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The course plays down hill, 529 yards to hole No. 1, shown here with passing storm clouds looming nearby. Photo by Daniel Zelazek.

literally not closing some holes sometime to get necessary maintenance done. It is yet another example of an adaptable maintenance department doing whatever it takes to get the job done and provide acceptable playing conditions.

Downtime and weather became an issue with this year's overseeding program. Abbuhl said, "We had to overseed around play, but the weather was either too windy or rainy to do the proper job, so we had to keep postponing our dates. On the back end, we had the Bowden Golf Classic coming up so we had to get the seed down so it would have time to pop and get established so the course would look

good for the event.

"Finally, we got a clear day and we hopped to it. With four guys on rotary spreaders, two on tractors with Lely spreaders and five carts and a truck and trailer we worked from 10 a.m. until 6 p.m. and put down 11.5 tons of seed around tees, greens slopes and fairways. The real challenges after overseeding is trying to keep the golfers from driving wherever as the new seedlings emerge. We put out 'No carts' signs in critical areas, but they often aren't very effective in curtailing wandering golfers."

Also escaping the golfers' awareness is the fact that Abbuhl is trying a new seed blend this year to improve turf conditions during spring transition.

"Typically, the newer ryegrasses seem to be more heat tolerant which might be good for some folks," he said, "but when the overseeding hangs on into late May and early June, we often end up with thin spots in the fairways and slopes when the winter grass checks out in a heat wave.

"This year I am trying Transus 2200 from Pickway Seed. It is an intermediate rye. It has a darker green color and is very cold tolerant which can be a good thing in Tallahassee. The 'intermediate' means it is not as heat tolerant so hopefully, we can groom it out more easily in the spring. I say hopefully, because we are experimenting with it for the first time."

Right now Abbuhl is working under the added pressure of not having an equipment manager on staff and recruiting a new one hasn't been easy. "Our long term benefits are great," he said, "but our starting salary ranges aren't very competitive with the better clubs in the area, so finding a savvy, experienced turf technician willing to set up in an outdated shop built in the 1960s is tough. We get some outside help with reel grinding on the mowers, but routine preventive maintenance can get behind."

Abbuhl has the patience of Job. He knows things must get better. "When I came here 16 years ago, I had to rebuild the Cla-valves and pressure control valves just to get decent coverage from the irrigation system. We had patches of green down the fairways because the heads wouldn't overlap. Once I turned

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on a green and stood in the middle and never got wet. With increased pressure and better coverage came the leaks in the old pipes and fittings. It would take four or five employees to operate and maintain the system, but we got decent coverage. When IGM came in to manage the course, we got a new Rain Bird® double row system installed. When new VFD pumps were installed on two wells over 1,500 feet apart, I could see there would be a problem because the wells couldn't communicate with each other. When one would ramp up the other would shut down. Finally we got them talking to each other so they work in harmony."

Working in harmony with Abbuhl is Assistant Superintendent Russell O'Quinn who has been at Seminole for seven years. He helps shoulder the administrative load with Abbuhl to keep the department running smoothly. O'Quinn is originally from Louisiana, but grew up in Graceville, just across the state line from Dothan, Ala. He attended FSU, studying accounting and economics but ended up graduating from Florida A&M along with classmate Andy Maguire who is the superintendent at the Marsh Creek GC in St. Augustine. O'Quinn got a job at Capital City C.C. in Tallahassee in 1990 and worked his way up from crewmember to assistant in 1998. He moved over to the Seminole G.C. in 2000.

For all the pressures, Abbuhl does appreciate the profession, especially the opportunity to work outdoors. "I was raised on a dairy farm in Ohio. I learned what hard work was from my parents and I enjoyed being outside with nature. Isn't it ironic that part of this property was once a dairy farm? This profession allows me so see nature coming alive every morning out on the golf course. Not many jobs give you the opportunity to work in such a beautiful setting.

