

like big box retailers such as Macy's and Nordstrom. These stores always stay in touch with their customers, either with a catalog, note or letter. We try to personalize our service the same way so we can stay fresh in the consumers' minds as often as possible."

The staff has different methods to obtain information from customers while they're making tee-time reservations or just before they tee off.

"We employ a starter, and one of his responsibilities during the normal course of talking about the course and the expectations of the course is asking the golfers where they're from and collecting zip codes

so we can employ marketing strategies throughout the year," Christenson says.

They keep the information in a database and organize it by demographics. They can then send personalized marketing items to each group.

Christenson suggests courses reward loyal golfers with special deals or with a tournament after the course closes for the season.

"Make the core group of players feel special," he says.

Christenson also finds Circling Raven's partnerships to be a valuable marketing tool. The club pooled some of its marketing dollars together with the nearby Coeur d'Alene Resort, home of the floating green, to promote

both courses. Benefits are offered to those who play both courses or stay at one of the resorts.

The fact the course has received several accolades also doesn't hinder business. It has earned best-of acclaim from Golf, Golfweek and Golf Digest magazines, and its operations, customer service and merchandising also have been recognized.

Still, Christenson believes it's up to the staff to make sure golfers return.

"Overall, we try to be creative and use target marketing so we can measure it," he says. "Otherwise, we're just spinning our wheels and hoping." — Heather Wood

Empire starts management services division

The timing was ideal for the creation of Empire Golf Management Services, a new division of Empire Golf Management, says Don Carpenter, the division's director. The division will focus on third-party management services, acquisitions and leasing, as well as selective consulting services.

"The reality is that there

continued on page 15



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continued from page 11

are an awful lot of golf courses and clubs that have been struggling for a few years," Carpenter says. "That has happened for a variety of reasons – overbuilding, the economy and the fact that not as many people are joining clubs or playing golf. And some clubs have been undermanaged as well. Clubs are looking for help and that can come in a number of different ways, from an outright purchase to managing or some kind of joint venture."

Pomona, N.Y.-based Empire Golf Management, which is a subsidiary of Bergstol Enterprises, owns and operates nine championship golf courses in New York, New Jersey and Florida, including Pine Hill Golf Club in N.J. and The Links at Madison Green in Royal Palm Beach, Fla.

"Our clubs enjoy a certain reputation in the industry because we have a formula that works," says Eric Bergstol, owner of Empire Golf Management. "We stress conditioning, service and efficient operations and that pays dividends. Now we're working with other clients to expand our reach and philosophy."

Carpenter was formerly Empire Golf's director of operations. His experience includes a stint as vice president of management services for American Golf Corp. and chief operations officer for National Fairways. He believes the experience Empire's executives have in the golf industry is a plus.



Carpenter



Bergstol

"Eric Bergstol has designed, built and managed great and successful golf courses, as well as clubhouses, so his company knows the business from start to finish," Carpenter says. "Those on our staff have strong

backgrounds in the golf and business world. We've run everything from low-end clubs and courses right up to Bayonne Golf Club (a recently opened, premier Empire Golf property in New Jersey).

Empire Golf Management Services can be successful in a competitive field already populated with high-profile management companies such as Billy Casper Golf, KemperSports, Arnold Palmer Golf, Troon Golf and American Golf, Carpenter says.

"One of the things Empire brings to the table is the ability to be a full-service company," he says. "Eric has 11 golf courses under his belt, and we can provide anything a client might demand, whether that's conducting a feasibility study about whether or not a client should build a golf course, to hiring an architect and

actually building the course and clubhouse. We feel there's a niche for us in the marketplace."

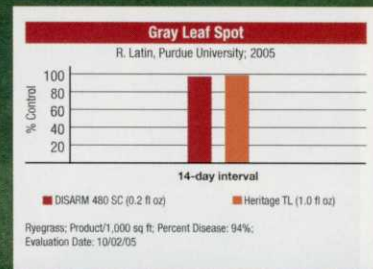
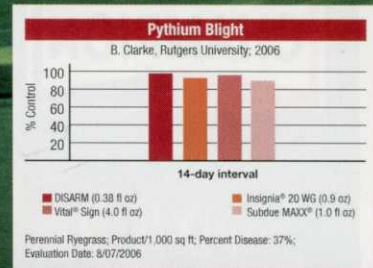
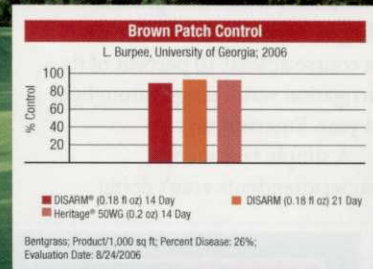
Empire Golf Management Services is in negotiations with a half dozen potential clients.

"We're in this to find ways to help make struggling clubs financially viable," Carpenter says. – John Torsiello

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