

# GOLF COURSE NEWS

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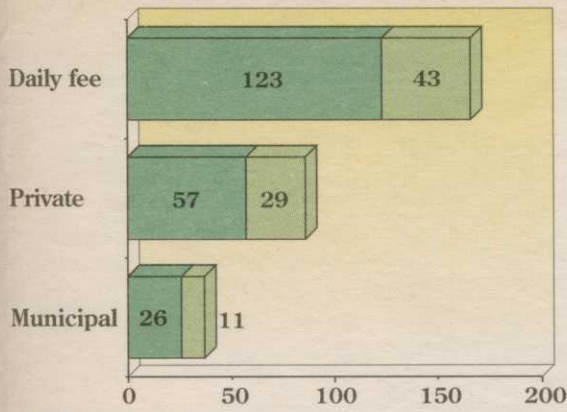
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**Forward to the past**  
*Carnival time in golf course design is an era of the past, not future, many say.*  
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## Pearce eyes change from within

By Peter Blais

With private club membership practices coming under increasing scrutiny by the public and media, newly elected Club Manager Association of America President Jim Pearce is a firm believer in change from within.

"I've seen clubs change on their own and do away with discriminatory prac-

tices. I don't know of anyone who manages a club that discriminates in the sense of the old term," Pearce said during last month's CMAA Annual Conference and Exposition in Dallas.

"Perhaps there is a lot of discrimination out there. But I am not aware of it in the clubs I have been privileged to manage because they've taken care of

those things. It's taken some time. But I think it's wrong to have to be legislated to change things when it's the member who is footing the bill and not the government."

Pearce was club manager of the Binghamton (N.Y.) Club in the mid-1950s when the board of directors voted

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## Aerator patent not enforceable

By Peter Blais

A federal judge has ruled the patent on a pond aeration device used on golf courses is unenforceable because the manufacturer obtained it improperly.

U.S. District Judge Donald Alsop ruled Feb. 20 that Daniel Durda, chairman and chief executive officer of Aeration Industries Inc. of Chaska, Minn., altered docu-

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## USGA specs under fire, face change

