

TurfByte hobby turns Patton job into 'modem operandi'

By Vern Putney

Fresh out of the Navy in the fall of 1969, brash Lt. (jg) Duane E. Patton landed the vacant job of course superintendent at Lawrence (Kan.) Country Club.

A few years later, he insisted his contract include provision that he play three to five times a week.

Patton still is in field command there, but he's struck far more computer keys the past four years than golf balls. Patton operates TurfByte, an electronic bulletin board (BBS) system for course

superintendents. It has replaced playing rounds as his related job interest.

"I can not imagine working without a computer," declares Patton. No longer limited to "computer experts," this form of telecommunicating is becoming increasingly common to all professions.

Many of Patton's first uses of the computer were tied to duties as secretary-treasurer of the Heart of America Golf Course Superintendents Association. He purchased

dBase III Plus and began keeping association records in a data base.

This made it easy to keep up-to-date mail lists and association financial records. Patton also developed similar applications for his superintendent's job. Some programs were written in Basic, but dBase was the program he found most useful.

Recently, he has been using Quatro Pro as his spreadsheet program. This produces course budgets quickly, easily and neatly, he said. A word processor to write reports and articles also is needed.

The TurfByte concept evolved from an idea originally discussed in a 1987 issue of *Golf Course Management* by Jon Scott, now at Golden Bear International in North Palm Beach, Fla., and Bill Spence, superintendent at The Country Club in Brookline, Mass.

Patton bought a modem, joined CompuServe, the largest BBS in the country, and initiated a conversation with Spence, a friend when at Kansas City Country Club.

Spence couldn't make a meeting at Houston, but Scott and Patton huddled there and started TurfByte on a BBS run by Dale A. Gadd, then a writer for GCM. This proved less than satisfactory because Gadd's BBS featured a "games section."

His board was used by many Kansas University students, making it very difficult to get on line. So TurfByte became Patton's "baby."

With Gadd's help, he became the system operator (SysOp) of TurfByte in February 1988.

Patton since has installed a separate phone line and bought a 386/20 computer and DESQview software that allows him to "multitask" and keep TurfByte on line 24 hours a day.

SUPER FOCUS



Duane Patton works TurfByte on his computer.

TurfByte has about 130 callers from 25 states, Canada and Thailand, and averages about 500 calls per month. (To "connect" with TurfByte, call 913-842-0618 at any time.)

TurfByte has permitted Patton to make many friendships, from Florida to New York to California. It's also a "learning experience" for callers. One found a neat new weather program last spring. He left a message about his discovery. Soon, many were using Weatherbrief.

Hours spent at the desk and with discs hardly are what Patton had in mind as a young man.

Born and raised on a farm in western Kansas, he followed the customary lifestyle lead of "working on the farm" as soon as big enough to contribute. He knew then he didn't want to be a farmer.

He graduated from small Scott City Community High in 1959, just as Russia launched its first "Sputnik." This country was going through a "We need more engineers" panic phase.

Patton enrolled at Kansas University and was strongly encouraged to be an engineer. He was placed in a calculus class "way over my head." He knew some math, but not much calculus, and was not destined to become an engineer.

Next came accounting. After a few business courses, he closed that book. He wasn't into figures.

Patton switched his major to education. While student teaching, he discovered he did not much like teaching youths, did not like the rigidity of the school environment, and hated being confined indoors. His options were narrowing.

Since he had worked at Lawrence CC while attending Kansas University, and had enjoyed the experience, it perhaps was natural that he end up as a superintendent. He came to realize that he did not really dislike farming. The unappealing part was the isolation of western Kansas.

His first superintendent job was at a nine-hole course in Iola, Kan. After two years, Uncle Sam beckoned.

Continued on page 20

PESTS: YOUR DAYS ARE NUMBERED!

Country Club 19-4-6
with
DURSBAN

Fertilize for fast green-up and extended feeding while you control soil and surface insect pests with Country Club 19-4-6 with DURSBAN. It contains a quality homogeneous fertilizer with 26% organic nitrogen — and is now available in either a 0.6% or a new 1.0% DURSBAN formulation. You save time and money by doing two jobs in one application! For straight granular insect control — try Lebanon DURSBAN 2.32%. From the source for premium quality turf products — your local Lebanon distributor.

COUNTRY CLUB
The Better Choice For Better Turf

Country Club is a registered trademark of Lebanon Chemical Corporation.

Lebanon
TURF PRODUCTS
800-233-0628

*DURSBAN is a registered trademark of DowElanco.

© 1991 Lebanon Chemical Corporation

COMPUTER SOFTWARE • COMPUTER SOFTWARE



TRIMS DOES IT ALL!

Golf course superintendents around the world are now using **TRIMS Grounds Management Software**.

TRIMS is the one and only software system designed with the help of superintendents to meet the challenge of today's record keeping requirements.

TRIMS Record Keeping Features Include:

- Budgets
- Personnel
- Material Safety Data
- Maintenance
- Labor Activity
- Chemicals
- Spare Parts
- Fuel Inventory
- Fertilizers
- Irrigation
- Work Orders
- Purchase Orders

Call or write today for your FREE Demo Disk and see what **TRIMS** can do for you!