"With all the redesign and improvement projects the past several years I have missed one of my favorite jobs on the course – walk-mowing greens. It is good exercise and a time



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Storm clouds linger over the 17th green, a 199-yard, par-3 hole. Photo by Daniel Zelazek.

when I can clear my mind of daily clutter and think about planning.”

Abbuhl keeps improving the 120-acre environment he manages beyond the playing conditions of the greens and fairways. His stewardship includes the stands of native pine trees and live oaks. He has an arborist annually survey the trees on the course to evaluate which ones might be diseased need to come down for safety reasons. When he plants pine trees in the roughs, he plants longleaf pines which are native to the area.

He also planted a number of Leyland cypress trees which are fast-growing, bushy evergreen to provide visual and safety screening between greens and adjacent tees. The addition of beds and specimen plantings of low maintenance native flowering grasses have provided additional color accents to the course that has open parkland feel. Abbuhl says there are roughly five acres of native areas on the course. I saw a couple of

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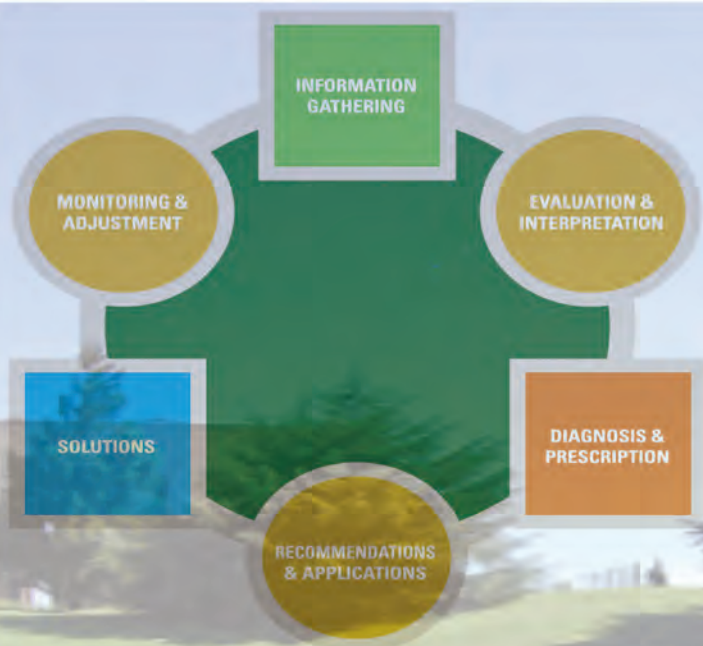
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these dense cover areas on the 14th hole.

You may have heard of people who are called “horse whisperers.” These folks seem to be able to connect with horses in a positive calming way. I can’t explain it beyond that. After my trip to Seminole, I’m dubbing Abbuhl the “hawk whistler.” He did a darn good imitation of a Red-tailed hawk as he tried to whistle one up for a photo during our course ride-through. I commented that I found hawks to be a very skittish. Abbuhl said, “We have a very large red-tailed population on the course and I can easily get within 15-20 feet of them as we whistle back and forth to each other.”

Abbuhl said that a young black bear had been reported on the course early that morning, but he never saw him. The wildlife sightings on this urban golf course include eastern bluebirds, crows, ibis and spoonbills, pileated and

red headed woodpeckers and all of the common songbird species. In the four-legged critter category there are fox, squirrels and rabbits an occasional white-tailed deer and if you can believe it, an alligator in the pond on No. 14. I would think that would be against school policy.

These natural wonders are a real plus to the setting, but as noted earlier good turf maintenance is at the heart of any successful golf course. Abbuhl has learned a few new tools along the way to help his program at Seminole. He said, “Because of the heavy play demand and our older equipment, mowing and clippings cleanup can be a challenge.”

