



Oh, Canada!

COVERAGE OF THE 50TH CANADIAN INTERNATIONAL TURFGRASS CONFERENCE & TRADE SHOW CONTINUES ON PAGES 20-25.

Super of the Year: Stay enthusiastic

By MARK LESLIE

BRAMPTON, Ontario, Canada — Ask Bob Heron about his accomplishments and he first points away from himself, to his many assistants who have gone on to take head superintendent jobs from North America to Loch Lomond, Scotland. Ask about his family and he embellishes about 29-year-old son Scott “whose resume is better than mine.” But ask colleagues of Canada’s 1998 Superintendent of the Year and they remark about a man who has greatly impacted this career field.

“Bob Heron has a good relationship with his members and he produces a pretty fine golf club,” Gordon Witteveen of The Board of Trade Country Club in Woodbridge said about the man who is now head superintendent at Beacon Hall Golf Club here. “He’s an upbeat guy and always has a positive personality, which makes him fun to be around.”

“R. Tee’s contributions to the game of golf locally, nationally and internationally have been many and continue to be ongoing,” said golfing pal Paul Dermott



Above is Beacon Hall Golf Club’s 2nd hole, which keeps Bob Heron, below, and his crew busy in Brampton, Ontario.

of Oakdale Golf & Country Club in Downsview, who nominated Heron on behalf of the Ontario Golf Course Superintendents Association. “He’s a good player and always turns out a playable and well-maintained course for his membership. He’s always been a real proponent of bentgrass, and he was one of the first ones up here to experiment with some chemicals to eradicate poa annua.”

Indeed, several innovations in golf course maintenance have been pio-

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Bubble Cover wins converts in Quebec

By MARK LESLIE

TORONTO — Be it laser shooting, Global Positioning Satellite technology or soil sensors, some of the greatest advances in the world of golf have been borrowed from other industries. Enter the latest: Bubble Covers, originally designed to lay over swimming pools to keep them warm.

Quebec superintendents have been experimenting with Bubble Covers to protect their greens from winter injury, and, according to Serge Gauthier, they have found success while saving money.

Speaking at the Canadian International Turfgrass Conference here, the superintendent at Islesmere Golf and Country Club in Laval, Quebec, said his experience with Bubble Cover over the last three winters has been extraordinary in terms of effectiveness, ease of installation and removal, and cost compared to using straw.

Traditionally, Gauthier had protected his greens during winters by laying down a strong netting, spreading a layer of straw over that and then covering both with a greens cover.

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BRIEFS



PTC AWARDS \$175,000 FOR RESEARCH

The Pennsylvania Turfgrass Council has announced allocation of funds to Penn State for the 1998-99 fiscal year. The \$175,000 research grant brings to almost \$2.5 million what the council has donated to Penn State over the years. The funds will support research projects in the departments of agronomy, entomology, and plant pathology. It will also support eight scholarships and awards granted to undergraduate and graduate students.

IGCSA ANNOUNCES NEW DIRECTORS

DES MOINES, Iowa — The following superintendents were elected to serve on the board of directors for the Iowa Golf Course Superintendents Association at the Iowa Turfgrass Conference here. President Dennis Watters, of the Fort Dodge Country Club in Fort Dodge, Iowa, will be assisted by new directors Ron Stephan, Joyce Hamilton, John Ausen and Tom Verrips.

Pooch sniffs out golf course’s elusive PVC

By PETER BLAIS

BRUTUS, Mich. — Think dogs are just good for chasing geese off golf courses? Well, Steve Sump, superintendent at Hidden River Golf & Casting Club here has a PVC-seeking missile of a Labrador Retriever that can find clogged drainage caps through the deepest, murkiest standing water allowing Sump to get the flooded parts of his course back in play in two shakes of a dog’s tail.

Buddy is an 18-month-old, 80-pound yellow lab who has lived in the Sump household since he was six weeks old. Buddy began accompanying Sump to work almost immediately, riding on the superintendent’s cart and quickly developing into a top-flight goose deterrent.

“I originally brought him out here to chase the geese,” Sump said. “We don’t have any geese now. We’ve got more turkeys than anything, and a few ducks. I got him to understand not to chase the turkeys or the ducks.”

