

Retiring Feindt's lesson for a lifetime: Take turf seriously

By MARK LESLIE

ROCHESTER, N.Y. — When Pennsylvania State University Professor Bert Musser laid it on the line back in 1959 — choose turfgrass or nursery management — Bob Feindt quickly picked turf. And he hasn't been sorry — except perhaps that college summer when he had the chance to work for a nursery for a lot more money than at Seaview Country Club in Warwick, R.I. He could have used the money, but his famed professor had disdain for jobs that didn't steer his pupils toward turf.

"He told me, 'That's fine. Take the nursery job and when you come back you won't be in the turf program. You'll be in nursery management. You think about it and let me know,'" Feindt recalled.

"When I gave him my answer, Bert said: 'You don't fool around in the turfgrass industry. You jump into it with both feet. You have to be dedicated and you have to be sincere. He went on and on. When I left his office I didn't think there was anything else in this world but grass. That was Bert Musser.'

And that is Bob Feindt. After dedicating his career to turfgrass maintenance — nine years at Otter Creek golf course in Columbus, Ind., and 26 at Country Club of Rochester — the Penn State alumnus retired Dec. 31. No regrets, except one.

"I will miss the course itself," he said. "I won't miss coordinating tasks, the day-to-day routine things. But you get to the point where the course becomes part of your life, your family."

That particular part of his family has become more challenging — and exciting — to work with over the last three decades, Feindt said. A former Indiana Golf Course Superintendents Association president, and member of the Midwest Regional Turfgrass Foundation and Pennsylvania Turf Council, Feindt pointed to innovations that have led to more sophisticated turf care.

"I think maybe we've created a monster," he said. "The golfer says, 'This is what I want,' and we say, 'We can accomplish this,' and we go to the manufacturer and tell them what we need. Twenty or 30 years ago we never heard of greens being cut at 1/8 inch. Since we started doing this, we've created other problems — moss on greens, more diseases, things of this sort."

The U.S. Golf Association, he said, is now saying the pendulum has gone too far in trying to reach tournament conditions for the Tour professionals, and that the trend should reverse. "They're now saying to raise the height of cut, not stress the grass as much, and manage the water," Feindt said. "You have courses today that

are hand-syringing fairways. This was unheard-of [in the past]."

Perhaps today's toughest challenge, along with administrative duties and turf care, is finding and keeping qualified crew members, he said.



Bob Feindt

"The equipment is so much more sophisticated and costly, you have to have a more qualified, or better-trained operator," he said. "The days of getting high school or college kids here for the summer are gone.

I keep preaching to our people: You've got to use common sense out there..."

"It's like working in a fish bowl. People see what you're doing. Three or four kids edging a bunker is not acceptable. You and your assistant have to stay on top of things like that."

He will miss his course as well

as a rapidly advancing industry.

"What is so exciting about the industry is, we're going through some great changes," he said. "There are great opportunities: the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary

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N.J. environmental alliance hires Sadlon as executive director

WARREN, N.J. — The Alliance for Environmental Concerns (AEC) has selected Nancy P. Sadlon as its new executive director. The AEC will also have a new address and phone number.

Sadlon has been involved with environmental issues and regulations for 14 years, most recently for the U.S. Golf Association (USGA) as its environmental specialist. She has provided guidance on wetland issues,

habitat enhancement, pond management, erosion control, integrated pest management, water conservation and other environmental regulatory issues.

She holds a bachelor's degree in landscape architecture/environmental planning and design from Rutgers University, where she continued her postgraduate studies focusing on wetland ecology and environmental issues. She is a principle of Sadlon

Environmental, a consulting firm providing professional expertise on various issues.

Sadlon takes the reigns of the AEC from its former executive director, Ilona F. Gray, who held the position since 1985. Gray leaves the position to relocate to Germany with her husband.

Contact the organization at P.O. Box 4292, Warren N.J. 07059-4292; phone 908-563-9252 or fax 908-560-8588.

Feindt retires

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Program, some of the new grass varieties, naturalizing the golf course with prairie grass and things like that. On one hand, it's a little scary and you have to be careful. But you have to look at the other side of the coin, too."

CC of Rochester members will miss Feindt, who joined the club in 1970 and has been working with architect Arthur Hills since 1980 on a long-term semi-renovation of the Donald Ross-designed course, including modifying some holes and redoing bunkers.

The club celebrated its centennial anniversary last year.

Since Bert Musser forced Feindt's hand 36 years ago, he has seen changes at his club and nationally.

Demands for highly maintained courses have come from members watching tourneys on TV, traveling and seeing tournament conditions and expecting that on their own facilities.

"We're not a tournament-type course like Oak Hill or Oakmont," he said. "A lot the of the older members are pretty understanding. They wanted to keep it low-key and no tourneys — no lightning-fast greens. Some of the younger members are asking for more than the older members. It has changed, but not as severely as some of the other courses.

