

We are only on the tip of the iceberg of advancements

By TERRY BUCHEN

• President, Terry Buchen Golf Agronomy



Terry Buchen

Many significant advancements have been achieved in golf course management during the past 10 years — most notably, living on the edge has gotten easier and better.

The new bentgrass

cultivars and ultra-dwarf Bermudagrass greens varieties have evolved with much better root systems, disease and weedgrass prevention capabilities, for much faster, firmer and smoother putting surfaces, to the delight of golfers and golf course managers in North America.

Management companies have proliferated during this decade by proving, over and over again, that money can be made in the golf business while still providing an acceptable conditioned product. This

proves how valuable the golf course manager is in providing good agronomic and playing conditions while watching the bottom line.

Management companies are now operating on all levels of golf course operations, including private clubs and resorts and even some military base courses. Many new courses are being operated soon after they are opened or are sold to management companies during or shortly after construction.

Headhunters have made tremendous

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Ten Years of Gaining Ground

By BRENT WADSWORTH

• Honorary Chairman of the Board, Wadsworth Golf Construction Co.

Golfers who walk (and more and more often ride) the fairways today are experiencing courses built — with ever-increasing degrees of perfection — by designers, contractors and developers who have continuously upgraded their styles and operations. The result is that the entire industry has been elevated.



Brent Wadsworth

While some things haven't changed — 18 hole courses of 6,800 to 7,200 yards still dominate — the industry has grown and evolved in many ways. For example, the total number of courses built year to year increased from 211 in 1988 to almost 448 in 1998. And golf course development is becoming more popular well outside major population areas, thanks to the expanding popularity of the sport.

Trends during the last decade include continuing upgrades in design, building techniques and technology as well as development of more daily-fee and semiprivate courses.

Here's more on where ground has been gained in the last 10 years:

Techniques and Technology

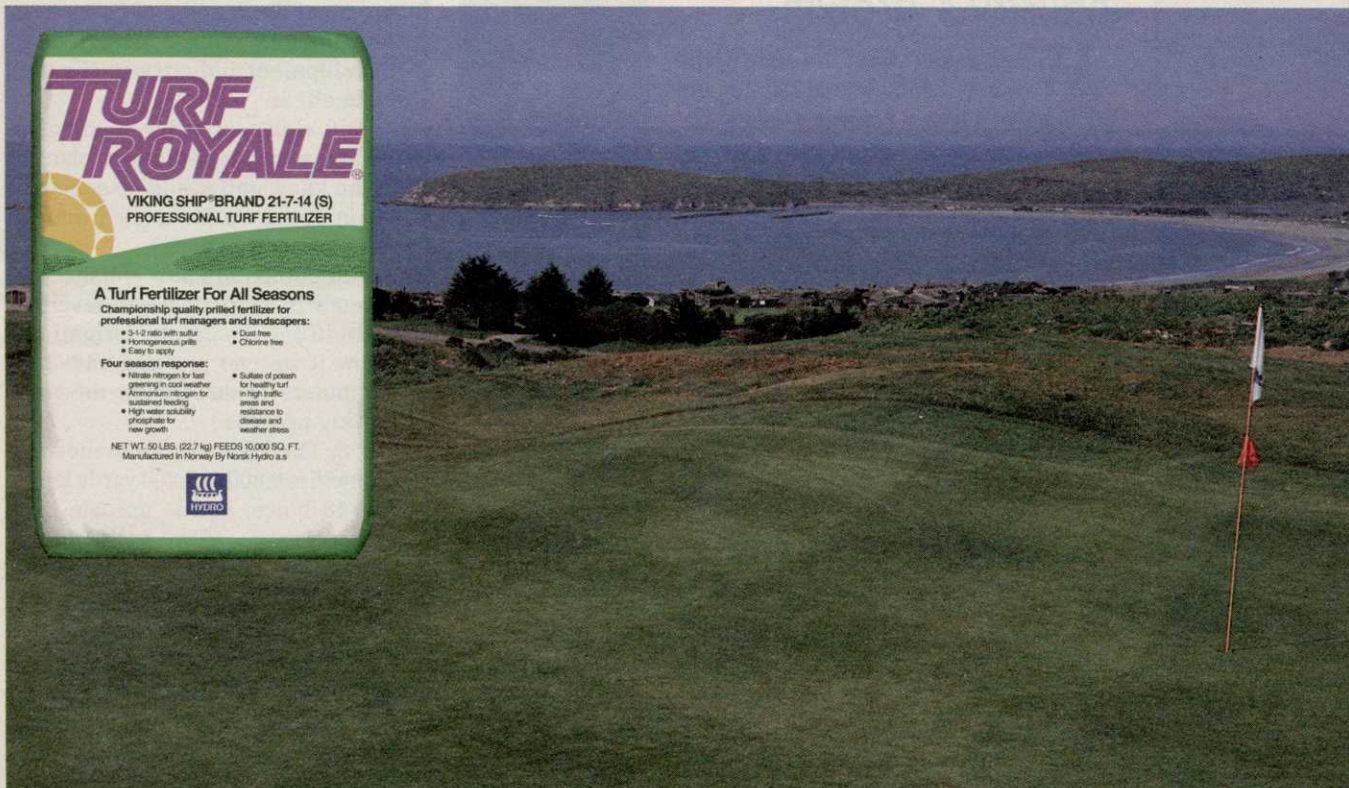
- **Hard surfaces** — We have benefited significantly from improvements in the specialized equipment that moves earth, trenches and performs such applications as stone- and debris-picking. Techniques in surface drainage, handling structures, cart paths and earthmoving have all improved, and a growing variety of surface materials, especially concrete, have been introduced. Computerization has advanced all aspects of design and construction.