Being a retriever, Buddy loved to pick things up and bring

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Buddy and partner Steve Sump quite a team at Hidden River Golf & Casting Club.

Headhunters are the new niche in job placement

By TERRY BUCHEN

WILLIAMSBURG, Va. — While networking with fellow course officials and investigating local and national job-referral services have long been used to discover superintendents’ jobs, search firms, or “headhunters,” are gaining credence with clubs and general managers.

“We are sensing there is a growing need for using search firms such as ours in the recruiting of superintendents and

directors of golf maintenance operations,” said Richard Farrell, a partner with Golf Search Personnel in Clemont, Fla. “We found we can be a neutral source for private clubs, ensuring no favoritism is involved as there can be in club politics. Also, using a search firm brings the confidentiality that needs to be involved in a search.”

Headhunters follow a similar format, though each has their own unique style.

Dick Kopplin of Kopplin Search, Inc. in LaQuinta, Calif., has been in the golf business for 28 years, many of those as a well-connected club general manager.

“We provide a specialty service to clubs where the general manager or president will contact me to help them find a qualified superintendent,” Kopplin said. “After sending them a packet of information about my company, with references, I

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Heron: Innovator, teacher

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neered by the 56-year-old Heron, a Guelph native, 1964 graduate of Penn State University and 1979 president of the Canadian Golf Superintendents Association.

- Heron performed "some of the early work" with Roundup on eradicating annual bluegrass in fairways.

- In 1981 he was ahead of his time in experimenting with winter covers.

- His club in 1989 was "the forerunner in leasing golf course equipment," although he takes no credit since it was in the program when he arrived.

- Last year he undertook his latest experiment, incorporating Georgia pine straw into the Beacon Hall property — a move he feels will reduce maintenance costs over the long term.

Winter covers, Heron reported, "are not a panacea for growing turf. But if everything else is equal and your management program is adequate, they will prevent some problems. I personally prefer perforated versus solid covers.

"Whether the green is in shade or the open makes a big difference to how fast frost comes out of the ground and how fast the turf greens up. But the real trick is when you take them off."

Leasing equipment, he said, has become "a good way to stay current. And it keeps your maintenance costs down because you're not repairing old equipment all the time."

Heron replaces his equipment every four years, or has an option of re-leasing it, or buying it from the lease company and selling it to other golf courses.

"Once the lease is established, we have the freedom of negotiating new equipment deals without having to go to the board of directors or general manager all the time for approvals," he said. "Once we select equipment, we like to shop around and get the best deal from a lease company."

In Beacon Hall's case, it was a new golf course with a very limited membership, "so there wasn't the capital to buy \$500,000 to \$700,000 in new equipment," Heron said.

The Georgia pine straw is another story — Heron's dream child after a number of visits to the Carolinas, Georgia and Florida.

"We brought in three loads last year just to spread around in our pine tree areas," he said. "The reason was, our red pine trees don't produce the same quantity as the loblolly pines down there. So, to enhance the walk, improve the aesthetics and playability, we have spread it in the woods. It makes it easier to find your ball. Maintenance costs are reduced because you don't

have to trim grass around trees. And it improves the health of the trees because of less competition."

Though the initial cost was high in Canadian dollars, Heron said he thinks it will save money over the long term, even with a minimal replacement cost each year.

In the midst of this innovation, Heron's crews began an

overseeding program last summer to convert the PennLinks bentgrass greens to G6.

"The new G varieties allow you to start off the season with a little tighter height of cut," he said. "I believe it's best suited to our climatic conditions. We think it will give us a much tighter turf and allow us to get down tighter earlier in the season. That's important with our short season, especially at a good golf course

because people like the ball to roll at 10 every day."

Heron expects to oversee two or three times a year for the next three years to accomplish his goal.

Increasingly, he said, business rather than cultural practices command most of his time.

"When I was in school it [the job] was the science, the art and the business," Heron said. "The business was probably 20 percent, the art, 50 percent, and the

science, 30 percent. I think now it's turned around to the point where business — people management — has become 50 percent of our job; and science and art are maybe 25 percent each.

"It has become a big business, and we have to be fiscally responsible because we're dealing with a lot of money at private golf clubs. That separates the good superintendents from the

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Bob Heron

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not-so-good superintendents.”

