

By PETER BLAIS

LAS VEGAS — The critical shortage of technicians to repair outdoor power equipment, like that used on golf courses, was the major topic at a meeting of the fledgling Engine and Equipment Training Council (EETC) held here during the recent GCSAA International Conference & Show.

The shortage has become so severe that power equipment manufacturers and distributors, normally intense competitors, pledged to share information and employ other cooperative measures to ease what EETC Executive Director Virgil Russell termed "a crisis situation."

"Finding new technicians to come into the field and upgrading the skills of those already in place are the major problems facing this industry," Russell told an audience that included representatives from Briggs & Stratton Corp., Husqvarna, Hydro Gear, Kohler Co., Kubota Tractor Corp., Lesco Inc., MTD Products Inc., Tecumseh Products Co., and The Toro Co.

"Golf courses use everything from small, low-horsepower machinery to complex, technical equipment costing \$70,000 to \$80,000. And yet, technicians generally make anywhere from \$8 to \$16 an hour," Russell said.

Low pay is one of the factors discouraging young people from entering the industry, attendees noted. Other barriers mentioned include the image of technicians as "grease monkeys" and the perception of "technician" as a dead-end job.

Changing those perceptions by developing career paths that can lead to greater financial rewards and additional responsibility for young

Manufacturers gear up to educate techs

technicians is the EETC's goal. Meeting that goal will require additional educational opportunities, especially at the vocational school level, a traditional source for engine and equipment technicians.

Unfortunately, many cash-strapped states and local governments are considering

dropping or consolidating technician programs at a time when the industry is screaming for more programs and more trained personnel.

Kubota National Training Director Tom Kane said EETC needs to discover exactly how many technicians the industry needs; develop competency tests

that will both test technicians' knowledge and serve as the basis for certifying aspiring technicians; and find schools that will teach those skills needed by manufacturers, distributors and equipment users.

"We need to work with schools to add and enhance their programs rather than sit

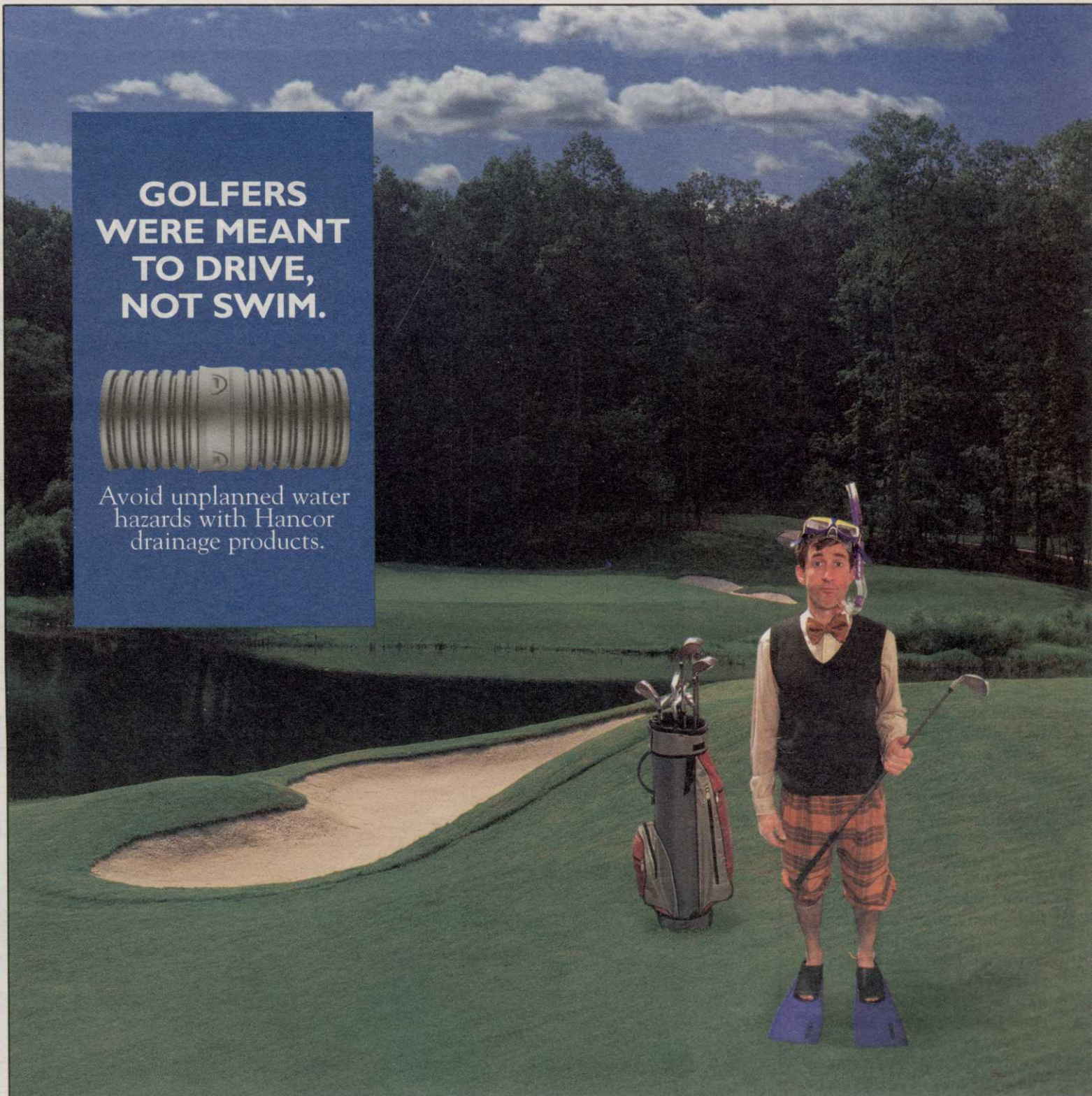
back and watch them drop programs," Kane said.

Kane and Bruce Radcliff of Briggs & Stratton Corp. were appointed co-chairs of an Education Committee. That committee will seek additional members and produce an action plan in time for the group's next meeting, scheduled for May 5-7 in Irving, Texas. Those attending the Las Vegas meeting agreed to assess annual dues of \$175.

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MEETING SET

IRVING, Texas — The Engine & Equipment Training Council (EETC) will conduct a meeting here, May 5-7.

The tentative schedule will include an EETC board meeting from 1-5 p.m., following by a 6-7 p.m. reception for all attendees on May 5; a general meeting from 8 a.m. to noon, followed by a 1-6 p.m. meeting of the OPE Technician Certification Committee to review tests on May 6; and Certification Committee meetings from 8 a.m. to noon on May 7.

More information is available from EETC Executive Director Virgil Russell at 1946 S. IH-35, Suite 100A, Austin, Texas 78704; 512-442-1788.

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