

Upon his return from the GCSAA convention in Las Vegas in February, *Golfweek* Business Editor Steve Pike criticized the golf industry for expending too much time and energy telling each other about golf's positive environmental impact rather than focusing

its efforts on educating the public. Steve's column struck a nerve with me because it reflects the same frustration I have felt for years. His perspective on the

golf industry's environmental IQ overall — and the concern of its members — differs from mine, however.

While attending the GCSAA convention, it would be easy to conclude that the industry overall is highly motivated and tuned into research and the environmental issues.

This is misleading.

While the majority of those attending the convention might fit that profile, they represent only a small percentage of those in the business. Those who need education the most cannot (or will not) attend the GCSAA convention or others that offer similar learning opportunities.

As Saddam Hussein recently learned, you cannot win a war unless you have the hearts and minds of your own troops. Unfortunately for the golf industry, too many people in the business ignore golf's problems and hope they will just go away. As long as they continue to make a good living, they are unconcerned about restrictive regulations and upward spiraling costs.

I believe the environmentally ignorant or insensitive still make up the majority of those in the golf business. If my analysis is correct, how can we possibly convince the general public that we are environmental "good guys?"

For many years, superintendents

comprised the majority of those desirous to learn to help change golf's poor environmental image. The last few years have seen architects and builders getting more involved.

Recently, the formation of organizations such as the Arizona and Florida Golf Councils indicate interest and commitment from a broader cross section of the industry than ever seen before. Perhaps our sleeping giant has awakened, but he has yet to stand up on his own two feet.

Some in the business are not only indifferent to educating themselves and giving something back to the business that sustains them, they also deny others under their authority the opportunity to do so. Many superintendents who don't attend conventions and other educational meetings say their general managers or greens chairmen won't let them. Other superintendents interviewing for new jobs have reported that their interviewer asked questions about their involvement in superintendent associations, bluntly stating they were "not interested in someone who wastes time at those things".

Though other reasons were given for the actions, it is odd that the last three immediate past presidents of the Florida GCSA have all lost their jobs in the past 15 months.

All are highly qualified superintendents. The same thing happened several years ago to the only GCSAA director ever to serve from the state of Florida, which is one reason Florida has no representation on the national level, and probably never will.

The only conclusion I can draw is that many decision-makers in the golf business see each golf course as an island and don't recognize the existence of golf as an industry. They can't seem to grasp the connection between their bottom line and the bottom line of the club down the street.

Surmounting this industry failure is a prerequisite to winning over the public. I guess it is easier to keep putting the squeeze on the pro, the

Most of the golf industry is STILL environmentally ignorant and insensitive

Mark My Words



Mark Jarrell, CGCS

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superintendent, and club manager, and the chef to tighten their budgets than it is to try to get to the root of the problem.

Merely telling the public that golf is an environmental "good guy" isn't going to cut it. Validated research is needed to refute the claims that we are harming the environment.

In the environmental arena, the American system of justice is put aside — the accused are judged guilty until they prove their innocence. Very little evidence (validated research) exists upon which to substantiate our innocence or our guilt.

What little research is available is extremely encouraging and supports our "good guy" position, such as the Cape Cod study about pesticides and groundwater contamination. Many such studies are needed, and needed soon. This research isn't going to get done unless we — as an industry — support it both politically and financially.

To give an example of the political ramifications of research, just last week I was told that the chances of the DER completing the groundwater contamination studies at my course and at Boca Lago, as scheduled, are slim. Since the first rounds of tests indicated no

problems, the DER isn't motivated to finish the project - they would rather pursue testing where negative results are indicated.

The golf industry, meanwhile, is losing an excellent chance to gain one more piece of validated research proving that properly applied chemicals used on golf courses don't contaminate groundwater. If the DER doesn't complete the study and publish its findings, we have nothing to prove this contention.

If Mark Jarrell, superintendent, calls the DER at (904) 488-3601 and asks Bruce Moore or someone else at the agency to finish the study, the response is "we'll get back to you;" if a representative of a \$5.5 billion, politically-active golf industry calls, the answer may be a bit different.

As for the financial support of research, it is very simple: golfers are a minority in this country and tax dollars aren't going to pay for research aimed at helping golf courses.

Most research today is a cooperative effort between industry and the university system. If you are wondering why there is such a lack of pertinent research, look no further than your mirror.

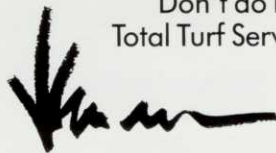
How much have you contributed to turf research over the past few years? If every golfer had been contributing an amount equal to the value a sleeve of golf balls every year for the past several years, we might have had the necessary research in hand to keep greens fees from going up an amount equal to the cost of a new golf bag each year.

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Having spent the past two and one half years managing bentgrass greens at the Isleworth Golf and Country Club, I have a different perspective of bentgrass from most of my Florida peers. There is only a handful of courses in the state that have pure stands of bentgrass maintained year round.

While I came to respect the fine playing qualities of bentgrass, I also gained an

appreciation for the difficulties of managing a cool season grass year round through three different Florida summers. Now that I have left Isleworth, I am often asked if I'm glad to be away from the

pressure of maintaining the bentgrass.

The easy answer is yes.

The reflective answer is that it was a unique experience fraught with frustrating turf losses countered by remarkable successes.