Another key ingredient setting superintendents apart is enthusiasm, Heron said.

“The ones who have done the best are those who have had the enthusiasm. If you don’t have the enthusiasm in this business, you don’t have a chance,” he said.

“A lot of us will make a com-

fortable living looking after golf courses, but never will be millionaires. It’s a labor of love, really. I look forward to it every day, even in the wintertime. That becomes more difficult as you get older, but if you can do it...”

Heron has tried to instill that enthusiasm in his assistants and employees as well.

“Enthusiasm and motivation are two very important words in my vocabulary,” he said. “We’re

‘Enthusiasm and motivation are two very important words in my vocabulary,’ he said. ‘We’re only as good as our worst employee. Motivating and dealing with the various types of employees is crucial.’

only as good as our worst employee. Motivating and dealing with the various types of employees is crucial. Turf students, who have an interest in the business, make it easier. But it’s im-

portant to keep the high school students, or retired people enthused, motivated and focused about what we are trying to do.

“Positive reinforcement is good. We try to catch them doing some-

thing right and make sure they’re aware of it. In the golf business we’re not blessed with being able to pay what other industries do. So it’s important to make it enjoyable and also have them understand what is expected.”

The assistant superintendents Heron is known for grooming are special to him.

“I’ve given them as much responsibility as I could, whether delegating on a day-to-day basis, budgeting, overall planning, or purchasing equipment,” he said. “In other words, keep them informed about everything required to do the job.”

He suggests that young people aspiring to work in the field enter a university turfgrass program and “be prepared to put in their innings — spend a lot of time working on a golf course. It is becoming more difficult because we have done a good job of providing a good environment for a lot of those types of people.

“And it’s no secret that the market at the moment is saturated with good quality young people. The good ones, the cream, will still come to the top, but it’s becoming more difficult to get a job, even withstanding the fact that more courses are opening. Some want to run before they walk, but it does take a long time to learn all there is to learn about the business.”

Will it pay off for them? For Heron, who started working on a course at the age of 15, it did.

“I don’t think there is anything I would prefer to do than look after a golf course,” he said.

In fact, he laughed, sometimes wife Carolyn, a certified financial planner, says that “if she were to do it all over again she would like to be a superintendent.”

Though daughter Cory Whiting is studying for a master’s degree at the University of Guelph, son Scott has taken after his father — in a big way. A Penn State alumnus like his father, he has worked at Pebble Beach Golf Links in California, Devil’s Pulpit in Caledonia, East Sussex National in England and Capilano Golf and Country Club in Vancouver. He just got his first head superintendent position, building a Doug Carrick-designed course on Bigwin Island in Huntsville.

For father, son and all superintendents, Heron said, the job is a challenge.

“It’s a real challenge dealing with adversity,” he said. “It’s a challenge sometimes dealing with members and their idiosyncrasies. Being a bit of a competitor is important, too, because you’re always competing within yourself and other golf courses.

“I think it’s important to be competitive in this game. There’s not a golf course anywhere, in my opinion, that could not be made better. I think you have to have that philosophy.”

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Bubble Covers bring extraordinary results

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"This was effective in most cases, but was time-consuming, and removal was also very time-consuming," he said. "But the main problem is, it's a living material... Also, in a mild winter, the greens did not come out so well."

Gauthier and his colleagues in the Northern regions considered that a perfect method of winter greens protection would include:

- control of water;
- isolation, such as an inorganic temperature buffer;
- ease of installation.

When a Bubble Cover salesman knocked on his door in late 1995, Gauthier jumped on the idea. "I knew it would be perfect," he recalled.

The product is sold from 4- to 28-foot widths, and Gauthier spent \$26,400 at 11 cents per square foot. He figures the Bubble Covers, which should be usable for at least six years, will save \$5,336 or more per year.

Using straw cost \$7,000 per year for the straw and \$4,560 in labor and disposal costs. The Bubble Cover costs only \$1,824 in labor, and the \$26,400 spread over six years equals \$4,400.

Gauthier spelled out the process of covering his greens with the bubble material, which is so strong the bubbles do not pop even when jumped upon.

