

# GOLF COURSE NEWS

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INSIDE

## Skin Preparation

Glenn Martin has readied Rancho La Quinta CC for Daly & Woods: The longest Skins Game ever ..... 21

## Design & Liability

Can golf holes be trademarked? Is your course responsible for emergency-vehicle access? ..... 37



### OF PIPES & PALMS

The PGA Club at The Reserve celebrated its Audubon Signature status with pomp & circumstance. See page 54.

### COURSE MAINTENANCE

Iron Men: Mechanics sound off in new column .... 17  
Cart Path Drainage — Beat the sheet ..... 20  
Pickseed opens warehouse in South Carolina ..... 12

### COURSE DEVELOPMENT

Hurdzan earns GCSAA's President's Award ..... 3  
ASGCA holds design contest for supers ..... 31  
Rathert headlines Asia-Pacific round-up ..... 33

### COURSE MANAGEMENT

Roger Maxwell returns to operations ..... 39  
Alfonso urges managers to keep level head ..... 40  
New Series focuses on 'Supers turned GM' ..... 43

### SUPPLIER BUSINESS

Toro buys Hardie, names new Commercial GM .... 45  
Emerald Isle teams with Bio Turf Gro ..... 46  
What's new in the marketplace? ..... 50

MEADOWBROOK BUYS NAGI, GRI

## Operations biz has new player

By PETER BLAIS

BEVERLY HILLS, Calif. — New-kid-on-the-block Meadowbrook Golf Group has suddenly become a major golf course management company with its recent purchases of Chicago-based North American Golf Inc. (NAGI) and California-based Golf Resources Inc. (GRI) giving it 25 courses nationwide.

Effective Oct. 1, 1996, North American Golf began operating as the Eastern Division of 2-year-old Meadowbrook Golf Management. An exchange of stock was expected to occur by Nov. 1, with a final closing on the transaction scheduled for January 1, 1997.

Meadowbrook expects to close this month on a similar transaction with

Continued on page 41

## Compost: A top-drawer top-dresser

By MARK LESLIE

GLENVIEW, Ill. — Scientists can't explain exactly why it works, but it does, and compost is gaining popularity among golf course superintendents as a top-dressing and divot-mix application.

"It definitely works, for whatever reason; it's being used more widely all the time," said Dr. Eric Nelson of Cornell University. "There is a qualitative change that happens in the soil but what, specifically, is anyone's guess. That's what we're trying to figure out."

Attesting to the fact that compost enhances divot

Continued on page 16



### VANDALISM: A COMMUNITY ISSUE

Industry experts believe combating course vandalism requires more community involvement, not higher fences. For the story on this all-too-common problem, see page 17.

THE AMERICAS BRING HOME THE HAYTER CUP & MAKE THE WORLD SMALLER... PAGE 30

## Easy credit drives GATX out of golf?

By PETER BLAIS

SAN FRANCISCO — In an ironic response to the improving financial climate for golf course development, GATX Capital Corp. will no longer make golf course loans, according to Vice President Roy Powell.

GATX has traditionally loaned money in high leverage, high rate-of-return situations that traditional lenders [banks] typically shun, Powell said. GATX and companies like them were one of the few sources of capital during the late 1980s and early 1990s when traditional lenders, scared off by the depressed real-estate market, shied away from making golf-related loans.

Continued on page 35



### JURASSIC GOLF?

Not exactly, but the new nine at Puddicombe-designed Dinosaur Trail Golf & Country Club in Drumheller, Alberta, Canada, is other-worldly. For story, see page 35.

## Big Fish/Little Fish: Jacobsen absorbs Bunton

By HAL PHILLIPS

LOUISVILLE, Ky. — If you believe consolidation indicates a healthy industry, the golf course business just got healthier.

In a move company officials claim will "increase its leadership role in the turf-maintenance industry," Racine, Wis.-based Jacobsen Division of Textron, Inc. has acquired the Bunton Company, a manufacturer of turf equipment based here.

No significant upheaval is expected at Bunton in the near future, according to Bill Robson, interim general manager here at the firm's Louisville headquar-

ters. For the time being, Jacobsen distributors will handle Jake products and Bunton distributors will handle Bunton products, he said.