“The past two or three years we have been on a Primo program, and it has been a lifesaver, reducing clippings and allowing us to reduce mowing frequency. We spray fairways, collars and cutouts around greens with Primo at 16 oz/A. Greens are sprayed weekly

in summer with Primo at 2-3 ounces per acre. With reduced clippings we can clean up quicker with the fairway blower and I have to say I think the blowing program has helped to keep our fairways more weed free by perhaps blowing weed seeds into the roughs where the taller grass might shade out the weed seedlings.”

Abbuhl uses Round-up® as a growth regulator in the 40 acres of bahiagrass predominant in the deep roughs. He said, “When the grass is actively growing in the warmer months we apply an initial application of 6 oz per acre, then five to six weeks later we follow up with 4 oz per acre and then, in another five to six weeks, we apply 2 oz per acre. This usually holds down the seed head and leaf growth until the cooler months when the growth naturally slows down on its own.”

His basic cultural programs include aerifying greens five times per year;

FUN FACTS

The Cool Abbuhl

Vehicle: 2001 Dodge Dakota

Last good movie I saw: Hero?

I stay home to watch: The History Channel or PBS Specials

The book I’ve been reading: The Five People You Meet in Heaven

Favorite meal: Sushi, fish

Favorite performers: The Who and Andy Pratt

Prized possessions: My two sons, Noah and Austin

Personal Heroes: My oldest son Austin in the Army.

The one thing I can’t stand: Mediocre employees who just barely get by

Nobody knows that I: Play video golf games late at night

I’m better than anyone when it comes to: Doubles in ping-pong

I’d give anything to meet: Arnold Palmer

If I could do it over: I wouldn’t change a thing

My fantasy is: Living in a cabin in the mountains with Rhonda

If I could change one thing about myself: I’d lose weight

My most irrational act: Taking the key out of a golfer’s cart after he drove up onto a green.

Most humbling experience: Looking into the eyes of my newborn sons



Obviously from the numerous golf cart tracks in the new tender ryegrass seedlings, someone didn’t get the message. Overseeding establishment takes cooperation from everybody. Photo by Joel Jackson.

Words that best describe me: Extrovert (on the inside) and introvert (on the outside)

My best fish story: When my assistant Russell and I won first place in the FTGA Fishing Tournament this year.

My most amazing/lucky/important golf shot: Still waiting for that one


My dream foursome would be: Arnold Palmer, Jack Nicklaus, Lee Trevino and Old Tom Morris.

pulling cores three times with 5/8-inch tines during growing season and using solid tines two times and a Hydroject during the cooler season; and verticutting two directions and topdressing with Red Bay sand every other week during growing season. The sand is stored in a sand silo.

Integrated Pest Management is accomplished by using Chipco Choice® for mole crickets although this year he sprayed Alectus® at 9 quarts per acre for crickets and grubs. He uses Talstar® to control worm outbreaks, especially when growing in new turf like our chipping green and practice facility this past season. On the new practice facilities he has had to control smutgrass and bahiagrass, which he does with applications of Princep® and Blade® applications.

High traffic volume and wear is a primary site challenge, but he says the soil profile, a sandy-clay mix called Orange Marlburg can dry out quickly in drought conditions but handles wet weather pretty well, allowing them to open up sooner than most other courses after a rainy spell. A good aeration program is important to keep the soil opened up for good percolation.

Every golf course has two stories to tell. One story is centered on playing the game of golf and the other is about managing the turf conditions that provide those all-important playing conditions. In the best of all worlds they both have interesting characters and story lines and most of all – happy endings.



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This view from the back tee shows the new two-story classroom and clubhouse buildings. The small brick building to the left is used for teaching and analyzing golf swings. Photo by Joel Jackson



Superintendent Doug Abbuhl stands next to the new self-contained chemical storage building by the old maintenance building. Photo by Joel Jackson



The new sand silo, above, holds dry topdressing stands beside a traditional open sand storage bin. Photo by Joel Jackson