It is not reasonable for 99.9 percent of the golf courses in Florida even to consider using bentgrass except for winter overseeding. However, if a club or two out there is contemplating pure bentgrass greens as its year-round turf, then please read the following list of requirements that I feel are necessary based on my two and one half years (and three summers!) worth of bentgrass trial and tribulation.

Following this list is no guarantee for success. Remember! Growing bentgrass in Florida is somewhat akin to growing oranges in Pennsylvania. It is out of its "natural range".

But these basics are necessary to assure a reasonable chance for success:

SITE

The greens should be located in areas with excellent air circulation and sunlight.

Greens surrounded by trees, mounds, and houses will suffer on hot, humid days. Some courses have installed fans to try to counteract this "stagnant pocket" effect. At Isleworth the highly elevated, exposed greens always did better in times of stress than those down low by the water and shielded by homes or trees.

CONSTRUCTION

I highly recommend USGA Specification Greens.

Bentgrass does not tolerate excessive moisture so the consistency and drainage of the greens must be exact. Shortcuts and sloppiness in the construction of the greens will result in definite problems in the summer.

Improperly sized drain gravel, inconsistent thickness of the soil mix, incorrect sub-grade contouring, and on-site mixing of the soil were some of the construction problems that came back to haunt us during times of stress on the Isleworth greens.

IRRIGATION

A modern control system is mandatory. The old electro-mechanical controllers can be made to work, but they become labor intensive when you must constantly adjust for moisture requirements. The new computerized controls will make infinitesimal adjustments to allow for local environmental changes.

Each green should have *at least* two manual hose connectors for hand-watering isolated dry spots, and a separate mist system of small heads for quick cool-down syringing in addition to the heads necessary to water the putting surface and the slopes.

STAFFING

A qualified, professional, assistant superintendent is essential to manage bentgrass. The care and attention that it requires will burn out one manager. The staff should be able to lead a "normal" life to produce a quality product. I was at the golf course 358 days my first year until I hired a good assistant. Managing bentgrass became tolerable after that.

A Requiem for Bentgrass

Green Side Up



Joel D. Jackson

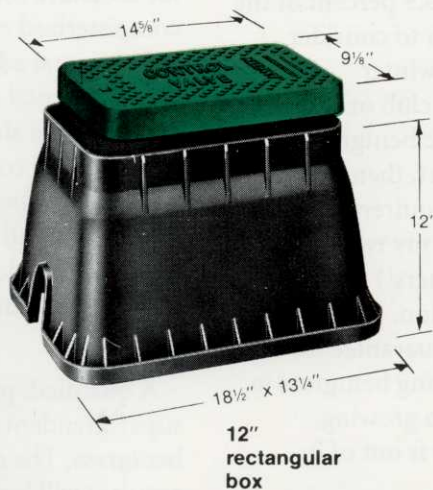
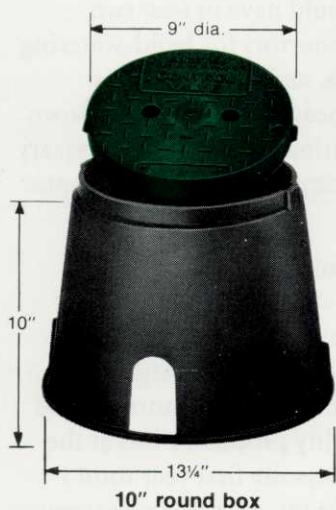
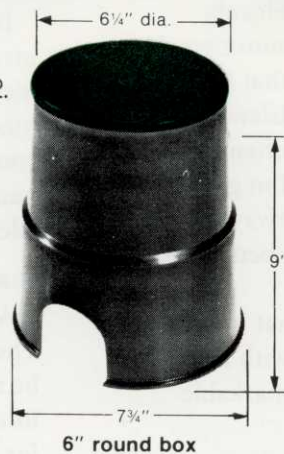
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AFTERWORDS

CLUB COMMITMENT

Even with the first four items in place there will be hard times and disappointments.

Bentgrass is a cool season grass.

Hot, humid days up North tend to get balanced by cool nights. Hot humid days in Florida are followed by warm, muggy nights. Therefore, the time zone for problems with bentgrass is expanded by warm springs and falls. The club must understand that and be flexible in its demands for grooming during stressful periods. Also, the club that plans to use bentgrass should be one that has light play or no play in the summer (Augusta National, for example), and no more than 20,000 rounds per year — 15,000 is better.

The title of this piece is "A Requiem for Bentgrass." A requiem is a song, or dirge, or mass for the dead. Bentgrass has departed my life, but is still alive for others. Dan Jones, CGCS, recently tested 24 bentgrass cultivars for Dr. Milton Engleke of Texas A&M. Dan was to treat the bentgrass no differently from bermudagrass and take no unusual actions to preserve it. Dan returned eight cultivars which survived the native conditions and neglect. Dr. Engleke will continue to test and select the hardiest cultivars for possible development.

So there you have my professional opinion about bentgrass in Florida! I spoke at the 1990 Wisconsin Turfgrass Symposium about growing bentgrass in Florida, and they gave me "The Living on the Edge" award!

It is a very special grass that requires some very special conditions to be successful. If all the conditions controllable by man *are not* met, I will guarantee problems. If those conditions *are* met, I will still promise you some tough days and turf loss while trying to grow a grass variety out of its natural range.