

GolfLink aims to put the superintendent on line

By MARK LESLIE

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — From the soil to the stars, golf course superintendents have a new, high-tech way to obtain information to help them agonomically and educationally.

GolfLink, the brainchild of certified golf course superintendent Jerry Lemons, is up and operating, linking golf courses with all sorts of weather data in addition to information from universities and golf industry groups.

Lemons, president of GolfLinks, Inc. and inventor of the Wetting Fork and Cut It Straight cup cutter, has tapped into a system that farmers nationwide have used the past 3-1/2 years. Some 30,000 farm-

ers are connected by computer and satellite to a communication system set up by Broadcast Partners of Des Moines, Iowa, along with the Illinois Farm Bureau, Pioneer Seed Corn and Farmland Industries. It broadcasts a well-rounded weather package, Chicago Board of Trade information, grain prices, commodities, *USA Today* briefs and commentaries from agricultural advisers.

Some 40 golf courses in Michigan, Florida, Iowa, Ohio and Tennessee use the farm information system. In its new joint venture with Broadcast Partners, GolfLink customizes the service to the needs of the golf industry.

"For under \$2 a day, the information

that will be available on this system will be phenomenal," Lemons said of the communications package that debuted at the Florida Turfgrass Foundation show at the end of September.

"I was interested in putting together a golf package to enhance communication between all local and national associations, and with superintendents and golfers themselves," said Lemons, a former superintendent and now consultant at Old Hickory Country Club in Hermitage. "The bulk of the package is based around the weather. We provide radar on the national and regional levels; infrared satellite maps updated at least four times an hour; action radar that shows the fronts

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move; jet stream, temperature and soil-temp maps; high-and-low forecasts — any type of information that relates to weather."

All this information is available instantly when the superintendent wants it — 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

In addition, Lemons is making GolfLink available to the U.S. Golf Association, Golf Course Superintendents Association of America, National Golf Foundation, Environmental Protection Agency, Professional Golfers Association, architects, builders and others.

"We want everybody in golf on the system, whether to provide information once a month or daily," Lemons said. "If it's for the good of the game, they're welcome."

"We are making available to them a free information highway to communicate with their members and golfers who have this system. It's a carte blanche for them — as long as it promotes the game of golf."

GolfLink is not meant to be an E-mail system for superintendents to discuss matters back and forth, Lemons said. "It is meant to be a system for the major industries, associations and universities to provide current information that will promote the game — whether as a marketing tool for the professional, or a turfgrass tidbit of research for the superintendent," he explained.

The individual or association sending information can specify exactly who is to receive it. Lemons is promoting the idea of having monitors in pro shops, so that staff and guests can also access information.

"If winter kill has happened on turf in the Southeast, golfers can see a map on the screen that shows winter kill and recognize that every course got hit instead of just their own," he said. "That will help a lot of supers stay out of the oven."

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The cost of GolfLink is a \$250 one-time initiation fee, plus \$58.25 per month. In turn, GolfLink provides all the equipment: satellite dish, computer hard drive, monitor and receiver.

"We will run a trial offer on the system: Pay \$159 for two months service and shipping fees, and you can try the system," he said.

Meanwhile, companies can also advertise on the system. When the computer monitor is not in use, the "screensavers," which protect the monitor from burning out, will display ads that will change every 15 seconds.

Advertising fees will be based on the number of subscribers, Lemons said.

More information about GolfLink is available by calling 800-200-3810, or writing GolfLinks, Inc. at 4811 Lebanon Road, Suite 107, Hermitage, Tenn. 37076.

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