- **Soft surfaces** — Grass surfaces have advanced, too, thanks to a trend toward automatic and fully computerized irrigation operations and improvements in cool- and warm-season grasses. Other improvements include more ways to use seed rather than vegetative propagation; more precise information about growing-medium requirements for greens and tee features; more use of sod to help open new golf courses quicker and eliminate some seeding and sprigging operations; and the use of more ground and grass covers to protect against destructive weather conditions.

COURSE TYPE AND LOCATION

The sector with the most growth is the 18-hole upscale/daily-fee golf course, sometimes classified as semi-private. Development courses represent a slightly smaller share of courses being built than 10 years ago.

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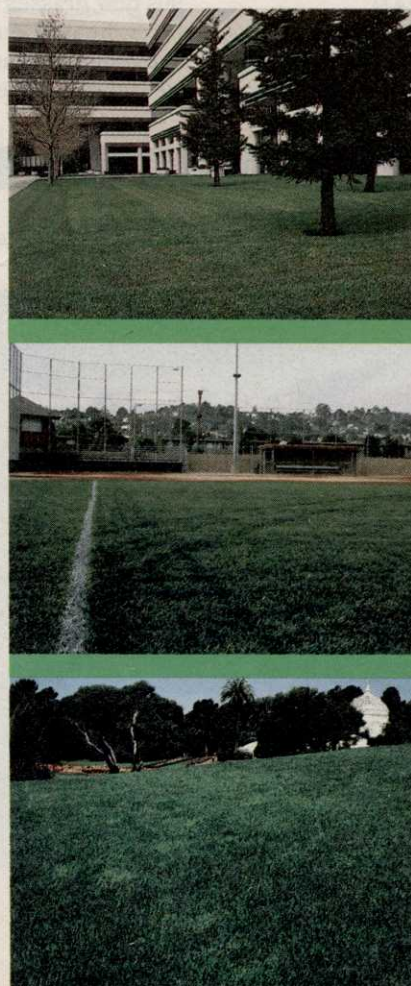
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strides in golf course management in the 1990s. The firms that placed general and club managers and golf professionals regularly take in course superintendents/managers. Even some superintendent/golf course managers have entered the job placement service business themselves.

Our side of the business is getting so competitive that some course managers are now submitting resumes to headhunting firms well ahead of their next anticipated job change — even when they are not actively pursuing a new position, just to be ready and able.

Our popular position in the golf community has caused an influx and over-abundance of students who many times must wait one to two years until well after they graduate from agronomy school before they can become an assistant superintendent.

Some student interns only want to work on high-profile courses and many of these courses cannot fill all of the applications they receive. Student interns must be more aware that they can learn just as much from other very qualified course managers at lesser-known facilities.

The agronomy schools keep graduating many fine superintendent prospects, but not enough jobs are available as approximately 450 to 500 new courses have been opening during the 1990s golf boom. Even with retirement attrition, there still are too many individuals in the maintenance and conditioning field. Many established turf managers feel there are too many turf scholarships in the marketplace and that the money would be better spent on turf research.

Much-needed publicity about course managers to the golfing public has made tremendous strides. Turf managers are finally getting the recognition and attention that they deserve, even though it seems it could always be better.

The Golf Course Superintendents Association of America (GCSAA) has made tremendous strides in providing the Par for the Course show on cable television's The Golf Channel; The Leaderboard Newsletter; the GCSAA Website www.gcsaa.org; The Old Tom Morris Award; The GCSAA Foundation; Historical Preservation Projects and Acquisitions; Environmental Management Program and the Environmental Research Library, to name a few.

Where do we go from here in the new millennium is anyone's guess. Golf course managers will receive even more good publicity, as our position in the golf community becomes even more

important. Golfers will want to get to know us better and will seek us out on more of a regular basis to discuss what we are doing on the course.

The cliché that growing grass is the easiest part of the job will continue to be evident as personnel management, communication skills with employers and golfers, environmental stewardship, providing even better playing conditions with tight budget constraints,

working for and with management companies, and other issues will be of great significance.

The usual major advancements in golf course equipment will continue to make our jobs easier. And new environmental ways to control pests and grow grasses that are more friendly to the planet will always move forward with excellent results.

Finding and keeping qualified and acceptable hourly maintenance employees will continue to get more difficult since the industry is relying more and more on minorities and immigrants to fill these vital positions.

Clubs that are now receiving between 100 and 300 resumes for course management jobs will receive even more, upwards of between 200 to 500. Networking will become even more prevalent.

Golf course managers will stay at their positions longer as

the trend to move every five to seven years will take a turn in the opposite direction; and more people over 50 years old will remain in their present jobs instead of moving to related green industries or getting out of the golf business completely.

Best wishes and continued success to all of you golf course maintenance professionals during the millennium, as the future looks bright.



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