

# The high-tech addition of the decade? Border collies

Reviewing 10 years of *Golf Course News* articles on cutting-edge technology and pioneering turf-care practices, it is fascinating that perhaps the greatest response followed a story, below left, in March 1994 on how one Connecticut superintendent, Richard Marcks, had ridded his golf course of geese with the most intelligent piece of maintenance equipment ever ... a border collie. Below right is a follow-up story.

## Tac rids course of irksome geese

By MARK LESLIE

There have been dog super-heroes in the past. Timmy's Lassie. Rusty's Rin Tin Tin. Sergeant Preston's King. But today, in Greenwich, Conn., the Dog of the Hour is Richard Marcks' Tac. Tac accomplished what no human in town could do: He drove several hundred geese to a new address — out of town.

A 7-year-old border collie, Tac (short for Sharp as a Tac) has ridded Fairview Country Club of 600 troublesome geese — and enjoyed every minute of it.

"This is the hottest thing since peanut butter," said Marcks, property manager at Fairview. Twelve other area golf courses have bought border collies to rid their properties of geese since seeing Tac at work.

Buying the trained dog was Marcks' brainchild. "Within a month we had the course clean," Marcks said. Tac, fully trained to herd sheep, took quickly to the geese. Since she loves water, it was no chore for her to swim into the waterways and fetch the flock toward Marcks. Once the geese were brought in tight to him, they flew off.

"After you harass them a few times they leave," he said.

The \$2,000 price tag, Marcks said, "sounds like a lot, but you spend more

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Richard and Sandy Marcks at Crumpin-Fox with their border collies, from left, Casey, Spy, Toby and Spy's mother Boo (standing). Crumpin-Fox was home to 100 to 150 geese when the Marckses arrived. But with Casey, Toby and Spy on the job, they were soon gone.

## Kick 'em out now, or watch out in the future

By MARK LESLIE

HOWELL, N.J. — David Marcks of Geese Police Inc. said golf courses and others who delay dealing with their geese problems will see those problems exacerbated.

"Is there a population problem? Absolutely," he said. "Will it double in the next five years? Absolutely. If the trend contin-

ues and you think there are a lot of geese now, just wait."

David explained that the major concern is not with migratory geese, who simply pass through on their way south or their return north. Rather, it is the resident geese.

A true migratory bird does not breed

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## An entire industry has been born

By MARK LESLIE

What began humbly, with one border collie at one golf course, has mushroomed into an industry, with franchises from New Jersey and Connecticut to Long Island, North Carolina, Chicago and Seattle.

"It's turned into an unbelievable business. I never expected it to grow so fast, or get so big," said Richard Marcks, who first dreamed up the idea of sicing a border collie on the geese which had so troubled and spoiled Fairview Country Club in Greenwich, Conn., where he worked as property manager.

Marcks, who in March moved to Crumpin-Fox Club in Bernardston, Mass., saw the success of his simple idea turn into Geese Police Inc., a multimillion-dollar business servicing hundreds of corporate and municipal clients — and golf courses — whose parks, grounds, playgrounds and racetracks are beset by the messy geese.

"Actually, we only have three or four golf courses," said David Marcks, Richard's brother whose Geese Police offices in Howell, N.J., serve as the nationwide headquarters. "Most usually end up buying their own dog."

When Richard Marcks' story ran in the March 1994 edition of *Golf Course News*,

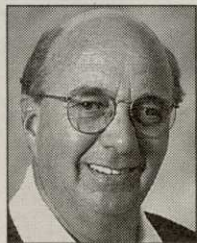
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## BRIEFS



### STOTTERN MOVES TO JONESES' TRACK

LAS VEGAS — Southern Highlands Golf Club, the new private club co-designed by Robert Trent Jones Sr. and Robert Trent Jones Jr., has named former Shadow Creek Golf Club superintendent Riley Stottern its new course superintendent. President of the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America in 1986-87, Stottern has more than 35 years experience overseeing course construction, maintenance and management. A certified golf course superintendent, he attended the University of Utah in Salt Lake City and studied turfgrass management through Guelph University in Ontario.



