

CANADA'S SUPERINTENDENT OF THE YEAR

Gooder shines in Canada

By MARK LESLIE

CALGARY, Alberta, Canada — The Alberta Golf Superintendents Association (GSA), which he co-founded, is going strong. So, too, the Alberta Turfgrass Research Foundation. And now his 1993 brainchild, the Alberta Golf Property Managers Conference, is setting new parameters for turfgrass industry education.

Walter Gooder's selection as Canada's Superintendent of the Year is "more an accumulation of contributions than what I did in 1997," he said. "There is no way that you can legitimately choose a superintendent of the year based on a performance for any particular year. There are too many people out there doing terrific things. It's not like the Super Bowl."

Whatever the reasoning for the selection, it's a high honor for someone who entered the profession by happenstance. "It was a fluke," said Gooder, "one of those very fortunate turn of events. I played a lot of golf as a boy. When a family acquaintance became manager at a pitch-and-putt in 1967, he needed somebody to work on the course. He knew nothing about golf but thought, 'Walt plays a lot of golf; he probably knows how to take care of a golf course.'"

"I was the grounds crew. It was fabulous. I mowed everything, sprayed everything and watered everything — and had absolutely no idea what I was doing," he laughed. "It was that summer that I decided I liked it and started investigating what to do. I had

been out of high school for a year and this looked like a career with a future."

The choice, Gooder said, was "a lucky guess. People with turfgrass degrees were scarce as hen's teeth, especially around here. I decided on Lake City (Florida) Community College and that was another good choice. It was very practical."

Lake City, he said, "was pretty specific toward golf and I was specific about what I wanted."

Graduating in 1971, Gooder returned to his native Calgary and worked as a foreman at Pinebrook Golf Club, later moving to Willow Park here and then across town to Edmonton Country Club in 1973. He remained at Edmonton CC until the end of the 1988 season and, after taking a year off, accepted the superintendent's position during construction at the 36-hole, private Country Hills Golf Club.

In the midst of his work, Gooder saw the need for expanding education for superintendents and to support research. The result was the founding of the Alberta Golf Superintendents Association (AGSA) and Alberta Turfgrass Research Foundation.

"In the early '70s there wasn't much for organized professional associations. There were loosely based social groups, but not with a hard educational basis," he said. "A few of us saw the need and started up the Alberta GSA and started the foundation in 1985 to raise funds to help turf research. It's really taking off now. Olds College started its turf program at about the same time."

second area of artificial stones to disperse the waves before they merge at the wall. The high seas this winter have helped us in determining what areas need to be addressed," Horton said.

"When you are working with any project of this size the final impact is difficult to predict," Holt said. "The action of Mother Nature is always a wild card in the equation. We do know that the fairway won't be lost in the future and the drama of playing this close to the water will remain for generations."

Pebble Beach seawall

Continued from previous page near the 18th green was full of seawater and the sand was strewn across the fairway, and that a crew of 8 had to hose down and squeegee off the sea water during play to protect the green made it clear that some fine tuning of the walls impact has to be made. There are plans to add more artificial stone work further in to the bay to break up the wave action this summer.

"We are working on plans to create a

EARNING CANADA'S TOP HONORS

Canadian Superintendent of the Year Walter Gooder, second from left, says: "It takes many good people all pulling in the same direction to produce a first-rate golf course these days, and these people are making it happen at Country Hills Golf Club. Left to right are Assistant Superintendent Dave Smith, Gooder, Second Assistant Superintendent Debbie Miller, horticulturalist Serge Basarsky, mechanic Ron Robertson, irrigation foreman Roy Bech and Rob Vend, who has left for Heritage Point Golf Course in Calgary.



While the foundation was all-volunteer at the time, it is now professionally run — by Barb Alexander — "and doing a great job," Gooder said. "Our research budget will be over \$200,000 this year."

The AGSA's membership has grown to 120 and it could reach 200.

The jewel in the crown may be the Alberta Golf Property Managers Conference, an idea the AGSA decided to support five years ago.

"It recognizes the fact that there are a lot of careers wrapped up in the golf course now — not just one," Gooder said. "We chose to call it 'property managers' because mechanics are becoming equipment managers and gardeners are becoming landscape managers. There are irrigation experts, assistant superintendents and professionals who apply products to your golf course. We need to educate them all."

The conferences run three concurrent programs — one dealing with the shop, one with the horticultural and environmental aspects of a golf course, and one with superintendents' issues like administration and turf quality.

The world of golf course care, Gooder said, has gotten bigger, if not more complicated.

"It was maybe more complicated

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Canada's Gooder

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when the superintendent had to be all of those things," he said.

The addition of mechanics, irrigation specialists and others is "a result of trying to simplify our lives. But obviously there are outside forces we've had to deal with — the government and golfers who pressure us to keep up with the golf conditions they see at other places."

Attention to the environment and higher expectations have added a lot to the superintendent's job, he said. "The effects are everywhere. You go to small country towns and they've renovated their golf courses because they're not happy with the way they were before."

Gooder said his advice to young people wanting to be golf course superintendents is: "Finish your degree.

"It's competitive out there," he said, "and more and more golf course owners — whether corporations or boards of directors — are realizing they have a huge asset that needs looking after and it needs to be in the hands of people with heads on their shoulders."

He said the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America showed it has recognized this by setting a timetable for when members must possess a bachelor's degree to obtain Class A status.

"I see people being a lot better educated and trained, and probably smarter, in the future," Gooder said. "They will be taught more on the business side of the job and that is why you'll need four-year programs. The program at Olds College has been expanded to three years. There's too much to learn in two years."

