## GOLF COURSE NEWS

## **Exclusive survey**

## Accessories are

BY PETER BLAIS

You don't have to sell a \$15,000 mower or a \$200,000 irrigation system to turn a buck in the golf course equipment business.

"We figure the total golf course accessories market at \$18 million a year," said Steve Garske of Par Aide Products Co.

John Kelly of Standard Golf Co. pegs the average cost of outfitting a new, 18-hole course at \$14,000.

With that kind of money available, it's little wonder many new companies have sprung

up the last few years to challenge the likes of such industry mainstays as Par Aide, Standard Golf Co., Fore Par Inc., American Eagle Golf Product (Lewis Line) and Lesco, Inc.

"There are many, many small companies out there," said Kelly. "And most have started up in the last eight or 10 years."

Twenty-one companies responded to this month's survey. Their responses ran the gamut from Accuform Golf Limited, which manufactures one of the 29 products we asked about (fairway rakes), to Standard Golf, which

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## big business in golf industry

manufactures all but one.

Superintendents rarely rely on one manufacturer to fill all their needs, preferring to mix and match as suits their needs and pocketbooks. For instance, four companies included ball washers among their products. At Sable Oaks Country Club in South Portland, Maine, Superintendent Chuck Welch said he chose a company that made a hard plastic rather than a metal washer, figuring he wouldn't have to worry about rust.

"Quality is the major factor when a super-

intendent decides what to buy," said Kelly. "He won't buy what won't stand up. Our products are exposed to the elements, weather, chemicals on a constant basis and they need to last."

Buying from different manufacturers is made easier by distributors who often carry many product lines. "Iron" people, as the large mower companies are called, are the major accessory distributors. But "soft" products companies — who carry things like pesticides, fertilizers, re-fit parts and gloves

— are becoming increasingly important, agreed Garske and Kelly.

Because "soft" products are generally less expensive than "iron" ones, a "soft" products distributor may work harder to sell a \$130 set of flags because it represents a bigger percentage of his sales, Garske explained.

Kelly said the "iron" distributors still represent two-thirds of Standard Golf's distribution network. But the number of "soft" distributors has been climbing.

"Superintendents have a lot to worry about,"

said Kelly. "Accessories aren't high on their priority list. They've got insects, diseases, rain and other things to think about that could ruin their course.

"So a superintendent depends a lot on his distributor to give him a good product line and what he needs when he needs it. If someone steals his flags tonight, he needs to know his distributor can get him a new set tomor-

"Quality and availability are the most important things."

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