Riley Stottern

## Kocher, Jett, people power the difference at Pinehurst #2

By TERRY BUCHEN

PINEHURST, N.C. — Tournament and championship veterans Brad Kocher, director of golf course maintenance, and Paul T. Jett, Course No. 2 superintendent at ClubCorp's Pinehurst are excited about this year's U.S. Open and have an able and efficient staff prepared to show off their talents.

Also a big help is Bob Farren, assistant director of golf course maintenance, who assists Kocher in his daily rounds of overseeing the maintenance of eight courses, including other many-faceted grounds operations.

"We have 24 of the best maintenance employees a golf course could ever want on our payroll, plus 14 student interns," said Jett.

So many people volunteered to work on the Open that "we had to stop all requests last October," said Jett, who kept the volunteer staff to 48. "We could have had 100 volunteers, without question, which shows the industry-wide dedication to Pinehurst and the



Photos by Michael Romney

In righthand photo, Brad Kocher, right, Pinehurst Resort's director of golf course maintenance, and Course No. 2 superintendent Paul Jett have been busy the past couple of years preparing the famous Donald Ross-designed course for this month's U.S. Open. Above is the 17th hole at Pinehurst No. 2.

U.S. Open."

A hospitality tent — complete with air-conditioning and television monitors — is set up across from the maintenance offices for staff and volunteers. Lesco will sponsor a breakfast every morning and Zeneca will go split the

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## An industry is born

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it spread like wildfire. Suddenly, the telephone calls turned from the question, "How can we do what you did?" to "Will you do it for us?"

The next step was obvious: incorporate Geese Police. Enter Marcks' wife, Sandy, and brother David, who once was his assistant superintendent at Fairview CC and worked in the Monmouth County (N.J.) Parks System for seven years.

That was four years ago. Today, David has 15 full-time employees working with 22 border collies to keep some 150 clients' properties geese-free. Clients include New York Botanical Gardens, Columbia University, GE Capital, and a lot of elementary and high schools. It is a seven-day-a-week, year-round proposition, said David, who in part laments the fact that the work has turned from "hobby" to "job."

Richard and Sandy sold their Connecticut franchise when they moved to a home off the 5th hole at Crumpin-Fox, and are taking solace in being able to keep at least one course clear of geese with their four dogs.

Because it is such a full-time business Richard and Sandy will not add a franchise in Bernardston, Sandy said. They intend to spend more time together, especially traveling to Florida, where Richard is overseeing construction of a new golf course for his company.

Meanwhile, in addition to the existing franchises, David is negotiating with people wanting to open offices in Pennsylvania and Massachusetts. But, he is not accepting new clients at his office because, he said, "We're overwhelmed and it's like shutting the barn door after they're out."

"A gazzilion copycat companies" have emerged around the country, David Marcks said.

"But we have the best record," added Richard. "And most people end up coming to us even if they start with somebody else. We've never had a goose injured. We get the best dogs out there. Others have been fined by killing geese, or not having dogs under control."

"We've learned a lot of things about geese and have some good secrets and that's what sells our franchises," Richard added.

Sandy Marcks attributed their success to the quality of dogs they have been able to get, first, from Barbara Ligon of Seclusival Farm and Kennel in Shipman, Va., and now from Kent and Gwen Kuykendall, breeders in Franklinville, N.C., who have become the Geese Police Academy. The Kuykendalls train all the

Marcks' dogs and also sell dogs to golf courses, but not to Geese Police competitors.

"We deal a lot with Fish and Wildlife departments," Sandy said. "They recommend what we do because our dogs don't touch the geese."