"Not that people are stupid. But they don't understand agriculture. So many things are not black and white. There are so many gray areas. They ask, 'Why can't our greens be cut as tight as somebody else's? Why doesn't the ball stand up on our fairways like such-and-such course?'"

"Even though there's cooperation between superintendents, there's competition among clubs.

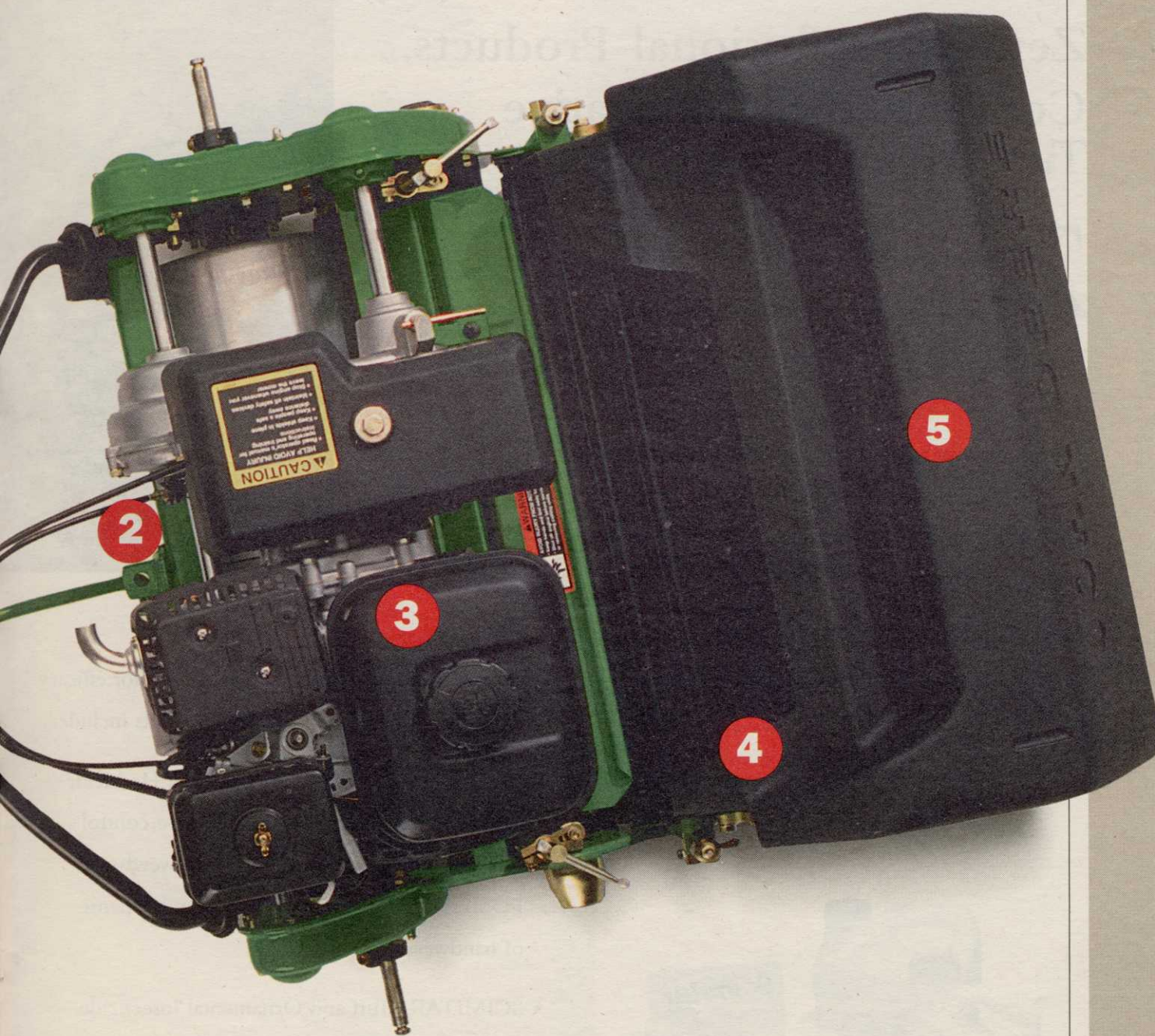
When members bring guests to the club they want the course to look picture-perfect, Feindt said. "They want to be proud of their facility. That is what's expected of us. It always has been the case, but more so now.

"Plus, when members get away from the daily pressures of the office, where do they go to relax? The golf course. They don't want to see an aerifier or a mower. Instead of seeing a psychiatrist, they golf — for peace and solitude."

Better conditions are also being demanded of superintendents at resort and daily-fee courses, Feindt said. "A lot of resort courses today are gearing up for the golfing customer," he said. "They are promoting the course and want better conditions because they want people coming back. A lot of the public and resort courses are in much better condition today than 30 years ago. The public golfer is demanding the same things the private golfer is."

But Feindt doesn't have to shoulder those concerns any more. He can relax, reflect on his career, and focus on such chores as publishing the *Penn State Turfgrass Alumni Club newsletter*. That's enough, he says.

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