

GOLF COURSE NEWS

Editorial focus:
Speed of Play ...19

THE BUSINESS NEWSPAPER FOR THE GOLF COURSE INDUSTRY

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PGA vice president of agronomy Jon Scott and architect Mike DeVries debate whether green speed thrills or kills.

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COUNTERPOINT

Bayer ES to retain Chipco product line

By ANDREW OVERBECK

MONTVALE, N.J. — Bayer ES has reached an agreement with regulatory officials and BASF AG on the divestiture of its key insecticide active ingredient fipronil. The deal includes back-licenses that allow Bayer ES to continue to market fipronil products, including the Chipco Choice line, to the turf and ornamental markets worldwide. BASF, which bought fipronil, will have rights to the active ingredient in the global professional pest control and agricultural markets.

The divestiture of fipronil and other fungicides was required by the U.S. Federal Trade Commission and European Commission as part of Bayer CropScience's acquisition Aventis CropScience. The planned divestiture was announced in late October and negotiations between Bayer ES and BASF finally wrapped up after the European Commission approved the deal March 24.

Retaining rights to market the Chipco products in the turf and ornamental market gives Bayer ES a solid insecticide lineup.

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MUNICIPAL GOLF UNDER SIEGE



Sassamon Trace Golf Course in Natick, Mass., is one of several municipal courses nationwide experiencing financial hardship.

By DEREK RICE

NATICK, Mass. — In March, the executive-length Sassamon Trace Golf Course became the focal point of an election for town selectman when a candidate proposed closing or selling the course, which was projected to lose \$300,000 in its fiscal year ending June 30.

While this case took place on a small scale — an executive course in a small town — it illustrates the challenges facing municipalities across the country. In a down economy, towns and cities look to improve their fiscal bottom line. And with course revenues

and rounds played numbers either flat or falling nationwide (see story below), municipal golf courses can be seen as good targets for cutting costs.

"It's the towns, cities and golf courses that lose out," said Pat Berger, business manager for Boston-based Sterling Golf Management, which operates Sassamon Trace.

The town of Natick also considered terminating its agreement with Sterling. The town's finance committee has approved the course's \$400,000 budget, which will carry operations through December, or until the Sterling

contract runs out. At press time, the budget still needed to be approved at an April town meeting.

Beyond December, the course's future is uncertain. Before that time, the town will consider whether to renew the contract

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Editorial Focus: Putting Green Management

Morris' Stimpmeter study reveals optimum speed

By ANDREW OVERBECK

FRANKFORT, Mich. — The Stimpmeter has never been a superintendent's best friend, but here at Crystal Downs Country Club, Mike Morris has changed all that. After an exhaustive two-year study that included Stimping two greens twice a day, collecting weather data, recording cultural practices and surveying members, Morris has determined the optimum green speed for the 1933



Asst. superintendent Don Roth checks out a pin placement.

Alister MacKenzie and Perry Maxwell-designed layout.

"We never had a problem with green speed before," said Morris. "But the issue arose at the club after we had a course come in up the street that had A4 bentgrass greens that were fast as lightning. All of a sudden it became a problem.

"The greens committee wanted to know two things: What is the most appropriate green speed for our golf course, and what is

Continued on page 11

Rounds dip, revenues flat

By DEREK RICE

JUPITER, Fla. — According to the National Golf Foundation (NGF), two out of every three golf facilities in the United States reported a decrease in rounds played in 2002. In addition, the NGF said, revenues at facilities were flat, thus creating a potentially dangerous mix for the golf industry.

The research study, conducted in conjunction with several industry organizations, showed rounds played dropped three percent from 2001 levels. Revenues increased, but only by 0.9 percent, according to the NGF. These numbers came from a January 2003 survey of 2,191 golf

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GolfGM adds finance

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"Golf professionals and purchasing managers want to increase their purchasing power," Lewis said. "GolfGM Finance enables facilities to stay current with their vendors and capitalize on off-price purchases when funds are tight."

