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# GOLF COURSE NEWS

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### U.S. golf course supply

	Daily Fee	Municipal	Private	Unknown
Open before 1990	6,331	2,185	5,146	—
Opened in 1990	166	37	86	—
Opened 1st Qtr. '91	14	7	16	—
Under Construction	351	86	205	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>6,862</b>	<b>2,315</b>	<b>5,453</b>	<b>5</b>
Total of all courses when construction complete: 14,635				

Source: NGF

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## Developer submits chem-free plan

*Sherman Hollow's Truax draws fire, support over Green Life use*

By Peter Blais

HUNTINGTON, Vt. — Hoping to end a six-year battle to gain state environmental approval, Sherman Hollow developers will submit plans to manage the controversial golf course without pesticides or fertilizers.

Sherman Hollow, Inc. will present details of its organic turf management program at a July 25 hearing before the same Vermont State Environmental Board that voted 2-to-1 against the project last September because of fears regarding pesti-

cide and fertilizer use.

The use of a non-toxic soil conditioner called Green Life, in conjunction with an organic program, will allow the course to be maintained without chemicals, according to Sherman Hollow President Paul Truax.

"This should remove concerns about the use of pesticides and fertilizers on the proposed golf course that, for the last six years, have prevented Sherman Hollow from receiving a golf course permit from the state of Vermont," Truax said.

Green Life has been researched and tested on several courses over the past 10 years by a Glendale, Calif., company hoping to make inroads into the environmentally conscious

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## Maintenance costs high all around

From staff reports

Paced by a double-digit increase in payroll taxes and employee benefits, golf course maintenance costs rose 7.8 percent at private country clubs in 1990, according to a recent survey of 250 facilities.

Last year's increase brings the national average figure to \$27,266 per hole and continues the spiraling cost of golf course maintenance, which has jumped 500 percent in the past 20 years, reported the international accounting firm Pannell Kerr Forster in its annual publication *Clubs in Town & Country*.

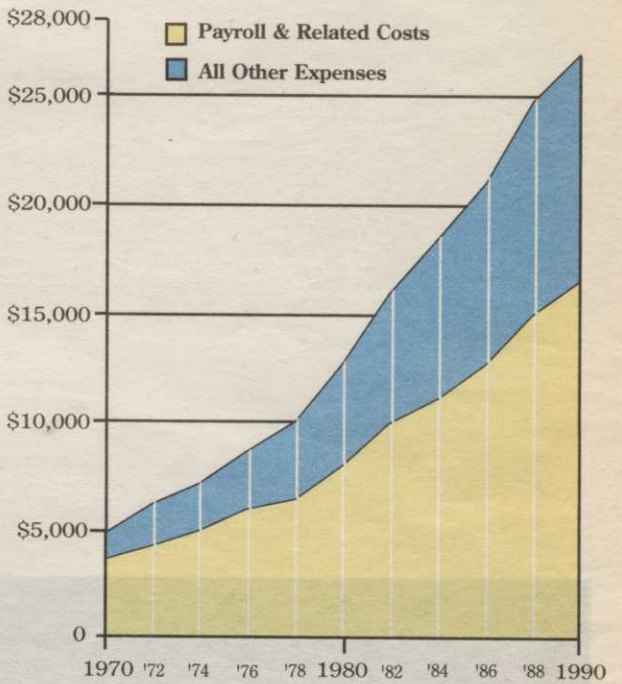
The highest per-hole costs occurred in the Far West, \$34,328. The South, \$27,443, East, \$25,143, and Midwest, \$22,567 followed.

Nationally, payroll (\$14,031) along with payroll taxes and employee benefits (\$2,718) averaged 61.4 percent of per-hole maintenance costs. The \$16,749 total is more than four times greater than the \$3,800 spent on the same items 20 years ago.

Why have labor costs risen so dramatically? Golfers' demands for perfect conditions simply require greater numbers

Continued on page 19

Yearly average costs per hole at country clubs



Source: Pannell Kerr Forster

## Florida lawmakers put water law on hold

By Peter Blais

The Florida Legislature will delay action until next year on a proposed water tax that could greatly impact the state's \$5.5-billion golf industry.

The Legislature adjourned last month before committees released bills to levy a 10-cent charge on every 1,000 gallons over a water user's allotment — a fee some estimate would cost many courses \$20,000 to \$30,000 annually.



*'A lot needs to be worked out before the Legislature goes forward.'*  
— Bobby Brantley

But Gov. Lawton Chiles has promised to make passage of a water tax a top

priority when the Legislature reconvenes early next year, according to Florida Golf Council Executive Director Bobby Brantley.

