

## Discovering nature's bounty, and environmental promise, in golf

By MARTIN BYHOWER

To many committed environmentalists, golf courses are, by conventional wisdom, anathema. Perceived as destroyers of valuable natural habitats, guzzlers of precious, diminishing water supplies, and sloppy repositories for pesticides, herbicides, and chemical fertilizers for the sole purpose of maintaining a sterile monoculture of grass, they are the last place most of us would expect to harbor wildlife! Yet some ardent birders have recognized, at least empirically, that certain golf courses can be good places to spot unusual species.

If you think about it, it makes sense. Birds and humans generally like the same kinds of places, and this is no coincidence. Behavioral scientists identify the "ideal human environment," that is, one to which we would naturally gravitate to live (and, presumably, play) as consisting of grassy (savanna) areas with interspersed trees, overlooking natural water sources.

Whether this harkens back to ancestral hominids descending from trees in an African savanna is the topic of a different essay! Birds like trees and water, too, and for many types, an open grassland bordering a grove of their preferred tree species provides the appropriate mixture

*The above comment appeared in Hummin', the newsletter for Palos Verdes/South Bay (Calif.) Audubon, a chapter of the National Audubon Society.*

of foraging and nesting habitats.

Unfortunately, many important wild habitats, and their inextricably linked native species, have been lost due to the development that often accompanies golf course construction (and, on occasion, golf courses have been the precursors or lures used to sell such developments). Management practices that utilize large amounts of fertilizers or toxic chemical additives, particularly those that are non-degradable (many of which are now, however, being phased out) have been demonstrated to be harmful to wildlife species that try to survive on or adjacent to golf greens. And building water-guzzling golf courses in arid desert environments like Palm Springs, is, in my mind, rather difficult to justify on any grounds.

Golf courses are a fact of life, however, providing recreation for many of the human species. Although the birding habit consumes most of my own leisure (not to mention side-vocational) time, I have friends who balance their addiction between birds and birdies. A remarkable visit on Aug. 12, 1994, to the Virginia Country Club in Long Beach, however, opened my mind to the possibility that golf courses and nature can coexist; for me, this was a startling but very welcome revelation, for it suggests the possibility of two seemingly disparate groups of recreation-seekers becoming allies in ways that enhance the quality of life for both (not to mention aiding in the survival of other critters!).

I would imagine that most golfers

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## Increase of jobs tied to upgrades at daily-fee, municipal courses

By GEORGE HAMILTON

A question that is often asked of turfgrass science educators is "Are you producing more graduates than there are job opportunities?" This is a legitimate question. After all, our mission should not be to produce a sheer number of graduates to support our reason for existence, but to continue to fill a void and meet the demands of our industry. Of course, one demand may be to have the opportunity to select from several qualified applicants for each position open.

The job market for turf graduates this year in the Northeast has been the best I have seen in the past few years. I believe a couple of things are responsible for this.

First, there seems to be an increase in the number of jobs available at single-owner and municipal golf courses with low budgets. Obviously, the low-budget operations typically don't have the money to support a full-

time, well-trained superintendent. An increase in job opportunities in this segment may be the result of the demand for better playing conditions from players. I think the more likely reason is the fact that the superintendent position has become much more complex. This is especially true when considering the environmental issues,

pesticide usage and regulation, and worker protection.

Of course, if these positions are going to be attractive to people with the appropriate qualifications, the salaries and benefits will have to match those qualifications. When hiring people for important positions, the adage "You get what you pay for" definitely holds true.

The second, and largest area of demand for turf graduates continues to be assistant and second assistant superintendent positions. This year and in the past we have had many more job openings than graduates to fill them. As of early April, we had received job announcements for 57 assistant and second assistant positions since November. Dr. Trey Rogers of Michigan State experienced the same

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George Hamilton

*George Hamilton is a member of the faculty in Penn State University's Turfgrass Management Program.*

## Letters

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There was some confusion about my remarks on the floor of the show in San Francisco to Mark Leslie, and that is very understandable.

There was some discussion of the need for standardized equipment for testing. Many people are not aware that much of the equipment is manufactured by the labs. Sometimes it is hard for associations like the USGA to understand the competitive nature of the commercial industry. As an example, Turf Diagnostics & Design has spent close to \$500,000 in capital funds and development time to produce equipment and test procedures that have set the standard for the industry. This is borne out by the presence of a considerable amount of our development work in the 1993 USGA Guidelines. I could never justify to my investors turning over five years of work to my competitors as part of the accreditation process. In my conversation with Mark Leslie, my five-year scenario included an attempt to standardize the equipment. However, multiple labs have contacted me about this issue and are strongly opposed to any attempt to standardize the equipment.

Imagine if you will: The head of R&D for Toro calling Rainbird's head of R&D and asking him to fax over their latest information on head design because they were

having problems with one of their new heads. The same scenario could apply to Flowtronex/PSI or Watertronics, Scotts and Lesco. Not likely to happen in my lifetime.