He added: "You just about need a clone just to keep up with the added paperwork and all the different directions you're taken in: public relations, customer relations, dealing with surveys, keeping up with reading. And the government here in Canada doesn't exist in the intensity of the United States. They don't have the bureaucracy to constantly monitor us, and maybe they don't need to, quite frankly. I see a lot of professional attention and care and concern about what superintendents are doing with their people and their property. I hope they find out about us, and how professional we are, before they start regulating us."

At his own 6-year-old Country Hills Golf Club, Gooder manages 300 acres in a challenging climate. Winters present the biggest challenge.

"Calgary's quite a bit like Denver," he said. "We get chinook winds, too. Many winters, like this

one, we're snowless. Yet it can be very cold with very low humidity. The winters are so arid that we do a lot of winter watering."

Gooder's crew, which swells from five full-timers to 60 part-timers in playing season, blows out the irrigation system in mid-October and soon thereafter gets out water tanks and starts watering the sand-based areas — tees and greens.

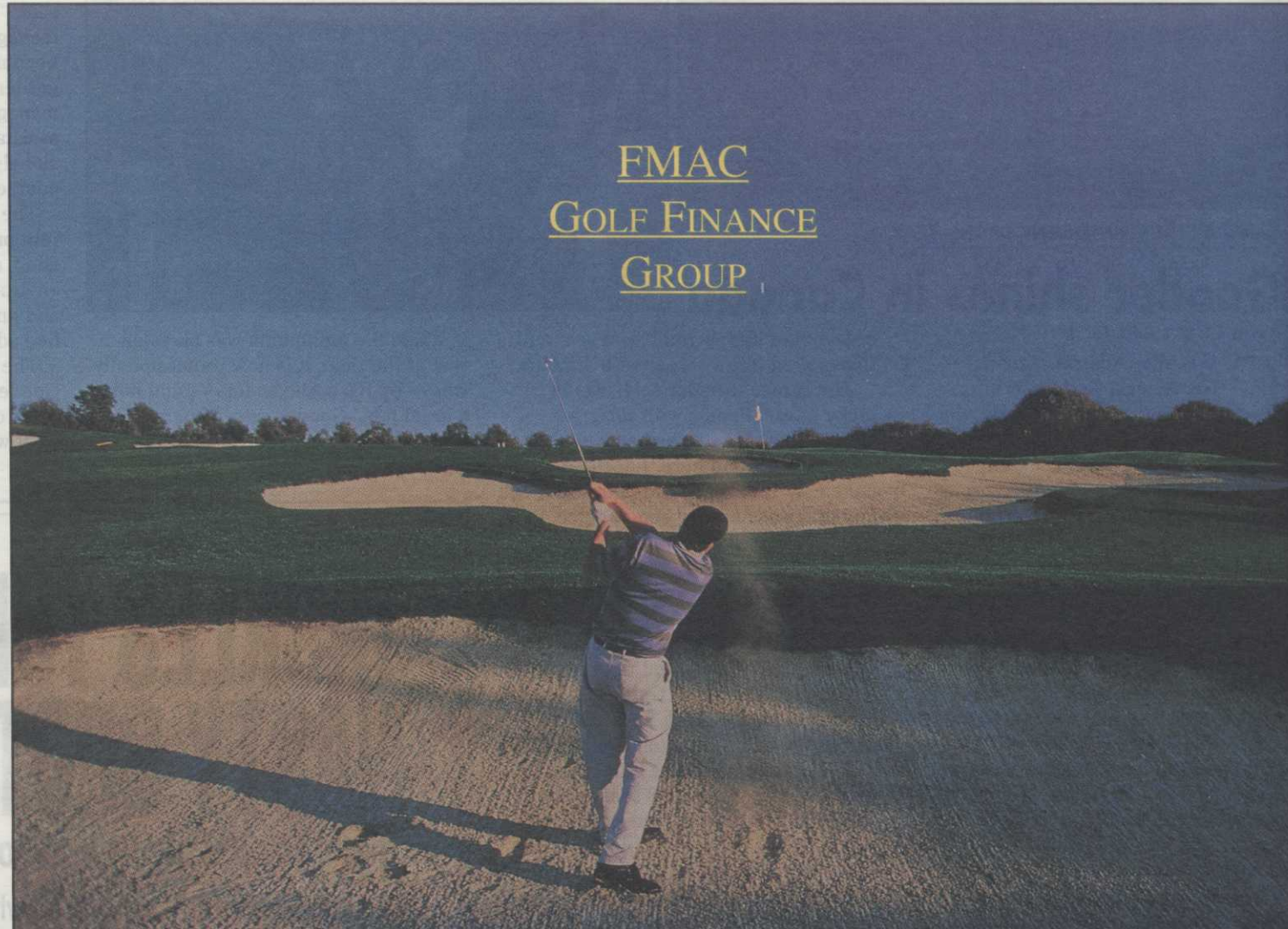
"It's an excellent *poa annua*

control," he said. "We let the fairways be exposed to 20-degree-below temperatures and 20-mile-per-hour winds, and the weather kills the *poa*."

Gooder, assistant Dave Smith and crew members cover all the greens, but with permeable covers so water goes through them. He also puts snow fencing along greens to catch as much snow as possible and take some of the pressure off the winter watering.

HAYTER CUP — AMERICAS VS. WORLD — SET

ATLANTA, Ga. — The second bi-annual Hayter International Cup competition, initiated in 1996 in Great Britain, will be held here Oct. 11-15. Initiated by The Hayter Co. to bring together representatives of some of the major golf superintendent's associations in the world, the event pits an "Americas Team" against "The Rest of the World Team." The idea of the event is to share information about what each national organization is doing and planning and to provide the opportunity to exchange ideas. The Hayter Co. also wanted a competitive golf tournament and asked for a representative from each nation to not only act as an ambassador for their association but to have a handicap of 12 or less. The Americas Team won the first event.



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