"We're pleased the bill didn't pass," Brantley said. "A lot needs to be worked out before the Legislature goes forward with plans to tax water consumption."

Besides raising much-needed revenue, tax supporters say the extra charge

Continued on page 12

## GCSAA out \$1.4M to McLoughlin

By Mark Leslie

The Golf Course Superintendents Association of America will appeal a May 9 jury verdict in a Topeka, Kan., federal district court awarding \$1,457,742 to former Executive Director

James McLoughlin.

The jury verdict awarded McLoughlin \$457,742 for breach of a separation agreement and \$1 million for libel — \$500,000 compensatory damages and \$500,000 punitive damages.

GCSAA attorney Robert Ochs said he would first file motions with Judge Richard Rogers for a new trial, and if that is denied, he will appeal the decision to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 10th Cir-

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# Vermont developer says no-chem maintenance

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golf course market.

But some golf industry officials question the company's claims the soil conditioner makes chemicals unnecessary.

"There is no sure-fire organic way to take care of a golf course that I know of," said Dave Otis, director of the U.S. Golf Association Green Section Northeast Region office, echoing the sentiments of several others.

And even though Truax stressed golf course chemicals have not proven hazardous anywhere in the

United States, others feel his decision to use an organic program will cause the public to doubt claims by most golf industry officials that chemicals are safe and necessary.

"I feel very badly for anyone who, either acting as an educator or as an expert in turfgrass, has had their credibility questioned and their professionalism politicized by this proposal," said Mike O'Connor, a superintendent and registered lobbyist with the Vermont Golf Association, who has supported the project in the past and feels Truax



Paul Truax

was unfairly denied his permit last year. "It seems rather strange that, after so many years of presenting expert testimony on how to manage a golf course with fertilizers and pesticides, that now this one project can perform without the use of any... I feel he's turned his back on every-

one who has helped him."

Green Life President Lewis Zettell said he wrote to Truax and told him Green Life may have been the solution to his problem after reading about the Vermont developer's most recent permitting setback.

Zettell said he spent seven years researching and the last three years field-testing his soil conditioning product. Simply put, Zettell claims chemicals rob the soil of its natural abilities to fight disease and feed on naturally occurring nutrients.

By using pesticides and fertilizers, turfgrass becomes dependent on chemicals to continue growing. When pests and disease become immune to a chemical, new chemicals have to be added to fight them.

"Using chemicals is a real merry-go-round," Zettell said.

When Green Life is worked into existing golf course turf, Zettell claims it rids the soil of the chemicals' residual effects. It rejuvenates the soil's natural defense system against disease and allows turfgrass to use organic material and nitrogen it fixes from the air as fertilizer.

The ability to fix nitrogen (which makes up four-fifths of the atmosphere) eliminates the need to aerify, he added. Green Life also reduces water usage and yields a turf as good as or superior to chemically treated grass, he said.

"We see golf as a potentially big market," said Zettell, adding that the product has been field-tested on a limited basis at some very well-known courses.

"It's going to be a difficult market to crack, however. It is dominated by the chemical companies, which have a very strong relationship with superintendents."

Green Life's acceptance has been slowed by superintendents, described as a very conservative group hesitant to risk their turf's health to a new product, according to Horse Thief Golf & Country Club superintendent Tim Kelly, who claims to have successfully used Green Life the past four years.

The Tehachapi, Calif., facility has used Green Life since Kelly came aboard in 1988. He had used it a year previously while at Pine Mountain Lake Country Club in Frazier Park.

Kelly said he continually applies the liquid to his course through the irrigation system, with heavier applications on greens and tees. He top dresses greens regularly with a sand-peat-steer manure mix and leaves clippings on tees and fairways for organic matter. He also uses Green Life in the ponds. The only chemical he has employed is for spot treatment of dandelions, a practice he hopes to completely stop next year.

"It was a goat farm, to put it mildly," Kelly said of the course's condition when he took it over three years ago. The decomposed granite-sand greens absorbed water "like a sponge," he said. Grass roots extended no more than 1-1/2 inches into the thatch, barely penetrating the soil's surface.

Three years later, bentgrass roots everywhere are at least five inches long with some going six and seven, Kelly said. Run times are down on sprinklers near the greens. One square foot of snow mold appeared on the course this spring, compared to 60 square feet two years ago.

"We use it in the ponds, too, and we haven't had to use any aquatic herbicides or algaecides," he added.

Horse Thief has a \$2,000 monthly contract with Green Life that includes unlimited product, laboratory and technical support. Kelly estimates his

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# 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."

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### 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."