

# GOLF COURSE NEWS

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Photo by Bob Spivak

#### THRONSON HAS DESIGNS ON ARCHITECTURE

Eagle Crest Resort superintendent John Thronson moonlights as a golf course designer. His latest project was as construction supervisor at Running Y Ranch in Oregon, a Palmer Golf Design Co. layout. See story page 19.

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## Medallist, Troon launch Australia operations

By PETER BLAIS

SYDNEY, Australia—An Australian development company has joined forces with an American-based management firm to form an international course development and management company that will also call on the expertise of famed professional golfer Greg Norman.

Medallist Golf Developments, a golf course and residential development company with offices in Australia and the United States, and Troon Golf, a high-end management/development firm based in Scottsdale, Ariz.,

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Photo by Scott Bessette

Assistant superintendents Ron Kugler, driving, and Brian Coates check the progress of a wetlands fire at LPGA Golf Course's three-hole practice facility in Daytona, Fla.

## Fla. fires: Golf escapes catastrophe

By MARK LESLIE

DAYTONA BEACH, Fla. — With a wildfire leaping across LPGA Boulevard here and licking at his doorstep, LPGA International Golf Course superintendent Scott Bessette turned the irrigation heads on his new course toward the rough and flipped on the water.

When fire cut electricity to River Bend Golf Course in Ormond Beach, superintendent Bobby Gonzales couldn't turn on the sprinklers, but the course's fairways and greens

served as a fire break that may have saved a community of homes.

When a "wall of flames" jumped U.S. Route 1 and reached the 3rd and 4th holes at Matanzas Woods Golf Course in Palm Coast, the last two evacuees were superintendent Andy McGuire and Michael Fabrizio, director of golf maintenance and construction for Matanzas and Palm Coast Resort's four other golf courses, who kept the sprinklers going until the last

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On Whistling Straits (#16 above): "In my lifetime I've never seen anything like this. Anyplace. Period." — Pete Dye (see pg. 31)

## Abbott jumps into market with organic nematicide

By M. LEVANS

NORTH CHICAGO, Ill. — Abbott Laboratories' Chemical and Agricultural Products Division has officially entered the golf course market with the

recent release of its new biological nematicide, DiTera WDG.

According to Abbott — a manufacturer and marketer of nutritional, pharmaceutical, diagnostic, hospital and agricultural products that did more than \$11 billion in sales in 1997 — DiTera has been produced from a naturally occurring microorganism (*Myrothecium spp.*) isolated from a cyst nematode.

"The non-toxic profile of DiTera is its key differen-

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## PGF Development Track: Get the balance right

By M. LEVANS

PALM SPRINGS, Calif. — If you're ready to break ground on a new public course or put a new spin on a faithful old layout, this year's Development Track at Public Golf Forum was designed to help you save time and money in the process.

Six Development sessions are slated at this

Continued on page 54

By M. LEVANS

CHESAPEAKE, Va. — The city of Chesapeake is finding that as industry booms public golf is sure to follow.

In the last year, Chesapeake has seen Chubb Insurance, Panasonic, Canon and Volvo, among others, expand existing physical plants and add well over 1,000 employees to

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# Fire, drought beat on Floridians

Continued from page 1  
moments.

Nearly all the golf courses escaped harm in the lightning-generated fires that swept through Florida, especially in the north and east-central portions of the state, in June and July. But one and all saw what can happen when temperatures reach the high-90s for days on end while the heat index soars above 105 and the relative humidity hovers around 30 to 40 percent.

"It was scary from the standpoint that I didn't think fire could travel that fast," said Fabrizio. "You could not outrun it. At times it was moving 20 to 25 miles per hour."

"We had no warning," said Gonzales. "When I left work it was on the west side of I-95. I didn't think it could jump a four-lane highway with a big median. They had firetrucks waiting for it and it just blew right by them."

Drew Rogers, a lead golf course architect with Arthur Hills & Associates who designed LPGA's second course here, told of flying into Daytona's airport: "As far as I could see everything was fried."

With 200 surrounding acres scorched, the LPGA's heavily wooded 4-year-old Rees Jones-designed course fared worse than Hills', which is expected to open in October.

"The flames burned everything on the north [Jones] course right up to the rough," said Pam Phipps, director of golf at LPGA International, whose headquarters is on the site and was threatened by the blaze on July 1 and 2.

The new Hills course, meanwhile, suffered damage to the perimeters of the 2nd and 3rd holes, the tee areas of the 4th and 6th holes and a stand of oak and pine trees behind the 5th green, according to Bessette. He said most of the oak trees survived and palmettos that were burned

will come back quickly.

In Palm Coast, Fabrizio was thankful that three separate fires scared but stayed clear of four of his courses, coming within two miles of Palm Harbor, one mile of Pine Lakes and 1-1/2 miles of Cypress Knoll. Those three and Grand Haven were all opened a week later, while the future of the Arnold Palmer-designed Matanzas Woods was in question in mid-July.

The woods along the Matanzas Woods' front nine was all burned, but the back nine was spared. A bathroom and rest shelter burned down and the clubhouse sustained fire and water damage. "It's the slower part of the season, so we're taking our time to make the right decision concerning renovation, restoration or rebuilding," Fabrizio said.

