

Catnapped?

There are scads of dogs riding along with superintendents, but cats have been earning their keep on the course for just as long.

But the disappearance of one feline has one golf course in a frenzy recently. The Palmira Golf Course in St. John, Ind., has more than 30 course kitties, keeping tabs on the small pest population and being friendly with players – they're all rescues, residing in the course's maintenance area.

"We take care of them," says Kelly Nicpon, course owner. "If we've got a cat on the property, we'll catch them and get them fixed. A lot of the time, the vet will clip their ear for us so we know if they leave and come back."

Among the clowder is Muffins, a white short-haired cat who hops up on golf carts for a ride or poses for a photo.



That is, she did until she vanished from the course earlier this season.

Though cats are known to wander, Nicpon suspects foul play. Out of all of the Palmira cats, none has ever been picked up by a predator.

"We think someone took her," says Nicpon, "because she was very affectionate. She would sit on a green or jump on a cart with somebody. She'd get on the tractors with the guys, sit on their laps and mow the lawn with them."

On July 8, before Muffins (also called Snowball) disappeared, the course received a phone call from a mysterious woman who was concerned that the cat was a stray. Nicpon says they reassured the caller that Muffins had a caring home – even in the past winter, they had arranged to have a tumor cut from her ear, leaving her with a very distinct look.

The very next day, the normally gregarious cat was nowhere to be found. Superintendent Bill Zientara let Nicpon know right away when one of his favorite cats was missing. They started by contacting press to get the word out when they remembered the woman on the phone.

Nicpon tried to go through the call log from the past day to track down the mysterious caller to follow that lead, but the number had vanished into the mass of phone calls the course receives daily. They've gone so far as to subpoena AT&T to discover the caller's number, and are waiting on that information to try to confront the potential catnapper.

"It's been in the paper, on Facebook, on the radio," says Nicpon. "Our next step is just to try to call the people who called and see if it was this woman or not. I don't know what will happen. Maybe she'll have a change of heart."

If we told you... Well, we'd have to kill you

You wouldn't believe some of the new John Deere equipment and turfcare innovations GCI was privy to during big green's exclusive 2012 Feedback event.

Deere brought equipment dealers and golf course superintendents from around the globe to Duke University Golf Club to give their no-holds-barred opinions on five areas of turf equipment in various prototype stages. For example, it was super cool to ride a prototype of a... Okay, we've been sworn to secrecy about that. Regarding quality of cut, what knocked our socks off was the... Actually, our lips are sealed about that, as well, and if we say more Deere's product engineering team will probably put a hit out on us.

We did get Mike Koppen, Deere's product line marketing manager, who said, on the record, that the feedback events are extremely helpful in assisting Deere on the innovations they eventually bring to market.

"What we learn through these feedback sessions is whether we're 'go' or 'no go' on a lot of these innovations," he says. "We're also at an early enough stage on some of this equipment so that, depending on the feedback, we can go back and make the necessary changes before we introduce the equipment to another focus group at another time over the next year."

As for the health of the overall industry, Koppen says there's a lot of cautious optimism among superintendents and equipment dealers.

"2012 has definitely been an interesting year for the golf industry and for superintendents and dealers," Koppen says. "All indications are that rounds are up and supers are looking to make equipment investments. We're (forecasting) a steady climb, but (spending) will never be what it once was.

"Again, a lot of this remains to be seen," he added. "However, we're remaining optimistic."

Tier IV – the transition to new diesel emission standards – is this fall's hot equipment topic, Koppen adds.

"Each of the manufacturers are handling (Tier IV) in their own way," he says. "Deere has been working with other components of our enterprise – like our agriculture division – that have already gone through this transition. The bottom line is that the engines you're going to see in the future are fuel efficient and will have more electronics in them because you need to govern all of that exhaust before it's released. We'll be working with all of our dealers to train them and get them up to speed. The days of the simple diesel engine are gone."

