

UTEC finds 2nd home for second-hand equipment

BY PETER BLAIS

Bill Barnette has taken a page out of the used car shopping guides that line supermarket checkout magazine racks to successfully market used turf equipment.

The South Florida businessman publishes a bi-monthly newsletter that includes pictures and prices of everything from used mowers to irrigation systems that are collecting dust in golf course maintenance sheds.

The newsletter serves the dual purpose of allowing superintendents to sell old equipment while giving others the chance to buy good, used equipment they may not be able to afford new.

Barnette estimates he has brokered approximately 200 pieces of equipment worth more than \$125,000 since Used Turf Equipment Co. published its first newsletter in March from its Hobe Sound headquarters.

"It's been very well received by the superintendents," said Barnette.

"We'll list around \$40,000 worth of equipment with Bill this year," said Tim Hiers, head superintendent at the 54-hole John's Island Country Club complex in Vero Beach.

"Before, I had to spend a lot of time on the phone finding buyers and advertising our used equipment. So Bill's service has been a great help to me. It allows me to spend that time doing other things around here."

The idea for a used equipment clearing house came to Barnette while he was working as a new equipment salesman in Palm Beach County.



Bill Barnette

"I kept seeing this perfectly good equipment that wasn't being used at a lot of the better courses. Then I'd talk to another superintendent who said he'd buy a used piece of equipment if he could find it," he remembered.

Knowing he was on to something, Barnette bought a truck, trailer, mobile phone and camera. He began visiting superintendents, getting an inventory, price desired and condition of their used equipment. He also took pictures.

Flyers were published and distributed to the 400 superintendents in Palm Beach, St. Lucie, Martin and Indian River counties.

"That's basically the area where I was working. Those are the people I know," explained Barnette.

Barnette knew from his own sales experi-

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ence that equipment salesmen are very hesitant to handle used equipment.

"It doesn't take a genius to figure out you're not going to get much from a distributor if you try to trade your equipment in," agreed Hiers. "Turf equipment distributors just don't want to handle used equipment."

Barnette also knew from a previous position as division director of maintenance for South Florida Water Co. that much of this used equipment was perfectly useable and saleable.

There are several reasons extra used equipment is often available, according to Barnette.

Finding equipment he is unfamiliar with, a new superintendent will often phase out the inherited equipment and replace it with his favorites.

A superintendent at a more affluent course may find it more economical to institute a routine maintenance program that replaces old equipment every two to four years.

"We have an active preventive maintenance program here that allows us to turn our equipment over while it still has useful life," said John's Island CC's Hiers.

Specialization and technological advances can also make a certain specialized piece of equipment obsolete within a few years after its purchase.

With the high cost of new equipment, buying used may be the only way to fit a piece of equipment into a superintendent's budget.

Used equipment is also very attractive at brand new courses where sand can wreak havoc on new equipment.

"An experienced superintendent will often use used equipment on a new course. I've seen brand new equipment degenerate in four to five months on a new course. You shouldn't buy new until you have the sand under control," said Hiers.

Among the bigger items Barnette has brokered was a seven-gang fairway unit.

"It sold for \$12,000. It would have gone for about \$60,000 new. It went to a golf course with a limited budget that the superintendent was trying to stretch. It should be good for at least another four to five years. The course that sold it was more established and just wanted to rotate out some equipment on a routine basis. It worked out well for both," said Barnette.

Barnette's broker fee ranges from 10 to 30 percent, depending on the asking price, with a minimum fee of \$100. Sales have included everything from a \$22,500 almost-new fairway mower to a \$300 sod cutter.

There is no shipping fee for sales within a 50-mile radius of the Palm Beach and Treasure Coast area. The charge beyond that is \$1.50 per mile.

The four-county area is providing Barnette with all the business he personally can handle. Still he would like to expand his business throughout Florida by enlisting a series of brokers familiar with turf management equipment who would develop flyers and work their own areas.

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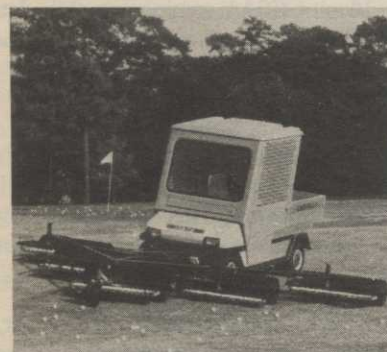
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