One of the main selling points of GolfGM Finance, Lewis said, is

the speed and ease with which facilities can sign up and have access to a credit line.

"There is no cost to participate in the GolfGM membership program," he said. "Within 24 hours, most clubs will increase their purchasing power by up to \$50,000."

To date, more than 500 facilities have registered for the service. Lewis said the company plans to add many more in 2003. ■

NGF report details decline in rounds, flattening revenues in 2002

Continued from page 1

facilities, with the data weighted to be nationally representative.

According to NGF president Joe Beditz, the decrease in total rounds played was not unexpected.

"Lack of growth in the number of golfers continues to inhibit any material growth in rounds played or facility revenues, making facility owners and operators vulnerable to increased competition and the poor economy," Beditz said.

Rounds revenue, defined as the sum of green fees, golf car rentals, annual dues and trail

fees, increased 0.6 percent, from \$13.1 billion to \$13.8 billion. The rest of the increase in revenues was attributed to food and beverage and merchandise revenues.

The rounds data cloud is not without its silver lining, however. Despite being outnumbered in the survey by nearly two to one, there are facilities around the country that experienced an increase in total rounds played in spite of difficult economic times, according to National Golf Course Owners Association executive director Mike Hughes.

Hughes said facilities cited a number of factors as having contributed to the changes in rounds played in 2002.

"Operators who had fewer rounds in 2002 than in 2001 cited weather, the economy and competition as the top reasons for the decline," Hughes said. "Meanwhile, those who had more rounds in 2002 cited weather, improved course conditions, improved or increased advertising/marketing and improved management as the main reasons for the increase."

On a regional basis, only central/south Florida and the Gulf Coast posted moderate gains in rounds of 0.2 percent and 1.4 percent, respectively. Hardest hit regions were the lower Midwest (down 5.5 percent), the Southeast (down 5.1 percent) and the Northeast (down 5.0 percent). For a complete list of rounds played numbers for each of the 11 regions the NGF defined for the study, see the chart at left.

The NGF's rounds played numbers largely agree with those published each month in the Databank section of *Golf Course News*. Those numbers, provided monthly by golf research company Golf Datatech, showed a 2.9 percent decrease in rounds played from 2001 to 2002. ■

2002 ROUNDS PLAYED IN THE UNITED STATES

REGION	ROUNDS (MILLIONS)	% CHANGE
NORTHEAST	67.6	-4.9%
MID ATLANTIC	30.9	-2.5%
SOUTHEAST	62.5	-5.1%
CENTRAL/SOUTH FLORIDA	36.6	0.3%
GULF COAST	29.2	1.4%
SOUTH CENTRAL	32.5	-0.1%
LOWER MIDWEST	85.6	-5.4%
UPPER MIDWEST	52.6	-4.4%
MOUNTAIN	19.2	-2.3%
SOUTHWEST	64.4	-0.2%
NORTHWEST	21.4	-2.7%
TOTAL U.S.	502.4	-3.0%

Source: National Golf Foundation

From fairways to a shopping mall

Continued from page 3

nice thing, it got kids playing golf."

When the Lowell family originally considered selling the property, they had hopes of keeping some of the golf course intact and preserving open space. However, the group of developers that were planning an outdoor health facility on the property couldn't get the funding together to make the project work.

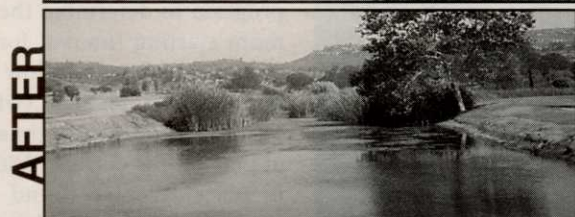
However, as the once-rural area began to grow as a bedroom community for Hartford, the change was inevitable. "It is very busy now," said Garvin. "It's turned into a pretty affluent area."

While Garvin plans to stay in the golf business, she will spend this spring shutting down the golf course, helping her parents move off the property and auctioning off two barns full of antiques. After that, she said, she plans to "take the summer off for the first time in a long time." ■

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