

By Don Benham

What is the old saying? I've got good news and I've got bad news, which do you want first? Let's start with bad news.

Several newspapers in the state have started their annual attack on golf courses and chemical use again. The articles generally quote somebody who makes scientific-sounding comments that are based on opinions.

In Manatee County the school board has decided to buy some land from the University of Florida to build a new high school. The land they are

buying is part of the university's agricultural station on State Road 70. The newspaper has written several articles saying how deadly the land is. Here are a few quotes from articles submitted to the paper. "To use pesticide applications on neighbors' yards or nearby golf courses are chemical attacks - surely not as severe as terrorists but chemical attacks nonetheless. Every day is code red to us."

The last time I heard this particular lady speak was at a department of health meeting in Orlando where she had also said, "Golf courses are toxic holding ponds waiting to poison us." Many times the same people are quoted all across the state pushing their agenda to stop all chemical pesticide, herbicide, insecticide and fungicide applications.

There is a direct tie-in here to scare people into passing local ordinances that these items are in our drinking water and the ground children play on, and the real culprits are golf courses.

Enough of the bad news. What is the good news?

The *Palm Beach Post*, which has been very critical of golf courses, published a great article on golf courses and the difficulty of growing grasses this winter. They quoted John Foy and several golf course superintendents, including Mike Ballard at Abacoa Golf Course, Ray Kimberly at West Palm Beach Country Club and Mark Jarrell at Palm Beach National. I know that after the negative publicity two years ago, Mark Jarrell has been in contact with the paper to urge more balanced articles. His direct contact I feel has changed the way the paper reports about golf.

If your local paper writes something very negative that is not true, take the time to meet the reporter. Not to beat on him, but to provide him with facts. For example, how much water do we actually use? We are seen as heavy water users. You can create your own grassroots support and become one of the people contacted before they actually publish an article.

More Good news. I attended a Treasure Coast GCSA meeting on Wednesday, Feb. 26 at Port St. Lucie. The meeting started at 4 p.m. and had a great agenda. Opening speaker was Kurt Kuebler, immediate past president of the Florida Club Managers Association.

Kuebler is the general manager of Loxahatchee Club in Jupiter. He spoke on employee relations and methods to improve them. The club even has a scholarship fund for children of employees and is funded by members. He conducts weekly meetings with department heads, so all departments could share what was happening that week. He praised Mark Heater, the golf superintendent, for his leadership ability. Kuebler was an excellent speaker and gave at least 15 workable suggestions.

John Foy spoke not only on the weather but, on losing some chemicals and cautions us on how to use MSMA. He said methyl bromide will probably be available past 2005, which was good news. He classified nematodes today as our number-one pest problem.

National Golf Foundation's Barry Frank gave an overview of where golf was heading in number of rounds played and courses under construction.

McGladrey and Pullen CPA firm talked on how accounting decisions affect course superintendents also. For example to buy or lease equipment they passed out a complete booklet on trends of private golf clubs including average cost per hole for maintenance broken down by region. It includes a good checklist for superintendents.

This program was put together by Kevin Downing and I would highly recommend it to all chapters. The good news is how good the program was and the idea of putting it on at 4:00 PM in the afternoon. The bad news is it was under-attended.

(Editor's note: The *Palm Beach Post* also recently ran articles on the Audubon ACSP Workshops and the results of the Florida Golf Economic Impact Study.)

For information about the author, see inside cover.

Harrell's, Inc. Chairman of the Board Jack R. Harrell, Sr., 74 died March 28 in Lakeland following a lengthy battle with cancer.

Harrell spent more than 50 years serving the turf and ornamental industry. His work began when his parents purchased a feed store in 1941 in downtown Lakeland. That location served local farm and ranch

customers in greater Lakeland for many years. Harrell was thrust into leadership of the business following his father's sudden death in 1964. The company soon expanded by adding five retail locations across west central Florida. The focus of the business during the 60s and 70s was lawn and garden supplies.

Harrell then directed the company into the

Good News - Bad News

BENHAM'S BEAT



Don Benham

In Memoriam

A Bull Gator in God's Garden

An obituary elsewhere in this issue will tell you the facts of the life and passing of Jack R. Harrell, Sr., but it cannot begin to tell the story of what Jack meant to the industry and to so many individuals in the business. I cannot speak for all of them. I can only tell my story.

When I left Disney in 1988 for a brief bout with bentgrass at the Isleworth G&CC, it was then I got to know and appreciate Jack Harrell as a supplier, a man and a friend. The fact that Jack mentored me as I battled bentgrass in Central Florida will not come as a surprise to many long-time superintendents in Florida. His helping hand has lifted many of us out of the doldrums of despair and confusion, and guided us along the path to success.

Mr. Harrell knew his own products. He fiddled around with them on his home bermudagrass lawn, so he could discuss the successes and limitations of each product. It was practical, cracker-barrel agronomy at its finest, and it was free for the asking. We asked often.

The most honest and truthful sentiment I can offer is the warm feeling and sense of ease that would come over a person when they engaged Mr. Harrell in conversation, whether it was business or personal. To me he had the charisma of an Arnold Palmer. He was someone who made you feel special and important in that moment.

I couldn't tell you about his business savvy in the terms of bean counters and annual reports. All indications were that he was a shrewd and infinitely honest businessman. He would never fail to thank you and tell you he appreciated you and not just your business. All I know as a customer is that the service and support provided by him personally or by his representatives was always superior and customer loyalty ran both ways.

The industry has been made much better because of him. The Harrell's Turf Academy is an almost-unprecedented event, where the company literally pays for your education, entertainment and meals for two days each year. His sponsorship of turf causes and events was always generous. He touched so many of us along his life's journey, that he earned the greatest riches of a lifetime - the love and respect of his fellow man.

Today I am sad at losing my friend and a great mentor in our business, but I am heartened to know that Mr. Harrell has been able to lay down the burden of his illness. And I can see the twinkle in his eye as the old Bull Gator takes a place of honor in God's garden in paradise.

Joel Jackson
March 28, 2003