Perhaps this analogy will help people better understand this lab issue and the 1993 Guidelines. Let's relate the USGA 1993 Guidelines to a Burberry suit. If you are a 44 reg., but they sell you a 46 long, well, that's still an excellent suit from Burberry's, but not for you. The USGA 1993 Guidelines are akin to a rack of Burberry suits; the key is getting the right fit. If you want to assume that all the labs are producing the same numbers, please understand that just puts you in the clothes store, you will need the right fit. To extend the analogy a little further, it also pays to have a fine tailor when the environment is at stake.

A closing comment to Charlie von Brecht. In my opinion, the GCN Letter to the Editor forum is one of the most important reasons for the overall improvement of the golf development industry.

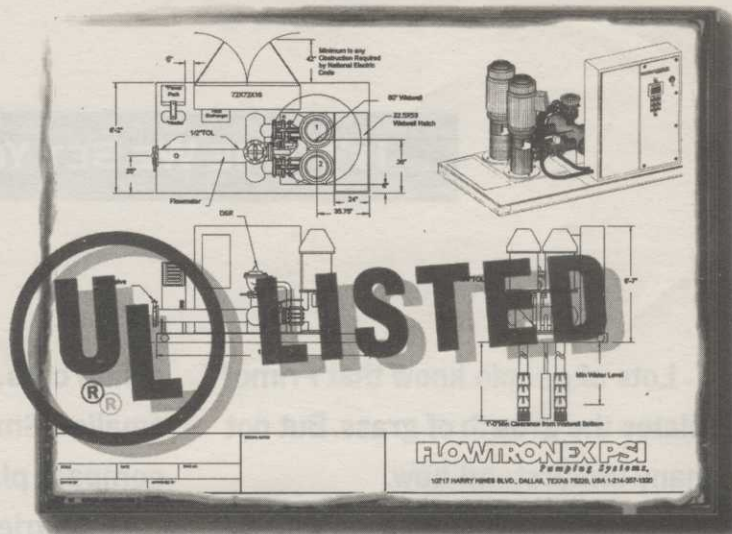
Stephen McWilliams  
president/CEO  
Turf Diagnostics & Design  
Olathe, Kan.

*Ed. Point taken on the media's need to "sell newspapers." Fortunately for GCN and its readers, our newspaper is free to all qualified readers, like Mr. McWilliams.*

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**RENOVATION BY GEORGE**

LYNCHBURG, Va. — Lester L. George of Colonial Golf Design, Inc. in Richmond, has been hired by Boonsboro Country Club here to lead the club in its development of a long-range master plan to renovate and restore its golf course in the coming months. Boonsboro, originally designed in 1977 by Fred Findlay, will be the site of the 51st Virginias/Carolinas Matches in 1996.

**Hamilton comment: Job prospecting**

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demand. He also said, "We had many more jobs for qualified students than students to fill the positions."

A certain portion of the assistant superintendent positions are the usual turnover from the traditional positions.

However, in the last 10 years, and still continuing today, a significant amount of assistant and second assistant positions has been created. This growth is supported by

statistics from the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America (GCSAA), which reported that in 1988, there were 450 assistant superintendent members compared to 2,150 today! Some of these new positions have been created by giving the person who has been doing the job all along an official title, and hopefully a raise, too. That's all right because at least it creates a position that should be filled if it is vacated.

Other assistant positions

have been created out of necessity. It goes back to the development and progression of the superintendent's role and responsibilities of the golf course.

First of all, the title "superintendent" can run the gamut of responsibilities from the local nine-hole muni to the elaborate 36-hole country club. So the title "superintendent" is somewhat ambiguous. If you could determine an average of responsibilities for superintendents, you would probably find the actual turfgrass management (agronomically speaking)

would probably constitute a small percentage of time. Hence, there is a need for an assistant to perform and supervise the majority of turf-related maintenance activities. These are the types of positions that many of the turf graduates secure upon graduation.

These positions require good agronomic skills, but less "people" and business skills, when compared to the superintendent.

One of the most difficult points to get across to graduating students is the fact that they have basically been trained to grow grass, which in reality is only a small part of the superintendent's role. However, when you consider that the only practical experience they have is working on a crew, their vision of a superintendent is giving the crew orders in the morning, talking with salespeople, knowing a little about turfgrass, and (of course) playing golf whenever you want, for free!

I think anyone considering golf course management for a career should attend a few greens committee meetings (preferably right before or after aerification), run the crew for a few months, spend many hours in the pro shop on ladies' day and men's Tuesday night leagues, and develop at least one budget.

Unfortunately, this would probably decrease the number of applicants we would have applying for our programs.

The growth in second assistant positions is also out of necessity. As superintendent positions have evolved, the demand for quality people has increased, and assistant superintendents have been a consistent source of quality and trained individuals. Which means that as the traditional assistant superintendent positions have been used to train people for other superintendent positions, a major void was created at the club where the assistant was working. This would leave the superintendent of that club in a retraining mode, which gets old after losing a few good assistants. Enter, the second-assistant superintendent position. These positions are usually down the totem pole, but still carry a modest level of responsibilities.

Also, at some of the upper-echelon clubs, the positions of assistant-in-training (AIT) are being created. These AIT positions are for people that may have the potential to be assistants, but require more training and experience in order to do so. It is a nice way to say:

"We think you have what it takes, but not quite enough of it, yet. Work with us, and we'll get you there."

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