

Golf industry intrigue in the Crescent City?

It seems a good amount of research and development was conducted at this year's Golf Course Superintendents Association of America Show. Unfortunately, it was R&D of the clandestine variety.

Several industry folks have told me they were troubled by the amount of competitive snooping in New Orleans.

Innocent visitors and potential consumers may have been preoccupied with the hail of new products, hurricanes and gumbo. But show security was at an all-time high in 1992, and expect an increased presence in Anaheim next year.

"We had all sorts of people taking pictures of things they shouldn't be taking pictures of," said one interested party, who shall remain nameless. "We even saw people lifting up hoods and taking pictures. It was ridiculous."

Another industry executive said some of his people didn't feel comfortable answering certain questions, for fear they might gift-wrap some key knowledge for the competition. What's next, a ban on all cameras (this is no

joke; it may happen)?

How about airport-style security, complete with infrared scanning — "Good morning sir, could I show you our new product line? Great. All I need is your license, social security number, and shoe size... Okay, now hand me your keys and step through the metal detector..."

But seriously folks, the whole point of a GCSAA show as you know is to display wares for the whole golf industry to see. Thousands of people mill about the floor, stop to look, test where appropriate, and move on.

A good number of exhibitors had security on duty during show hours; but how does one distinguish between a person shopping around and one scheming for that competitive edge?

Many firms hired after-hours security guards to complement the normal night watch, which included a contingent for the convention floor and another for the hallways outside. Colleague Peter Blais spent a frustrating



Hal Phillips
editor

hour trying to retrieve a briefcase from the *Golf Course News* booth: 30 minutes on the phone with different security forces, and another 30 explaining his story to a particular guard (who kept an eye on Peter as he walked through the great hall).

In a way, I suppose, this intrigue indicates a healthy industry. But competition not only breeds excellence, but contempt, as well.

Had the opportunity to play a pair of fine golf courses in May — one brand-spanking new, the other firmly established. While both tracks provided excellent playing conditions, Mother Nature was not so cooperative.

During the annual American Society of Golf Course Architects meeting on Long Island, attendees played The Atlantic Club, Rees Jones' newest creation. Jones must have known his cohorts were coming because the pins were in championship spots all the way around.

The course was a challenging joy to play; deftly carved from rolling (sometimes sharply!) farmland in the Hamptons. But the day we played, a shifting 30-mph wind blew throughout. With the gale in our faces for 15 of the 18 holes, my playing partners — Tom Johnson, Bill Love, Roger Rulewich — and I felt like a school of salmon looking for a place to spawn.

Later that week I traveled to Minnesota for 18 at Hazeltine National, one year removed from its second U.S. Open stint but still in magnificent fettle. My hosts — superintendent Patty Knaggs and pro Mike Schultz — couldn't have been more accommodating. However, they overdid it on the weather. Two days removed from a raw, windy day in the Hamptons didn't prepare me for 80-degree temperatures in Minnesota.

Mind you, this was early May in the nation's coldest urban area!

Well, better to have played Hazeltine and perspired profusely than never to have played at all.

COMMENTARY

All actions have an effect — sometimes deadly

Everything, without exception, has an "afterwards."

Sometimes that "afterwards" is likable, laughable, fun. Sometimes it is dangerous, poisonous, deadly.

The Environmental Protection Agency has released its National Home and Garden Pesticide Use Survey, a "one-time snapshot" of the non-agricultural use of pesticides in and around urban and rural homes in the U.S. It reeks of the dangerous-poisonously-deadly variety of "afterwards."

Among the findings:

- Of the American households that dispose of concentrated pesticides, 67 percent used the regular trash, 16 percent used special collections, and 17 percent either gave it away, poured

it down the sink or toilet, on the street, in the gutter or sewer or on the ground.

- Of those disposing of leftover diluted pesticides mixed from concentrates, 36 percent poured the mixture down the toilet, 29 percent use the regular trash and 35 percent either burned it, gave it away, poured on the ground, in the gutter or sewer, or sprayed it elsewhere.