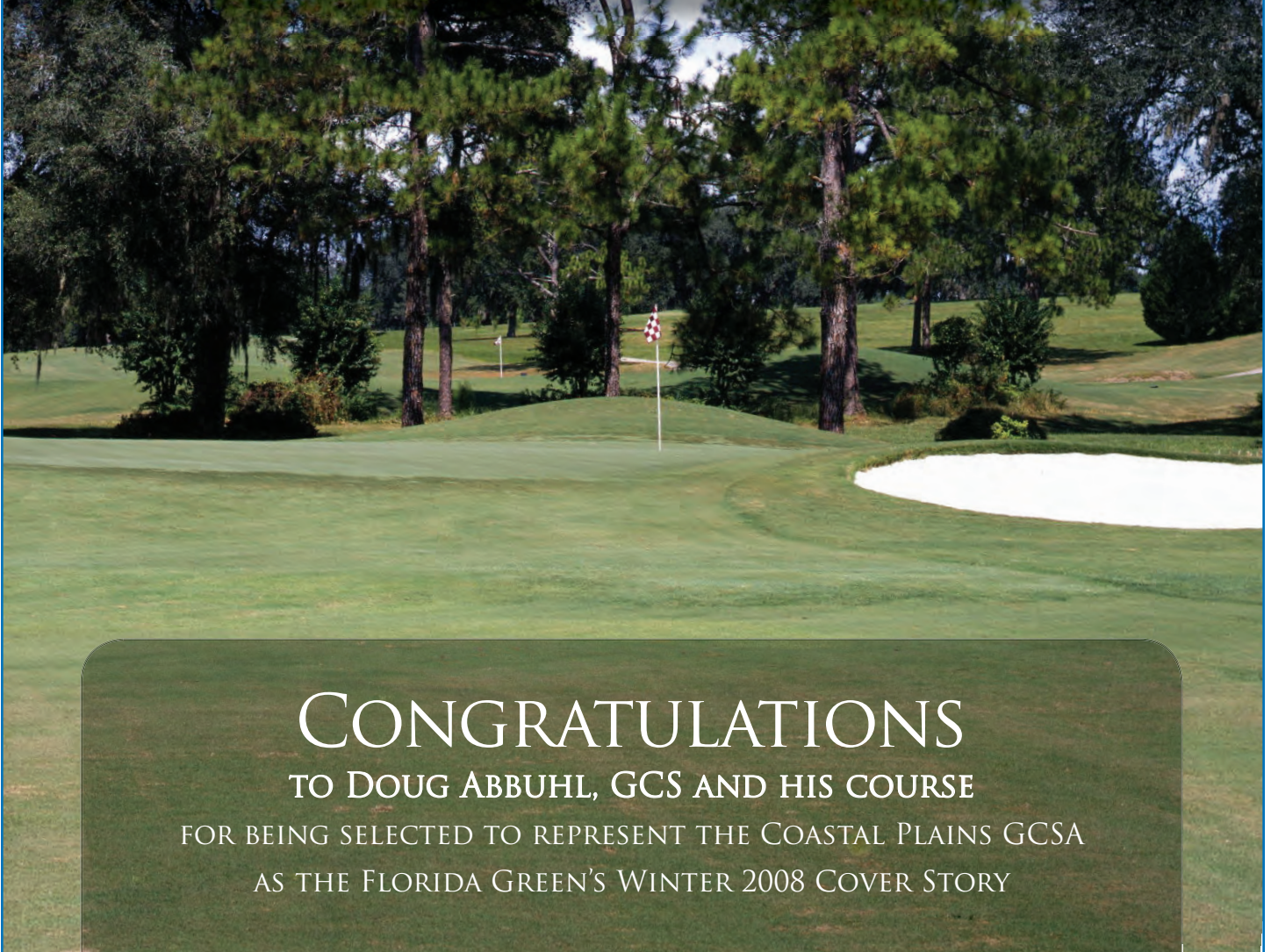


The new 10-acre practice facility with its greens, bunkers and swales will require more equipment and labor than the old 5-gang, pull-behind mower. Photo by Joel Jackson



Wooded upland and native grasses on the 14th hole provide excellent wildlife habitat. Photo by Joel Jackson