"That doesn't mean that if a Jacobsen distributor wanted to sell Bunton, we wouldn't look at it," said Robson. "But right at the moment, nothing will change."

With approximately 100 employees, Bunton's 1995 sales were \$19 million. According to Herb Henkel, Textron president of industrial products, Bunton's facility and employees will remain in Ken-

Continued on page 48

## Compost/top-dressing

Continued from page 1

mixes and top dressing are superintendents Dan Dinelli of North Shore Country Club here and Scott Cybulski of Falmouth (Maine) Country Club.

The seed "jumped out of the ground," said Dinelli, when he used straight yard-waste compost mixed in with bentgrass seed in his tee and fairway divot mixes.

Acknowledging that his evidence is "anecdotal right now," Cybulski said he used a composted turkey manure, marketed as a fertilizer, as his top-dressing

mix after aeration and "it does wonders for the grass... It usually takes 10 to 15 days to be grown in. This took seven to nine. It was fast.

"It's not a soluble salt," he added. "It's something that is really hot, so that when you're grinding sand up against it, you're not breaking particle coatings or breaking down ammonium sulfate or anything that is going to burn. So it seems to be something that is going to work out well."

"We can say for sure that it [compost's effectiveness] is related to microbiological changes and that microbiology is a key to understanding why it works,"

Nelson said. "It is a tough problem to crack. I've been working on it for nine years and it took seven years to get to the point where we can ask that question and have the techniques to answer it."

Nelson added that compared to the normal straight sand or 80-20 sand/spagnum mix, compost's superior water retention accounts for some of the improvement in grass growth.

Poultry-based compost, he said, "has a wider spectrum of activity. Part of the reason is that there are chemical factors that actually provide disease suppressiveness, too — mainly ammonia. Yard waste

serves the purpose of increased water holding. But it wouldn't affect disease suppression."

Yard-waste compost is more of a soil amendment than a fertilizer like poultry compost, said Dinelli. "They address two different issues. But they both harbor carbon, and that's the key. Carbon is the organic matter in all these products that helps drive and elevate the microbial activity."

"In the past we always used our 80-20 top-dressing mix. The difference is like night and day. The divots heal roughly four times faster than with any other method we've used."

With his yard-waste compost, Dinelli said: "In 10 to 14 days the divot has green fuzz where you can't see the black soil unless you're on top of it. In the old mix, a few seedlings would come up, but we would have as much bentgrass encroachment from along the perimeter of the divot. Using straight compost, I feel confident that the majority of the grass that fills back in is the actual seed you're using and you're not relying on encroachment from the side."

"Using the normal sandy-type soil that tends to dry out quickly, how do you manage many newly seeded little areas? You're not giving those little seedlings much advantage."

Top dressing with sand and adding the composted turkey manure on top, helps, Cybulski said. "Top dressing is messy anyway, so nobody's worried about the organic fertilizer."

Saying that superintendents can encounter "real problems creating compost themselves if they can't do it properly," Nelson encouraged superintendents to buy compost from commercial operations, whether it be municipalities or companies. Besides the more widely known products, he said: "We have isolated types of compost that aren't widely available but that work really well. There are batches of municipal sludges here and there that are really good. Others don't do anything."

"The dilemma with yard-waste compost is consistency," Dinelli said. "With poultry they have a more consistent product from one batch to another."

...

Dinelli mixes his bentgrass seed with the compost and, at the same time, deals with any inconsistency by using a large 1/4-inch mesh screen stretched across 2-by-4s riding on top of the trailer.