LABB Systems/Software

6018 E. OSBORN ROAD
SCOTTSDALE, AZ 85251
800/733-9710 • 602/481-9710

GOLF & COUNTRY CLUB SIGN PROGRAMS

Attractive Durable Sign Programs

- On and off course
- Main Entrance Signs
- Interior Signage

Sign Programs for the Country Club

- Fitted to the Unique needs of individual courses

Sandblasted Granite Sign Faces

- Sandblasted Wood Signs
- Photographically Silk Screened Signs

Designers & Manufacturers of Sign Systems & Sales Centers For Residential Builders • Since 1976



DISPRO: DISPLAY PRODUCTS CORPORATION
910 Fourth Avenue
Asbury Park, NJ 07712
(908) 988-5400
FAX (908) 974-8873

plan can keep course healthy despite detractors

annual chemical bill on a traditionally maintained, 18-hole course would be 50 percent more.

While it sounds like the magic bullet the golf industry has been seeking, Green Life has its detractors.

Alfred Luna, superintendent at Los Angeles Royal Vista, used the product for almost three years before going back to traditional maintenance practices two years ago.

"We got very poor results," he said. "It looked good at first. But the root structure wasn't what they claimed it would be. The greens turned yellowish. We had weed problems because of the steer manure. We had little clumps of flowers all the time. It was doing more damage than good."

Putting the product on the 27 greens with a spreader (the liquid form wasn't available) twice a week was a time-consuming process, Luna said. Green Life also recommended dumping steer manure in the lakes to clean the water, but the manure clogged up the irrigation system for the next two months, he added. The greens didn't use less water and turned "rock hard" in dry weather.

Luna was the assistant superintendent when Royal Vista started using Green Life. The general manager, not the superintendent ("He didn't like it either," Luna said), decided to use it, according to Luna.

"In my honest opinion, I wouldn't recommend using it," Luna said.

A superintendent at a major California course, who asked not to be identified, experimented with the product and said, "I've never found anything that totally removes the need for pesticides or fertilizers."

"If there were a product out there that did that (made chemicals unnecessary), don't you think everyone would be using it?" asked Green Section Western Region Director Larry Gilhuly.

Back in Vermont, faced with dropping his multi-million-dollar project or continuing his appeals to environmental boards and the courts, Truax decided Green Life may be his best bet to finally land a permit.

"We believe in the years to come, it will be the trend for all new golf

facilities to follow this or similar organic turf management programs," he said.

"We also feel, with the growing public awareness of environmental needs, our pesticide-free, fertilizer-free approach will be a strong marketing tool in selling the course to potential members."

Truax said he expects opponents to argue he is going the no-chemical route to simply get his permit, and that he will later ask permission to use chemicals after the course is open and the grass doesn't grow.

A recently opened Vermont course promised not to use chemicals, but has already gone back to the state seeking to use them, said Stuart Cohen of Environmental and Turf Services, Inc., a Washington, D.C.-based environmental consulting firm.

"Paul is really sold on it," said Sherman Hollow course architect Charles Ankrom, adding that his research leads him to believe Green Life works. "He's getting involved personally in marketing it because it could be a significant breakthrough."

While conceding Truax "got a raw deal" in not receiving his permit, O'Connor said the developer failed to consider some of the unique problems of his proposed site (a shallow aquifer, for instance) and the political strength abutting landowners could muster in opposition.

O'Connor fears the national publicity Vermont has received over Sherman Hollow, and the media attention that will continue to focus on the course, will scare potential developers away.

"I don't want the golf community

thinking anything they propose up here doesn't have a chance of getting through," he said. "I've gotten calls from many people asking 'Mike, what's going on up there, anyway?' Nothing is going on."

"It's time," he added, "to make the rest of the golf industry realize that, in Vermont, there will be other golf facilities that will succeed under Act 250 (Vermont's primary development law). Golf will continue to prosper because of the public's desire and the willingness to accept what has existed for over 100 years in Vermont."

THE FINEST COURSES FLY MAR-KING FLAGS!



SHOULDN'T YOU?

And rightfully so. It's because of our higher quality flags at competitive prices!

The fabric is polyester and combed cotton and the edges are bound with nylon, not hemmed. And to go one step further, the corners are dipped in a special stiffening solution to prevent fraying.

Any club logo can be precisely reproduced in one to four colors and all are machine washable and will not shrink. So fly your colors high with Mar-King Flags!

Mar-King

REGAL CHEMICAL CO.

P.O. Box 900

Alpharetta, GA 30239

404/475-4837

800/621-5208

Patton

Continued from page 19

oned. After three years of rough seas, Patton was happy to plant his feet on the solid ground of Lawrence CC.

It's ironic that the young man who turned his back on teaching now is confined indoors periodically, reaching a far larger audience eager to learn.

His "golfplay" stipulation remains in effect, but seldom is invoked.

As Patton notes, "Life really is as much luck and chance as it is planning and doing. Times and interests change. One thing remains obvious, however. We must continue to learn and grow to have an interesting life and a rewarding career."