

GOLF COURSE NEWS

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Some developers believe golf course construction may outpace demand 6

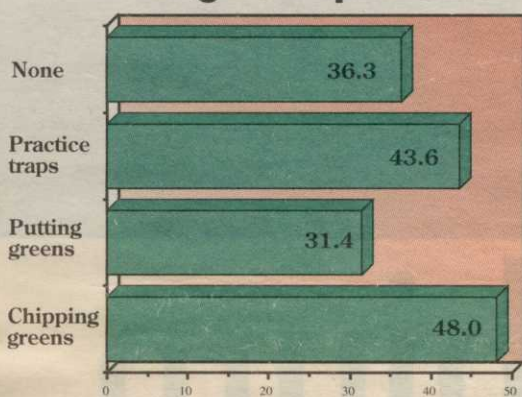
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A range of options



Many U.S. practice facilities offer chipping and putting greens and practice traps. This graph shows the percentages of surveyed ranges that offer these services. Ranges that operate at or close to a year-round basis are more likely to offer practice areas.

Source: National Golf Foundation

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Grads facing uncertain future

By Peter Blais

Turf school graduates are having more trouble finding entry-level jobs as assistant superintendents than they did a year ago, according to college officials.

"We usually graduate 45 to 50 students," said Professor Richard Cooper, coordinator of the University of Massachusetts two-year turf management program.

"Last year was the first time they weren't all able to get jobs. This year it's been even worse. It's taking a lot more work to find positions."

Cooper blames a weak economy, particularly in the Northeast, for the bleak job

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Cat strike leaves mark on industry

By Hal Phillips

PEORIA, ILL. — Wadsworth Construction Co. held a unique perspective on the year's most visible labor dispute, in terms of industry and geography.

Located in Plainfield, Ill., Wadsworth observed the five-month strike at nearby Caterpillar Inc. from close range.

"We've got Cat plants on both sides of us, in Aurora and Joliet," said Paul Eldredge, president of Wadsworth. Before the April 15 settlement, Eldredge indicated he felt Caterpillar was in good position to wait out its discontented work-

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Gen Morita wants all golf construction halted, including Perry Dye's Royal Hawaiian (above).

Japanese course basher sets sights on Hawaii

By Peter Blais

His goal is nothing short of stopping all golf course development, period. And Hawaii is his latest target.

"It's not possible to build a good golf course," said Gen Morita of the The Global Network for Anti-Golf Course Action. "You can't put something like that on 150 acres and expect it to not hurt the environment, unless you stick it in the middle of the desert. But if you build it in the usual way, it's just not possible."

Before developers dismiss the 44-year-old Japanese activist as just another fly in

the ointment, they ought to consider his record.

Morita claims to have had a hand in stopping construction of 280 Japanese courses through his work with the Japan National Network Against Resort and Golf Course Development. Since 1988, the group has helped obtain moratoriums against new development in 10 of Japan's 46 prefectures.

With Japanese corporations financing many of Hawaii's new courses, Morita turned his attention to the 50th state last

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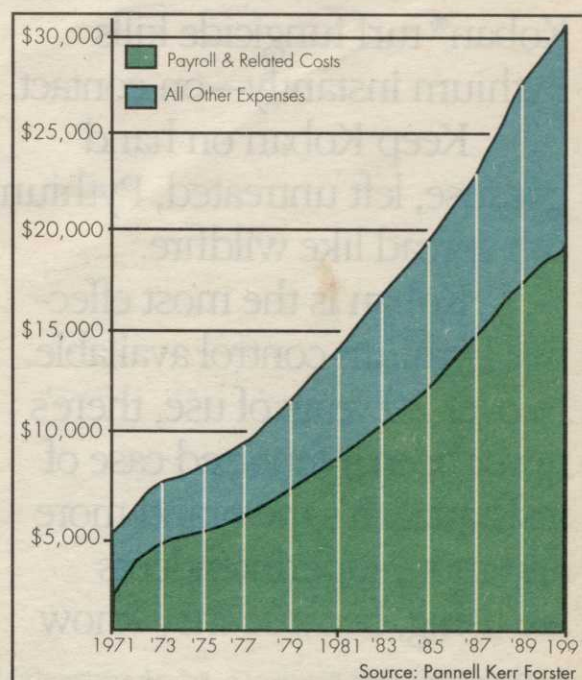
Maintenance costs continue upward spiral

From Staff Reports

Higher payroll expenses caused country club maintenance costs to jump almost 10 percent last year, despite efforts to cut back on repairs and other costs.