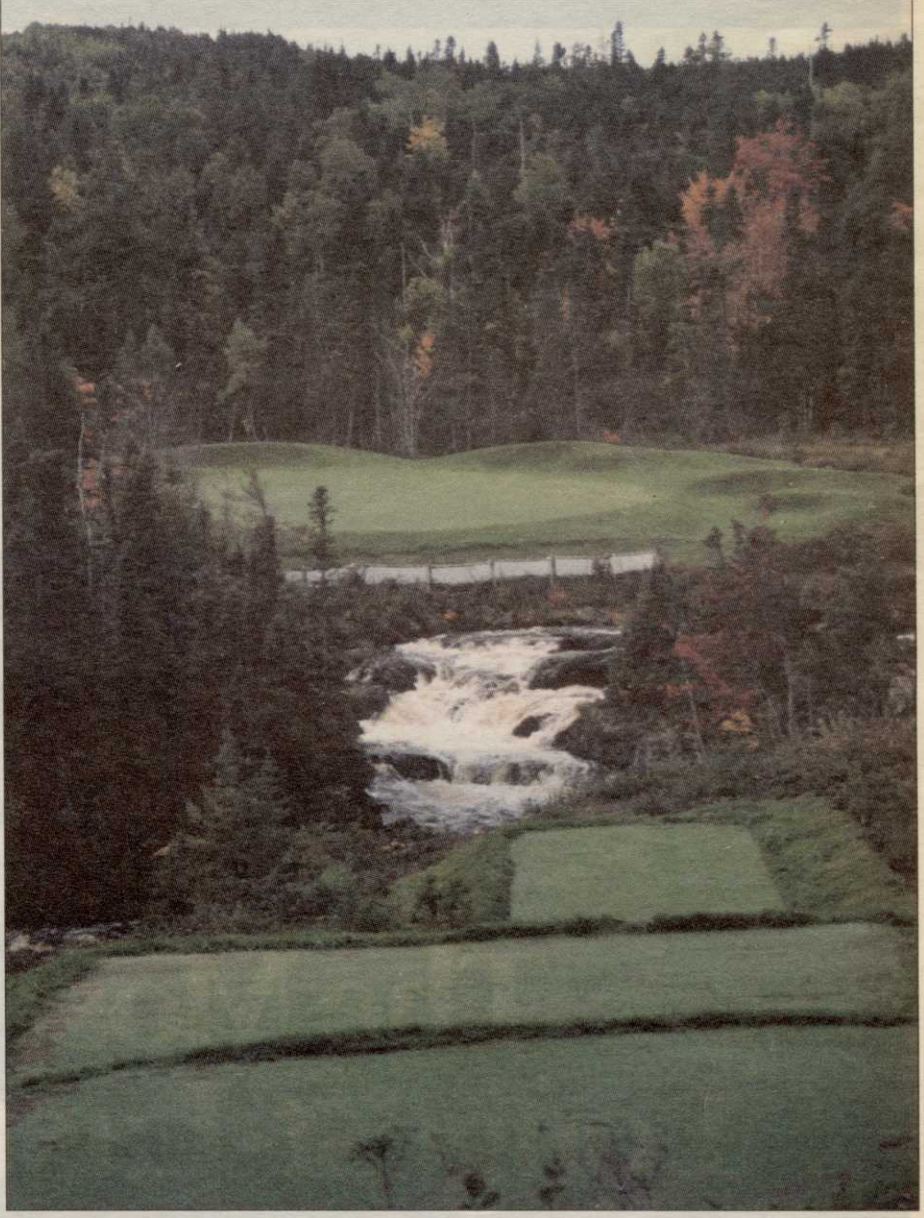
By Kit Bradshaw

The heat is on for change to the United States Golf Association's specifications for greens construction, which have been reduced to pamphlet size since the original one-inch-thick document.

Depending on the source, these specifications, an industry-wide standard for three decades:

- Are not based on sound scientific rationales.
- Have a problem in the

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The 175-yard 8th hole at the Doug Carrick-designed Twin Rivers Golf Course spans a salmon river in Terra Nova National Park, Newfoundland. For more information on this course and others in North America, see pages 28-31.

## Idaho legislators nix field burning bill

By Bob Spiwak

BOISE, Idaho — The state Legislature on March 6 quashed a bill to limit the burning of turfgrass fields in Idaho, which produces tall fescue and Kentucky bluegrass for the nation.

Burning has proved the most cost-effective method

of controlling disease and pests in the fields, but has been opposed by environmentalists who decry the black smoke from the



fires every fall. The opposition came to a head in 1988 when a wind-shift pushed the smoke from a burning field across a major highway in Oregon, causing a 37-car collision and fatally injuring seven persons.

Prior to the Legislature's

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# USGA's controversial greens specifications

Continued from page 1

choker layer, thought by many to be too expensive and often too difficult to obtain, and therefore eliminated from many greens.

- Are non-specific concerning the organic composition in the root zone mixture.
- Have not been the cause of greens failure to date.
- Are important, and have 20 years of actual use behind them.
- Need to be updated.
- Are controversial.
- All of the above.

Bob Vavrek, an agronomist with the Great Lakes Region of the USGA Green Section, said: "We know the Green Section greens haven't failed yet. We'd rather stick with our specs because they work."

Even those who have concerns about the USGA greens specifications are quick to point out their validity.

Golf course architect Edward Connor, president of Golforms in Ponce Inlet, Fla., and a member of the USGA Greens Committee, said: "It is important to create USGA greens. I live and die by it. A properly built USGA green hasn't failed yet."

But Dr. James Beard of Texas A&M University, an internationally known turfgrass authority, has problems with the current USGA specifications on greens.

"The USGA system as originally developed back in the 1950s and 1960s, and modified in the 1970s, is based on good science and detailed research," Beard said. "But the problem of the alternative system is that it wasn't adequately tested before being used on golf courses. You should do the research first, sort out the bugs and problems, and then use the system."

There are several layers to this controversy, just as there are to a green.

The bottom layer of a green has the least amount of controversy. The bottom can be of limestone and pea gravel, such as in Florida; decomposed granite, as they use in California; or crushed shale, such as is used in West Virginia. Basically, the material should be clean and chemically and physically inert. So far, so good.

The next layer becomes more controversial. Called the choker layer, it essentially is designed to partially interrupt the flow of water through the subsurface of the green. The USGA specs require this choker layer be of a larger or coarser type of sand.

Connor said: "In the past, the choker layer was treated with the respect of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. But the choker layer is important. I asked a lab ... why it is important, and they said that when a golf course comes to them with a problem on the green, the first thing they want is a core sample of the green profile. When they cut the profile open — and they've done more than 1,000 — they have never found a properly

constructed USGA green sample. In other words, a properly built USGA green hasn't failed yet — in their experience."