- In households with children under 5 years old, 47 percent stored at least one pesticide within reach of children.

- An estimated 85 percent of all households have at least one pesti-



Mark Leslie
managing editor

cide in storage in and around the home; most families have between one and five pesticide products stored; and 27 percent of single-family households have more than six.

The well-educated, certified and licensed pesticide applicators in the golf industry are far different from their neighbors — right? A superintendent out on the golf course has rigid rules by which he and his crew handle chemicals.

Hopefully, they do the same at home.

I have to plead guilty to misuse in

disposal. It was the "I'm only one person; what harm can it do?" syndrome. It won't happen again.

I knew dumping old engine oil was not a brilliant idea. It was convenient.

Now people aren't stupid. But they lean toward convenience.

Our entire society needs a major attitude readjustment.

Here's the bottom line: The Golden Rule applies to all areas of life, including how we deal with the environment. Let's do unto the earth as we would have others do unto us: Be kind to it. (And let's fill the neighbors in on this attitude as well.)

Because, for every action there is an effect.

GUEST COMMENT

Many improvements necessary in the industry

By Eliot Roberts

Amazing progress in turfgrass research and cultural practices mark the last 40 years, but the green industry must be alert to government regulations and remain an active force in the years ahead. Here are some observations from my perch at The Lawn Institute.

- Select a few of the better varieties of turfgrass with broader adaptability. In the past 40 years, great improvements

have been made in turfgrasses. Starting with Merion Kentucky bluegrass, more disease and insect resistance have been incorporated as well as better stress tolerance and vigor to compete with weeds. Now, some 300 new varieties are available and there are more to come. That would seem close to market saturation.

- Modify the National Variety Trials testing. Standard methods of evaluation help provide a reliable assessment of performance under widely varying soil and climatic conditions. Thus, one variety may look excellent in one location, good in another and poor in a third. This provides some lead concerning areas of adaptation and thus market potential. When data



Eliot Roberts
The Lawn Institute

from all trial locations are averaged together, much of the variation from one location to another is lost. On this basis, conclusions on which variety is best may be misleading.

- Improve the practical understanding of soil-turfgrass relationships, which are the key to development of cultural practices for production and maintenance of high-quality turf. The genetic diversity of grasses is great and the variability of the soil system, square foot by square foot, is tremendous. Combine with this, ever-changing climatic conditions, temperature and moisture, and we have perhaps the ultimate in variable growing conditions. Without this understanding, the professionalism of turfgrass management is lost.

- Improve education concerning microbiology and biochemistry, which are key to understanding the living nature of all root zones. We seldom grow grass in hydroponics. The biological nature of these latter root zones is limited and at times becomes pathogenic. In more natural or moderately amended soils, biological systems are active in formatting humic acids and humus in the presence of fibrous root systems of grass plants. These microbiological and biochemical processes are important also in purifying water and degrading all sorts of pollutants that wash down into the root zone.

- More emphasis will be placed on "organic" turf management during the years ahead because biologically active soils are rich and productive. With increasing public concern for environmental contamination with all sorts

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Editorial Office

Golf Course News

PO Box 997

38 Lafayette Street

Yarmouth, ME 04096

(207) 846-0600

Advertising Office

National Sales:

Charles E. von Brecht

Marketplace Sales:

Simone M. Marsteller

Golf Course News

7901 Fourth St. North

Suite 311

St. Petersburg, FL 33702

(813) 576-7077

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714 W. Olympic Blvd.

Suite 1120

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(213) 746-8800

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Roberts speaks out

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of products and by-products, the concept of "organic" has been latched onto as a way to save individuals as well as the planet. This is not supported by fact; it is, in fact, pure fiction.

"Organic" gardening or "organic" turf management has nothing whatsoever to do with elimination of pesticides or chemical fertilizers. It is concerned with the biological activity of the root zone and with the formation of humus by 45 quadrillion microbes per 1,000 square feet of soil to a six-inch depth.