Average payroll climbed 10 percent (to \$15,888 per hole) while payroll taxes and benefits rose 16.8 percent (to \$3,610 per hole) at 250 private U.S. country clubs surveyed by the accounting firm of Pannell Kerr Forster in its 1992 Clubs in Town & Country report.

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Source: Pannell Kerr Forster

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Caterpillar strike leaves mark on the industry

Continued from page 1

force. He proved a prophet.

"They've got a pretty good inventory over there," he said at the time.

Some golf course builders and contractors went about their business untouched by the walkout of 12,000 employees. Yet Bill Kubly, president of Landscapes Unlimited, said months of inactivity from the nation's largest manufacturer of heavy equipment did change the market.

"I was talking to one of our subcontractors the other day, and he

said he was having trouble coming up with second-hand, rubber-tired scrapers," said Kubly, who noted that most course builders don't own real heavy equipment, like scrapers.

"It's strange," Kubly continued. "Late last fall, the market was real soft because the whole economy has been soft. We were able to pick up some scrapers at a 30-percent savings. But now, the short supply has driven up the price."

That situation is unlikely to change anytime soon. Caterpillar production has been crippled for nearly six

months. Workers didn't return in force until April 20.

However, "There's so much equipment in the country right now, it'd take a year before we'd begin to feel it," noted Eldredge. "The price of equipment may have gone up. But if the economy were better — and it looks to be improving — it wouldn't have made much of a difference."

According to Eldredge, while the strike took place right next door, it never hit home at Wadsworth. "I don't know that it has affected us," he said.

"It was a real sad situation," said Bob Steele, vice president at Paul Clute and Associates. "We haven't felt any effects. We're pretty well equipped with scrapers — we own most of our equipment."

"But if this thing had gone on for three or four months, into the summer, it could have become difficult to get scraper parts, among other things."

Kubly said he's pleased the struggle ended when it did. "As the whole economy turns up, this strike could have really slowed us down."

Polymers

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drated crystals are absorbed through the plant-feeder root system."

Once deposited, studies show the polymer makes roughly 95 percent of the absorbed water available to the plant. It's estimated that 15 pounds of polymer per 1,000 square feet will store 1/2 inch of typical irrigation water; 30 pounds will store 1 inch.

Nus has found polymers most effective on tees and greens.

"Polymers work best in drought-ridden soils, and we build greens and tees out of sand-based root zones, which are traditionally drought-ridden soils," Nus explained. "Peat can only hold 20 times its weight in water."

Don Courtney, director of golf operations at the 54-hole Wigwam golf complex in Litchfield Park, Ariz., has experimented with polymers in several trouble spots. He also applied polyacrylamides to half his driving range, leaving the other half untreated.

"Where we've put it down, it has kept the grass greener and held water well," he explained. "In between fertilizer applications, the plots do stay greener."

Courtney is impressed. But with further experiments underway on fairways and roughs, he's not quite ready to issue an unqualified endorsement. "I'm holding back until I see more," he said.

Nus agrees the jury is still out, and he issues these words of caution: "These materials are so absorbent, there is a point of no return. If used improperly, they can be counterproductive."

"Before you can promote any of these materials, you have to have a firm basis in scientific research, and that research is just starting to hit the review stage."

The cross-linked polyacrylamide must be applied underneath existing turf, a problem for superintendents. The Olathe Model 831 Polymer Planter, for example, is pulled by a 40-horsepower tractor and deposits the crystals after individual blades slice the turf at depths of 2 1/2 to 4 1/2 inches.

"It uses grooving, rotating blades on 6-inch centers. It's a heavy-duty machine," said Nus, who noted the Olathe 831 is "surface disruptive" and better suited to athletic fields.

According to Nus, there are alternatives for the golf course industry, namely high-pressure, liquid injectors and smaller-blade products: "vibrating, slicing, plow type things." However, these two products are currently going through the patent process, he said.

Despite the shortage of appropriate applicators and grounded scientific research, Nus said polymers should not be considered "down-the-road" technology.

"It's upon us," he said. "There's a lot of interest, but we have to be sure we know what we're talking about before we start publicizing it."



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