The Marckses also encourage property owners to get addling

permits from Fish and Wildlife departments which allow them to touch goose eggs during nesting periods. Shake the eggs and leave them in the nest, and they will not hatch.

And if golf course superintendents and others feel they want to buy a border collie for themselves, the ante at Geese Police Academy is from \$2,500 to \$3,500, depending on the experience of the dog.

## Tac gone and irreplaceable

Whatever happened to Tac? Tac is the substance of legends now. An entire industry was promulgated from Richard Marcks' idea. But it was Tac's execution that drove it. After two operations for cancer, Tac died late last summer in semi-retirement.

"No one took Tac's place," said Sandy Marcks. "She was so consistent and loved working. It could be a cold, windy February day and she would go in the water and not finish until the geese were gone. I have two dogs who will go into the water any time of the year but to play, not to work."

Silence isn't golden.





## Move geese now rather than later

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until its third or fourth year of life, and not successfully until its fifth or sixth year. When it does, it lays four to six eggs. But robust residential geese, instead of expending their energy migrating, lay more and bigger eggs. And the survival rate is over 80 percent.

So, he said, if the residential

population is not sent packing, the golf courses and other properties on which they live become home to a skyrocketing number of geese.

"It's called 'imprinting,'" David said. "Once they have bred on your property, they will return to breed on your property and so will their young."

While migratory geese fly

through New Jersey in early October and return in late January to early February, the resident geese "get stubborn," David said, around February. Instead of flying far from the property when chased by a dog, they will fly just a few yards away because they are pairing off to breed. In March they start laying eggs. In April the goslings are born and aren't able to fly until the second week of August. The adults,

meanwhile, molt the second week of June and are grounded until the second week of August.

They can't fly, "so anything you have on your property in April or May you're stuck with for the summer," David said.

During that time, all the border collies can do is chase the birds out of harm's way and sensitive areas.

Once mid-August arrives, "they get moving and it's back

to the easy part," he said.

The birds' timing varies from place to place, but being Geese Police remains a year-round job, David Marcks said.

Golf courses have long struggled with controlling geese, trying solutions from lighting firecrackers and firing guns to scare them away, stringing rope around waterways, floating frightening-looking balloons above ponds and spreading products on the turf surrounding the water. None seem to have lasting effects.

Now a health study may turn this battle into one of emergency. Working with Monmouth (N.J.) County health officials, scientists at Monmouth University and Johns Hopkins University have reported that goose droppings will translate sickness to people in the forms of diarrhea and crypto sporidium which entails a 15-pound weight loss.

"Each goose produces 1-1/2 pounds of droppings per day, and that's where the problem lies," said David Marcks.

## Tac the original

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than that in maintenance and cleanup [of geese]."

Tac and Marcks have gone out on the speakers circuit, demonstrating how they gave the ex-resident geese a new address.

Among the new converts to the Border Collie Remedy are Tamarack, Redding and Sterling Farms country clubs, and Scarsdale and Richter Park golf clubs. Westchester County's Parks and Recreation Department is buying two dogs for its five courses and The Hampshire Club has just ordered one, Marcks said.

"Many superintendents have tried other kinds of dogs but they don't listen well," said Marcks. "The border collies are trained to respond to voice and hand commands and to a whistle."

"Geese will drown a dog. But when a border collie gets in trouble, you can just call them back out of the water."

The Connecticut and New York clubs have been buying the dogs fully trained from a woman in Shipman, Va., who has 25 dogs in her kennel. With so many sales to golf courses, she now trains them on geese as well as sheep.

Marcks said it costs him \$1,000 a year to keep Tac. As well as good workers, border collies make "great companions," he said. "She rides with me on the golf car. And the public relations with the membership is great. They all want to stop and talk to the dog. There's no greater ice-breaker."

Marcks has already prepared for the future, Tac giving birth to pups seven months ago.

"Training him can be a little bit of a pain," Marcks conceded. But cleaning up for geese can virtually be torment.

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