In addition, he said, "almost every day more trees fall. Smoldering fires beneath the base of the trees weaken their root structure and knock them down."

Some mid-July rains helped soak the ground — the only way to stop the sub-surface smoldering.

An arborist will consult on which trees to cut down, but Fabrizio said, "It can be upwards of a year before you know for sure."

The Palm Coast Resort was so close to the middle of the fires that it served for awhile as a command post and, for weeks, housed 200 to 300 firefighters.

Gonzales, meanwhile, told how the fires affected golf courses many miles away. "We've been breathing smoke for three weeks," said the River Bend superintendent, "especially in the morning. It settles in over the night. It's so thick that I've had to send the guys home after mowing the greens."

That was confirmed by John Foy, director of the U.S. Golf Association Green Section's Florida Region and headquartered in Hobe Sound, far south of Daytona.



A wall of flames approaches the 2nd fairway at LPGA Golf Course in Daytona, Fla.

"When the fires were really raging," he said, "upper-level wind patterns were blowing the smoke a couple hundred miles south. It was very unpleasant. Haze and smoke aggravated people's allergies and breathing problems."

"Probably the biggest thing was having to work all day in that kind of heat."

#### FIGHTING THE DROUGHT

In the meantime, as they pray that weathermen are wrong in forecasting a 100-year drought worse than the Dust Bowl of the 1930s, Florida's superintendents have faced the more immediately consequences of four months of what Gonzales called "brutally dry and hot" weather.

Bobby Weed Design Business Manager Mike Matthews reported that when they took up the grass during a renovation of Ponte Vedra Golf Course in Ponte Vedra Beach "it was nothing but dry, powdered dirt. It looked like the beach."

Superintendents reported less than 1

inch of rain over 120 days leading up to July. The torrential rains that tormented Florida superintendents in November and December therefore proved to be a god-send.

"We got down to a day's worth of water at Pine Lakes, an older [Arnold] Palmer course," Fabrizio said, "and we were down to 2 inches in the reservoir at Grand Haven, our new [Jack] Nicklaus course." But a timely, 2-inch rainfall saved the day, giving the turf a boost and adding 9 or 10 inches to the Pine Lakes reservoir.

"You can pump all the irrigation you want, but it never compares to a good rain," said the USGA's Foy.

Foy said the extremes — from the heavy rains to the drought and extraordinarily hot temperatures — "have complicated things" agronomically.

"Central and north Florida had rough times coming into transition from overseeding," he said.

Heavy rains and lack of sunlight meant weak root systems. Then the extreme hot and dry weather quickly burned out the overseeded grasses, whether it was ryegrass, poa trivialis or bentgrass. And the Bermudagrass was slow to grow back.

Kevin Downing at Willoughby Golf Club in Stuart explained that the transition from the overseeded grasses back to Bermuda was "really, really painful."

The overseeding, he said, "did not handle the arid conditions. There was just no moisture in the air."

Superintendents responded by spreading more seed to make it through the season. When the transition period arrived, the Bermuda was patchy.

"A lot of courses in the central Florida and Tampa areas have been more affected," Downing said. "But at this point [mid-July] the Bermuda is coming back."

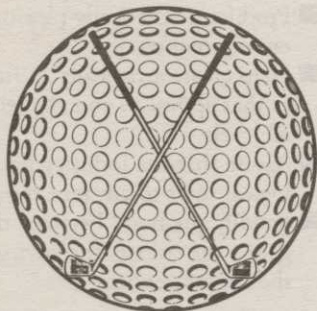
In July, officials in a couple of areas were discussing water restrictions and some had been invoked on the Gulf Coast.

"I'm surprised they didn't come sooner," Downing said. "But we still had high levels of ground water throughout the state."

Meanwhile, Fabrizio put the impact of the fires on the golf industry into perspective. "It's only grass," he said. "There are people who lost their homes. There are 150 homes in Matanzas Woods, and eight or nine were destroyed."

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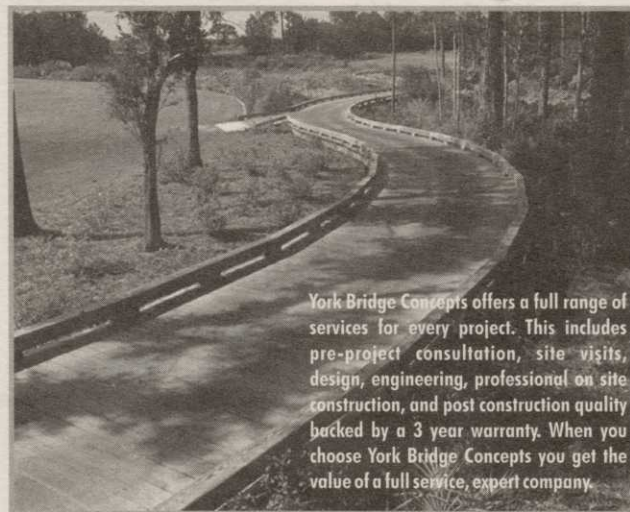
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