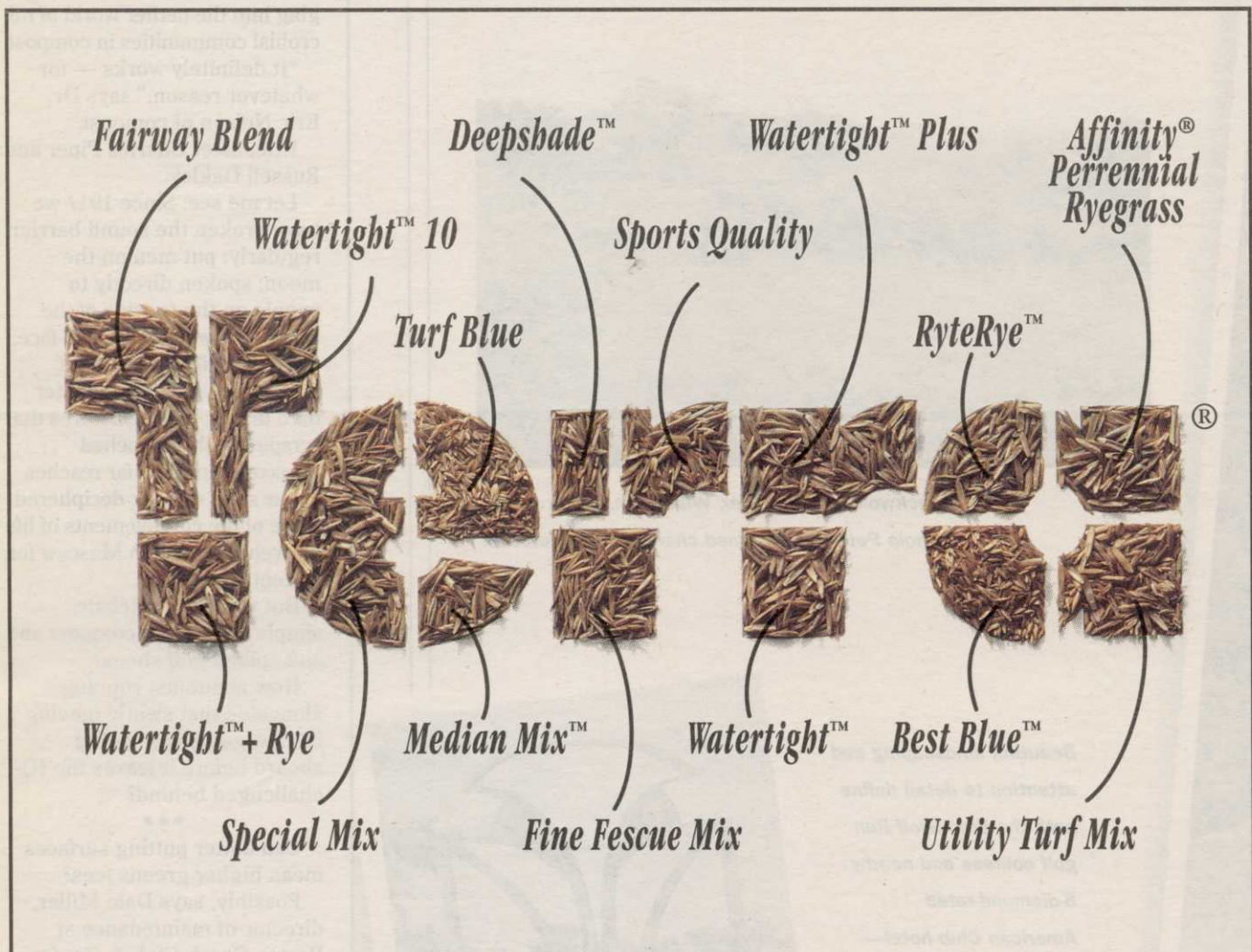
One person shovels compost over that screen, while another very lightly sprinkles in bentgrass seed.

"It's very scientific," Dinelli laughed. "But it works. It screens out any of the larger solids (like twigs), and just as importantly it blends the seed into the material throughout the whole load."

About 7 pounds of seed mixes with 2 yards of compost in the trailer, and it takes 6 cubic yards of material, on average, to repair all tees and fairways at the 18-hole facility.

"I don't know what the magic [of compost] is," said Dinelli, "whether it is because it holds moisture better or whether its darker color and warms up quicker, but the difference is dramatic."

North Shore uses other organic fertilizers as well, he said. "I've used Sustane and NatureSafe. I'm very religious with using Milorganite... We web it all so it all works together."



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