• *Reduce pesticide use.* Most turfgrass scientists agree pesticide use is greater than need be most of the time. The concept of Integrated Pest Management, better termed Total Plant Health,

is indeed valid. Although the emphasis should be placed on plant health rather than pests, the net result is the same: less use of pesticides.

• *Grasscycling's day has come.* Sanitary landfills in many communities are already out of space. In others, old landfills are closing each month. We should not waste this high-quality form of organic matter. Grasscycling involves the return of clippings to the sod by use of conventional and mulching mowers. Once within the sod, clippings decompose quickly to form humus. Thatch only forms when either the grass is growing too rapidly or decomposition takes place too slowly. Both these conditions can be adjusted to favor the grasscycling process with current cultural technology.

• *It will take sharp, well-trained people to keep up with turfgrass technology into the next century.* During the past 50 years, the increase in techni-

cal information has been extraordinary. Now, computerization is considered indispensable. There is no other means to process and evaluate inputs for decision-making. Agronomy, business, computers will form the specialized training focus for future grounds managers. In these educational efforts, it will be well to remember it is the "man" in "management" that makes the education and training and new technical information work.

• *We must demonstrate a better record of new technology use.* Agricultural and turf research generate new information and technology with practical implications each year. Application of this technology often lags its discovery by many years and, in some situations, never is adopted.

At times, economic factors prevent improved practices or grasses from ever being used. The cost of the product is greater than the consumer

feels is appropriate. In other instances, resistance to change from old and so-called "proven" practices prevents the use of new information that could create better practices.

We get comfortable with what we believe works well enough. And then, there is some new technology that has threatening implications because we fail to understand how it may be adequately regulated and controlled. Genetic engineering has great potential to serve humankind if we can understand how to deal with the risks in developing new plant and animal types.

• *It's way past time for change if it is true that some seed companies do not support surveys.* Steady improvements have been made formulating and conducting green industry surveys. More detailed state, regional and national turfgrass surveys are required to better characterize the nature and importance of this commodity to society. Costs of projects of this type are high and often not enthusiastically supported by some in our industry who believe business and commerce secrets will be revealed.

• *Politics is an element in all that we are and do.* We play at politics in ways that influence others to think or behave or do as we would do. Politics has nothing to do with whether something is "right" or "wrong," "true" or "untrue," "just" or "unjust."

The environment has become a highly political issue because we are all concerned about the quality of our surroundings. Agricultural and related atmospheric science, as well as medical science, have much good sound technical information for environmental discussions. For instance, turf and landscape plants help achieve environmental quality. Also, there is sound information on soil and water conservation and on atmospheric conditions that influence temperature and other changes over time.

Researchers differ in approach, methodology and conclusions. Research papers and reports are subject to peer review to assure objectivity. This type of review is not required in the political process and, in fact, most anyone can present an argument based on either fact or fiction without question. The net result is massive confusion.

It's likely this confusion will continue. As long as the public wants to play politics with science, science is not likely to serve us all as it should.

• *Diseducation and misinformation are disruptive forces.* A little education is a dangerous thing. Life and living are complicated. Science involving chemistry, physics and biology and related calculations based on an understanding of mathematics requires years of study and discipline. We realize this and complain that our schools fail to accomplish high levels of learning.

The other side of this coin is that the media impress their audiences with answers to complex situations and issues in few words or illustrations that require only limited time or exposure to the topic. This amounts to diseducation. It results in confusion, prejudice and lack of understanding of related conditions and circumstances essential to soundly evaluate the topic. We are continually subject to this disruptive force and will likely continue to be so influenced.

• *As the general public continues to be concerned with a wide variety of issues, the political process will push toward more and more government regulations.* Some will be highly effective because they address a real need for some measure of control. It's relatively easy to pass regulations. It is often costly to implement them. These costs are often deferred to the consumer.

If consumers conclude that the product plus control is overpriced, the competitive edge may shift to another product. For example, lawngrass seed is likely to increase in price as field-burning restrictions are imposed in seed-producing sections of the country. This could shift crop production to other non-turf crops and result in gardeners using less lawngrass seed.

It's important to realize that we always pay the cost of having our government do for us what we can not do or will not do.

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