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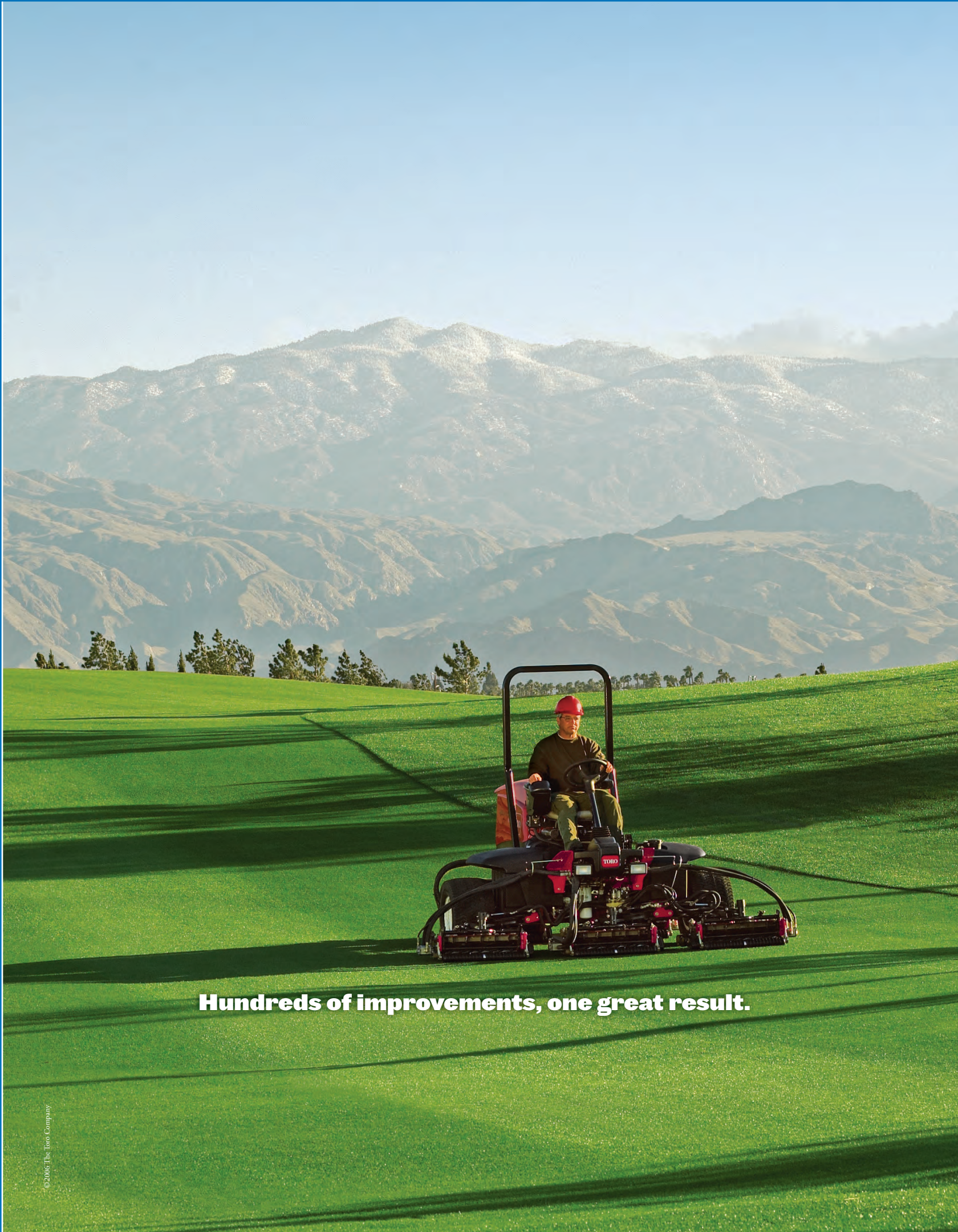
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