First, the plastic netting is laid over the green. Mouse repellent is sprayed over the green. The Bubble Cover is spread out over the netting and is clamped down with long, fluorescent-pink staples so they can be easily found come spring. All this is held down by a permeable greens cover.

"This top cover," he said, "is very important and we have to pull it all the way back from the green. If not clamped down well, wind will tear it out."

In his experiments Gauthier placed household heat monitors inside the greens, with a sensor near the middle of the green and the monitor in a Ziploc bag at the edge of the green.



Crew member Daniel Fassina nails down the cover over one of the greens at Islesmere Golf & Country Club.

'The method is not perfect. Sometimes water infiltrates under the cover. But we are fine-tuning it. We are pulling the top cover even more taut. And some results are incredible.'

— Serge Gauthier

The temperature never dipped below 5 or 6 degrees Celsius (32 to 34 Fahrenheit), which *poa annua* can survive, he said.

A bonus of the Bubble Covers is that they are fairly translucent which helps kick-start the grass in the spring when the top cover is removed.

Since each cover is tailor-fit to a specific green, it is labeled for use the next year.

"The method is not perfect. Sometimes water infiltrates under the cover," Gauthier said. "But we are fine-tuning it. We are pulling the top cover even more taut. And some results are incredible."



Tough plastic netting, left, is the first layer placed on the green before winter strikes. It allows the turf to breathe and also serves to easily pick up whatever is on top of it. On top of the netting, crews lay down the translucent Bubble Cover, right, which insulates in the winter time and allows radiant heat when spring arrives. Both the netting and Bubble Cover are anchored down by a permeable cover.



BIGGA chairman calls on supers to 'uphold golf's heritage'

By MARK LESLIE

TORONTO — Golf course superintendents have a duty to the game and must uphold its heritage, something that maintaining "unnatural conditions" does not accomplish this, according to Gordon Child.

Child, a retired superintendent and chairman of British & International Golf Greenkeepers Association (BIGGA), said golf course caretakers should agree to certain basic principles of maintenance.

"One thing that does irritate me greatly is golfers telling us how we should achieve what they want," Child told his colleagues in a session at the 50th Canadian International Turfgrass Conference & Trade Show held here in March.

Saying that his "basic principles" are based on golf's traditions and not necessarily for every superintendent, who may face environmental conditions that require other maintenance measures, Child spelled them out.

"First, we don't realize how little fertilizer grass needs," he said. "I believe we only need to use limited phosphates. In the UK [United Kingdom], some of the best

golf courses you see are on very low phosphate readings and some of the worst are on high-phosphate readings...

"The Old Course at St. Andrews uses very little phosphate, yet the course stands up to a lot of play."

St. Andrews, he said, also "encourages the fine grasses to dominate, and they do."

Child added that applying nitrogen more is far less expensive than phosphate and is more consistent and reliable.

Another element Child cites is "free drainage."

"Irrigation is far too readily used," he said, even though grass will not live without it.

He suggested that superintendents keep their courses dry, "but never ever to the point of burning the turf itself."

Referring to the many schools of thought about top dressing, Child said, "We should think of top dressing in relation to the root zone."

Saying that a "pure sand green" builds up humus and therefore is not pure sand for long, he said that changes the way of dealing with the question of top dressing.

"I think we should add some sort of humus into the root zone," he said.

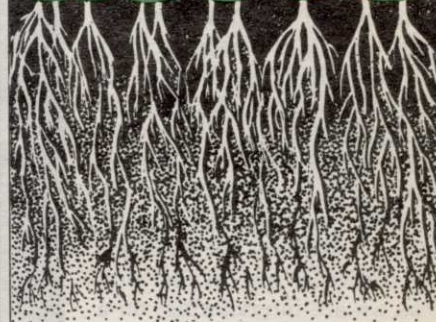


"This is really taking off in Quebec," said Fern Maille of Charm Services Inc. in Bellefeuille, Quebec, who sells Bubble Cover. Although Bubble Cover is being shipped across North America for swimming pools, it is sold only in the Province of Quebec for golf courses, he said. "I believe this year we will be selling it in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, and looking for distributors in the U.S."

"It's just a question of having enough testimony to convince the guys to at least use it on one or two greens."

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