

Business not as usual with Snyder at Hercules CC

By TROY BLEWETT

WILMINGTON, Del. — Bad weather, turf disease, weeds and insects are not the biggest risks for golf course superintendents, said Sam Snyder, director of facilities and grounds here for the Hercules Country Club. Snyder, a 20-year superintendent, said being too conservative or sticking with a business-as-usual mentality is the biggest risk of all.

"Superintendents need to look for new ideas and take chances that can improve their course, their image in the community and their image with club members," he said. "The challenge is to put equal emphasis on our agronomic skills and on others like communicating."

For Snyder, this challenge has meant trying new techniques and taking a greater role in communicating with the public.

Even though all 27 holes at Hercules CC are playable year-round, Snyder and his 11 full-time employees are busiest in spring. So, when he started reading and hearing about the success of fall-applied pre-emergence herbicides for crabgrass control, he decided to try it.

"We were spraying 150 acres for broadleaf weeds in the fall and then applying our pre-emergence herbicide over the same area in the spring," Snyder said. "It just didn't make sense to spray that big an area and then go out and do it again during your busiest time of year."

"We were using Barricade pre-emergence herbicide in the spring and getting season-long control of broadleaf weeds and crabgrass, so it was logical to combine it with our broadleaf control program and try a fall application."

Snyder applied the pre-emergence herbicide at just over one pound per acre and achieved excellent results. "In a year with heavy rain, we didn't have any problems with crabgrass," he reported. "And we greatly decreased broadleaf competition on the course."

According to Snyder, there are other benefits to a fall application of pre-emergence herbicide. "The soil in this area is generally firmer in the fall than in the spring," he said. "You don't need to worry about the sprayer churning up mud and making ruts in the course."

Additionally, course traffic is highest in spring and summer so there's a smaller window of opportunity for spraying than there is in the fall. By going with a fall application, Snyder benefits by balancing his crew's work and spending less time on the course

during the peak spring season.

Snyder said trying new agronomic ideas is critical, but real success comes from thinking "big picture" about your job. He believes dealing with the public will become an even larger part of a golf course superintendent's job.

"If superintendents are afraid to speak out on issues that affect

them and their courses, it will only hurt the industry," he stressed.

"It's very important to have open discussions with your club's management or board, its members, and the public at large," Snyder said, adding that super-



Sam Snyder

intendents don't do their jobs in a vacuum. "Your decisions impact other groups and their decisions affect you."

For instance, Snyder is negotiating with the Delaware Department of Transportation (DOT) which

plans to widen the road to Hercules CC. The DOT's plan will affect the contour of the course by removing a group of large trees. He is working with DOT officials to keep the impact to the course minimal.

In another case, board members were discussing construction of a pond at the base of a hill to catch chemical run-off. Members thought this idea was

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Hercules CC

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a good one.

"I wrote a two-page letter to all of our members explaining that run-off is the result of negligence," Snyder said. "I explained to them that we properly apply the products used on the course and, therefore, run-off is not a problem for us." Snyder credits the low water solubility of pre-emergence herbicide, which kept the product from moving, even on slopes and hillsides.

Snyder communicates regularly with members.

He writes a column for the course newsletter on maintenance that includes a lawn-care tip, and puts weekly notices on a bulletin board

"Following the winter of 1994, we lost 30 acres of fairway grass to ice damage," he said. "I used the bulletin board to explain to our golfers how we were going to re-establish the grass. This let them know what we were doing and how their cooperation and patience would help."

According to Snyder, taking a chance and winning, gives more courage to try something new the next time. You have also improved your golf course and your career.

Zebra mussels, other topics due

BURLINGTON, Vt. — Terry Bastian of Waterflow, a North Reading, Mass., ecological design firm that consults on Northeast courses, is speaking at the 2nd annual Northeast Conference on Nonindigenous Aquatic Species here.

The spread of zebra mussels, hydrilla, water chestnut and similar vegetation is a concern of

scientists, environmentalists and superintendents as they struggle with keeping their water features alive and beautiful.

Bastian's lecture, "Loosing Loostrife by Fire" details his work with fire management at the Sagamore Spring Golf Course in Lynnfield, Mass. The goal was to burn the wetland and keep it in a sedge meadow stage of succession, killing the speckled alder, poison sumac and white pine bushes that restricted air flow to the 15th green, exacerbating fungal problems. The burn worked and the green responded very well, being the healthiest green the next season.

"What I had hoped to do was lessen the fungicide and pesticide use with a practice that was used here until the 1970s. What was a pleasant surprise was that this technique severely affected the exotic purple loostrife population that was squeezing out the native plants," Bastian said.

Research update

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tures. He wants to introduce that gene into bentgrass and possibly ryegrass.

Last year was the first year of the three-year study.