The only problem with the choker layer, according to Connor, is in the availability of the materials. "Sometimes it is impossible to find choker-size sand in an already manufactured state," he said. "You need 1,000 tons for a golf course and this could cost \$40 to \$50 per ton.

"It costs about 12 cents a ton to

*The problem of the (new) alternative system is that it wasn't adequately tested before being used on golf courses.'*

— Dr. James Beard

move one ton one mile. So for every mile away from the job you go, you are adding cost to the choker."

This added cost, Connor said, is why some course developers decide not to include the choker layer in the greens. "To eliminate the choker layer is to compromise the

green," he said.

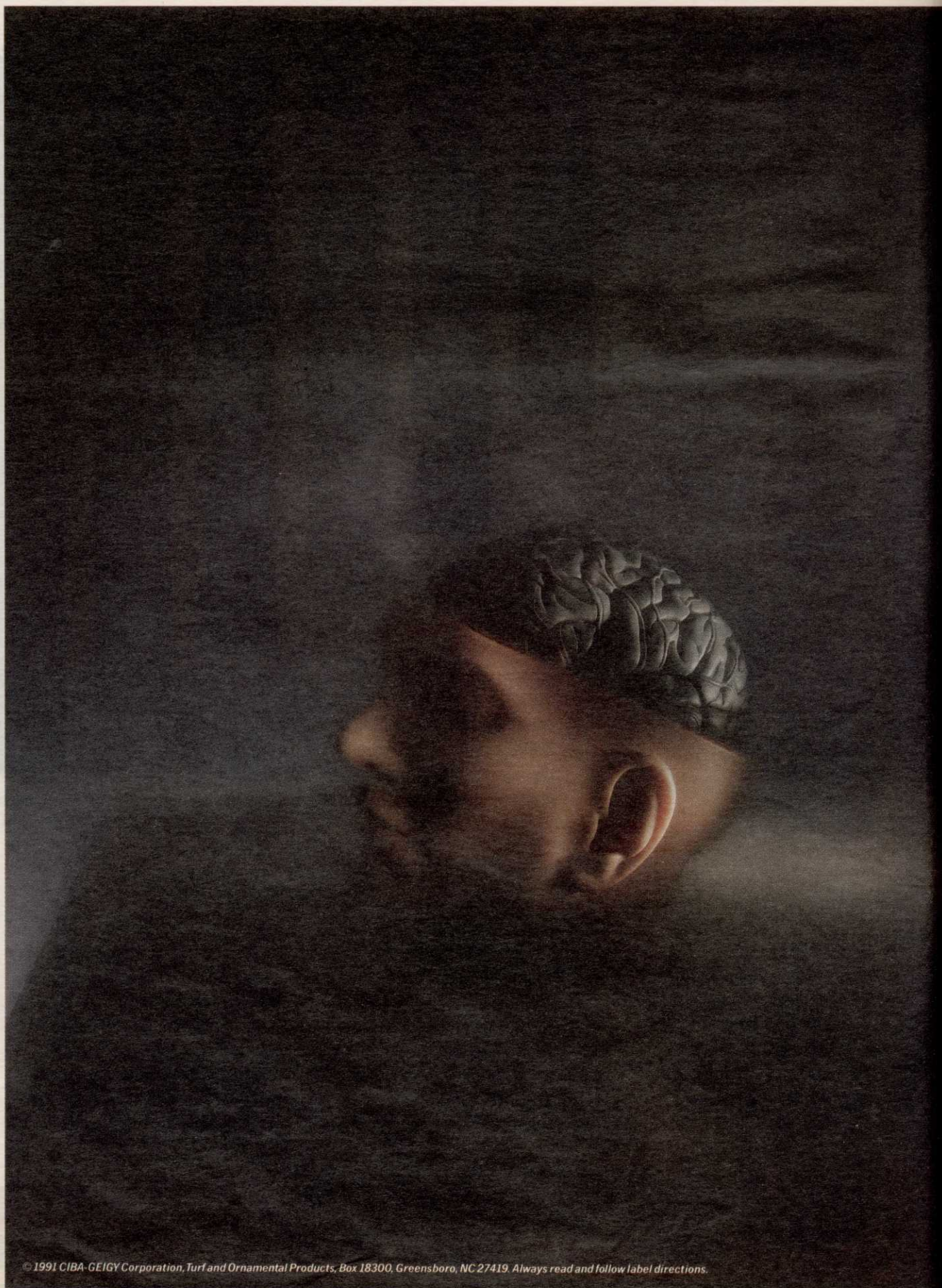
However, he admitted that one of the problems may be in the USGA specifications themselves.

