N.C., area raised $56,065 in a raffle of a John Deere LT 150. The money was donated to benefit Parker, the 2-year-old son of Raleigh Country Club Superintendent Michael Shoun.

"This is just overwhelming," Michael Shoun said after the check presentation at the club. "We can't begin to tell you how grateful we are for the difference you have made in Parker's life. And in our lives."

Born with an inability to hear, Parker underwent cochlear implant surgery during the summer. The total cost of surgery, therapy and specialized schooling is expected to run between $60,000 and $80,000.

Parker's doctors and parents are encouraged by early results, although introducing Parker to the world of sound has presented a headache or two of its own for his mom and dad.

"He's had this little fire engine he loves to ride for a long time," Shoun said. "Since he's had the surgery and he's discovered that the buttons make noise, well, it's all we hear. Before that you could yell in his ear at the top of your voice and it wouldn't register."

Ed Wheeler, an employee of Harrell's Inc., won the raffle and immediately re-donated the prize, which had been offered by Revels Tractor Co., to the fund-raising campaign. The tractor may go back into a 24-hour raffle during the Carolinas Golf Course Superintendents Association and USGA Regional Seminar at Pinehurst, N.C., in March, meaning the $56,065 price tag could go even higher.

**Quotable**

"We know enough to know that we don't know everything."

— Todd Ingraham, director of golf for Bunker Hill Golf Course in Brunswick, Ohio

"My pro doesn't have anything to do with my course. He sells Mars Bars, drinks and shirts. He's pretty good with that."

— An Australian superintendent commenting on the superintendent-pro relationship at his course Down Under. (What's the message when you read between the lines?)

"It looks like somebody who works — and not at golf."

— Jon Jennings, certified superintendent of the Chicago Golf Club, describing what his golf game looks like. (We can all relate.)
Continued from page 14

adds GCBAA President Jeffrey Harstine. “We won’t be able to please everybody.”

The main purpose behind the project is to educate GIS attendees, specifically superintendents. The Golf Course Superintendents Association of America (GCSAA) had pondered the idea of building an indoor green for several years and finally submitted a formal plan in October 2003.

“Our goal is to find some part of the golf course to highlight at every Golf Industry Show and to provide a learning experience for our members,” says Jeff Bollig, the GCSAA’s director of communications.

“There are many superintendents who have been involved in construction elements,” adds Chad Ritterbusch, executive secretary of the American Society of Golf Course Architects (ASGCA). “However, many have not. And many others will have the opportunity to become reacquainted with the process.”

The GCSAA had no trouble finding willing partners in the ASGCA and GCBAA. The architects, led by Tom Fazio and Tom Marzolf, designed the green. And the builders, behind Harstine and Tommy Sasser, have donated myriad funds and supplies and will handle much of the construction on the show floor before handing the baton to the superintendents for green maintenance.

“The builders,” says Marzolf, vice president of the ASGCA, “are really the big story in terms of they’re making it happen. They’re going to have all the materials delivered and they’re going to supply the manpower to physically build it. ... If you were building a green on a golf course, you could expect something like this to cost $50,000.”

Although none of the associations is putting a price tag on the project, Harstine says the GCBAA has collected between $12,000 and $13,000 in member donations.

“Nearly every (builder) company has contributed toward the effort,” Hetrick says. “We’re trying to balance the cost of getting the dirt, the pipe and all those different things. And the majority of it is given to the association for the association purpose. That’s really the underlying factor — there’s nobody

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that is going to get any marketing leverage from participat-
ing. It's all being done for the GCBA by the GCBA.”

The architects originally intended to replicate a U.S.
Open green from Pinehurst or Oakmont Country Club. Per
the builders' advice, they scrapped the idea in favor of a
unique design that suits the educational initiative.

“We're going to have three quadrants that will be at differ-
ent pitches, different grids, to show easy pins, moderate pins,
and pins that are borderline pins in terms of their slope or
pitch,” Marzolf says. “So it is not a replica green anymore.
We would have been limited in how we could use the green
for teaching.”

Using the same rationale, at least two or three varieties of
turf will be utilized — bentgrass, bermudagrass and pas-
palum grass. The sod will surround two bunkers and cover
about 250 to 300 cubic yards of fill material that stacks
between 3 and 4 feet high.

As for the weeklong timetable, materials are to be deliv-
ered Monday. Architects and builders will spend Tuesday and
Wednesday rough-shaping the floor of the green. “The core
of the green itself is USGA — which is drainage, 4 inches of
rock layer and 12 inches of mix,” Harstine says.

On Thursday, with the floor open to attendees for the first
time, the builders will begin laying irrigation pipe. “The goal
is to finish construction of the green by Friday morning, and
Friday afternoon we're sodding the green,” Marzolf says.
“And by the end of the day Friday we're ready to turn it over
to the superintendents association.”

“The superintendents at some point in the program will
take over the green and topdress it, roll it and groom it,”
Harstine adds.

Will the putting surface be good enough to stage a “Ryder
Cup”-like putting contest, as Harstine puts it?

“I don't know,” answers Hetrick. “We’re going to try to
get it to that stage, but if it's ridiculous, no, we're not going to
have a contest. But if we can get it to where we can roll the
sod out and it will stay pretty much stationary and maybe
lightly sand it with something to where it has a pretty good
roll to it, yeah, we'd probably have one.”

Attendees won't be able to miss the indoor green. The
project covers 12,000 square feet in the center of the trade-
show floor, with every aisle funneling toward it. “We are
thrilled that the building of the green has been placed in such
a prominent location,” Ritterbusch says.

Each association will have respective “experts” present at all
times in booths to provide commentary and field questions.
“We'll be constructing the green right in front of everybody,”
Hetrick says. “There'll be discussions on cost for building a
green, which ownership would be very interested in hearing.”

“People can either walk up or schedule a time,” Ritter-
busch says. “A superintendent or an owner or both might sit
down with a golf course architect and perhaps talk about the
master planning process and how that takes place.”

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