



Brian Vinchesi, the 2009 EPA WaterSense Irrigation Partner of the Year, is president of Irrigation Consulting Inc., a golf course irrigation design and consulting firm headquartered in Pepperell, Mass., that designs irrigation systems throughout the world. He can be reached at bvinchesi@irrigationconsulting.com or 978/433-8972.

PICK FROM THE CREAM OF THE CROP

If you were fortunate enough (the pride) or unfortunate enough (the money) to have children go through college, then you've noticed every area of study has some type of national student competition. In it, students compete against their peers at other colleges and universities. For example, when I was in college, way back when, I put a model airplane engine and a transmission in a small toy tractor and competed in a tractor pull. Yes, a tractor pull – miniature sled and all.

My son – a commercial pilot – competed in a flying competition between schools and won two national championships. In turf management, the competition is the Turf Bowl, held each year at the Golf Industry Show.

For horticultural students, the Professional Lawn Care Network (PLANET) holds its competitions each year in March during Student Career Days (SCD). Along with the student competitions there are workshops, a career fair and various other educational opportunities. Each year around 900 students from more than 60 schools compete in one or more of the 28 events. These include skid steer and compact excavator operation, hardscape installation, turf and weed identification and leadership skills, to name a few. A green industry company or group of companies sponsors each event and is responsible for developing, setting up and judging. Always held in March, the competition moves around the

country from school to school. This year's competition was at Auburn University, last year Kansas State and next year Colorado State. For more SCD information, visit the website: studentcareerdays.org.

For the last 12 years, I've had the pleasure to be involved as both a workshop presenter and as a judge. It's my favorite volunteer endeavor of the year. Three irrigation competitions that take place: irrigation design, irrigation assembly and irrigation troubleshooting.

In irrigation design, students have a professional commercial or residential irrigation design they must answer questions about and complete the missing parts.

In irrigation assembly, a pair of students receive a small, two-zone irrigation plan and have to build, operate, adjust and program it within 110 minutes. You see things done with pipe and irrigation equipment you never knew were possible. It's both entertaining and educational.

Irrigation troubleshooting requires students to fix a mechanically and electrically sabotaged irrigation system, as well as complete a written qualifying test.

Okay, so why is this of interest to a golf course? SCD's participants are the industry's cream of the crop. They are all well trained and many have several years of field experience. In fact, a large percentage are second-career individuals and/or outside your typical college-age demographic.

I bring this to your attention because you may be unaware that these



Three irrigation competitions take place at PLANET Student Career Days.

students are a potential labor pool. While most aren't turf majors, they do have diverse backgrounds in equipment operation, arboriculture and landscape construction.

These students have excellent potential as a golf course irrigation technician. I get asked all the time if I know of any irrigation technicians available or anyone who would be interested in being one. Wouldn't it be nice to hire someone who knew something about irrigation to start with; solvent weld cementing, valve and wire troubleshooting, or how to properly size pipe or make a wire splice? While training is required, you won't be starting from ground zero. Look at the list of participating schools on PLANET's website, or contact your local community or four-year college's horticultural program. Do they have students graduating with experience and an interest in irrigation?

And as the saying goes, "Put your money where your mouth is." I watched a very smart young lady kick ass in all three of the irrigation competitions over a 3-year period. Now she is one of my employees. **GCI**

The first name in surfactants. The last you'll need to know.