"In 1982, the specifications said the choker layer's worth wasn't proven. There was nothing clandestine about it. The specs said it

might or might not be necessary," Connor said. "But this language left an opening, and a lot of people drove through it."

Chuck Dixon, vice president of technical operations for International Sports Turf Research Center, Inc. in Olathe, Kan., has problems with several parts of the specifications.

"If you go back and look at the records, you see that the USGA said it was OK to have a USGA green without the choker. I'm not



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# draw fire as they are put to microscope

convinced that the failures in greens are totally due to the influence or lack of a choker layer, but I do know that putting it in has an effect on the cost.

"The only halfway decent argument for having a choker layer is because of freeze and thaw in the Northeast."

The top layer in a green — the root zone mix — is also controversial because of the organics in the mixture.

Beard said many factors help

determine the optimum combination of soil, sand and organics so that the mix, under compaction, falls within the USGA guidelines for bulk density, porosity, infiltration rate and water retention.

"The type of organic materials makes a big difference," said Beard.

But Dixon said this very mixture that is sent to the lab for testing can be a problem, despite the USGA guidelines.

"One of the problems in doing this evaluation is that the lab test-

ing has no direct relationship to what will occur on the green," he said. "Once the grass is growing, it will change the infiltration rate. Field research data indicates the mixes will slow down by half after the turf root zone is fully established.

"In addition, some organics are unstable, and the physics can change. The USGA specs deal with the physical aspects, not with the biological components. If they looked at the carbon content of this mixture, it would fit most 2 X 4's I

know."

Dixon added that the logistics in the sampling process can be a problem as well. "In 1,000 square feet of surface area you have tons of material. Yet the samples don't reflect every place on the golf course. And the materials brought onto the site could get contaminated as well. The only solution is to have an on-site tester who knows how to pull samples on the job. But this could cost from \$5,000 to \$10,000, and most courses won't pay it.

"It can easily cost \$1 million to rebuild greens," said Charles Gockel, vice president of Agri-Systems of Texas, Inc. in Tomball. "For \$100,000 or whatever it costs up front for the choker layer, you save \$1 million later on."

Gockel said: "You have to follow the USGA specs to the limit or find some other way. But saying a green is a 'modified USGA green' is an oxymoron. If it's not, it's not.

"You find people saying, 'What's all this organics for? We don't need organics down at the bottom of the greens mix. The roots won't go all the way down there, so let's just rototill some in.' So you have 12 inches of greens mix laid on the gravel and rototill it in 45 inches. It usually ends up being too heavy at the very top, it holds too much moisture, impedes the oxygen flow into the system and they'll get three to five years out of it, sit back, scratch their heads, fire the superintendent and wonder what went wrong."

Connor agreed there is "no such thing as a 'modified' green. Modified can be applied to just about anything."

## REGIONAL GUIDELINES

Many in the industry believe regional specifications would make sense.

"The climate is involved. The turf is involved," Gockel said. "There are other aspects like organic selection and sand gradation (to consider)... What's good in Northern Michigan is not necessarily so for Houston."

Connor said that although he thinks regional criteria would help, it could be as difficult to have regional specifications as it is having national ones. He said perhaps a difference should be drawn between the types of turfgrass and soil requirements from one region to another.

"I think the specs are trying to cover a lot of territory, and regionalization may not be the answer," Connor said. "The problem now is that the specs are so precise they are difficult to meet.

"These specs imply that if you are outside their range in any category, you don't have a USGA green."

"We should be more aware of regional differences," Connor said. "For instance, we worried about using limestone in Florida but now it seems we can use native rock. We had been importing material that often cost nine to 10 times more."

The USGA's Vavrek is aware of the controversial nature of the greens' specifications, and the organization is attempting to look at several areas of difficulty.

"For one thing," he said, "how do you characterize peat or organic materials? It's important to have clean peat, and even in the peat field you can have silt and clay. We are talking to universities right now to see if they are testing peat. And also, we are involved in doing a historical review of the specifications to help solve some of these problems."

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