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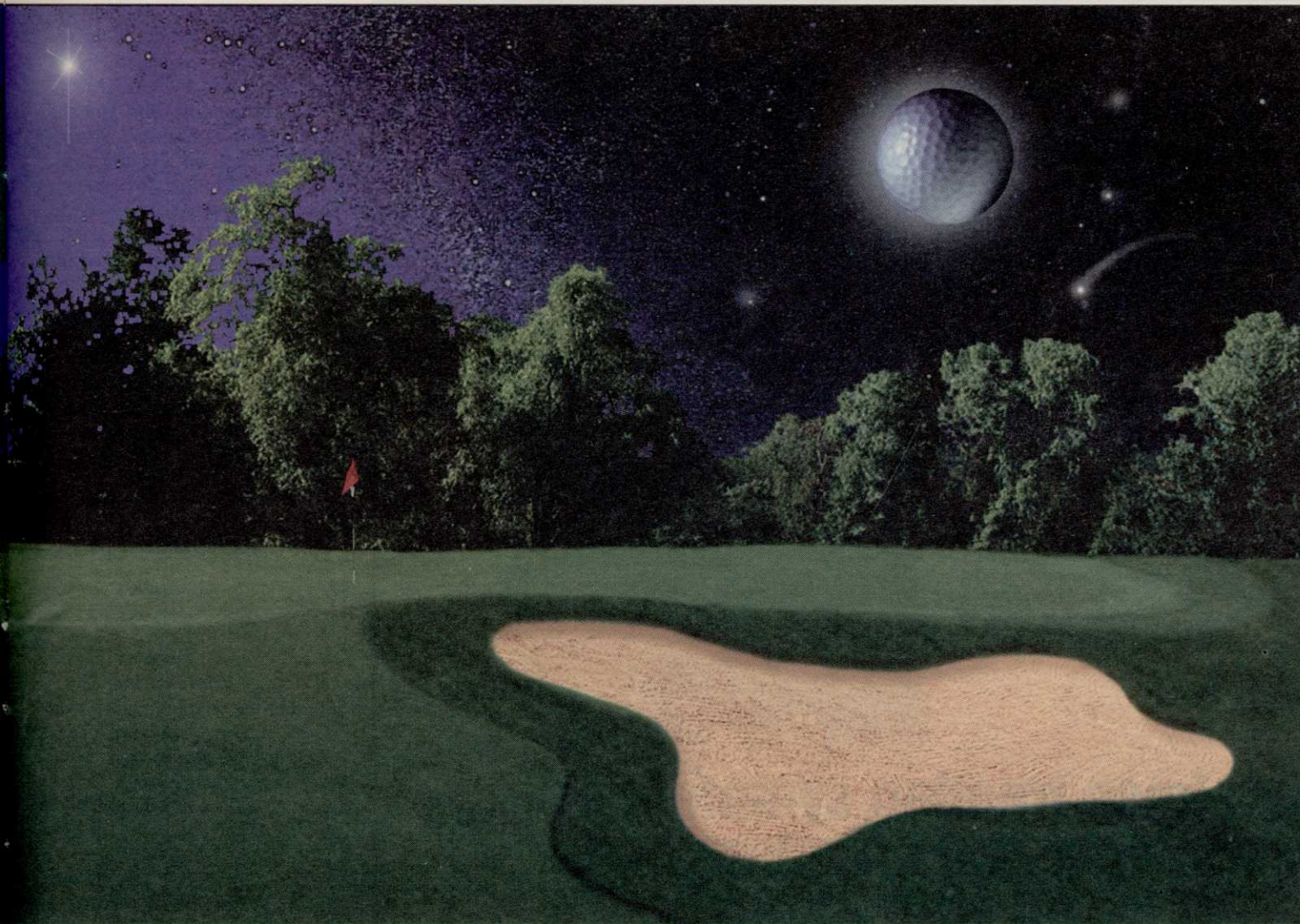
In other research:

- At the Laval University, PhD student Julie Dionne and Dr. Yves Desjardins have studied winter covers, finding that -10 degrees Celsius is "the critical minimum temperature where poa annua starts to sustain damage," Yamada said. "If you are in a very severe low-temperature climate and do not have any insulating covers, be it snow or other, you are in danger of sustaining damage just from low temperature."

- At Olds College researchers saw the trend for poa annua to deharder faster in the spring than bentgrass, explaining why it is more susceptible to early-spring damage.

- At the University of Manitoba scientists are investigating use of native species of perennial grasses and their potential use on golf courses and other settings as low-maintenance turf. They are establishing plots of buffalograss, side-oats grama, inland desert salt grass, tufted hair grass, Canada bluegrass, prairie junegrass, fowl bluegrass, alkalai and other non-traditional types of grasses. This year they will cut them at 7/10, 1-1/2 and 2-1/2 inches to see if they can be used on golf course roughs in very low-maintenance areas without irrigation.

"They will also be selecting for drought-tolerance as well as salt-tolerance," Yamada said.



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