

TURF FOOD



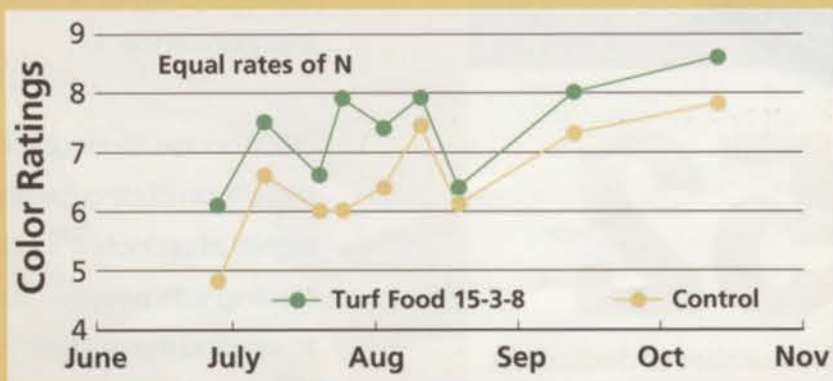
Color By The Numbers

When it comes to your greens, it's all about the color

It's not easy keeping all your greens, well, green. Turf Food granular fertilizers not only feed the turf, but also improve the life of the soil at the same time. So you get greener greens, tees and fairways and overall healthier turf...and a lot more.

- Outstanding and consistent color response
- Improved turf density and root mass

University of Wisconsin research tells the story.



Trial showed significantly better color on 7 out of 9 dates during stress period vs. comparable organic fertilizer at 3/4 lb N.

Turf Food is part of The Roots® Challenge



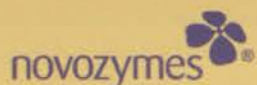
The Roots Challenge provides season-long turf management solutions using Roots products to attain the healthiest turf possible – even in the most stressful conditions.

Your distributor representative, Roots territory manager and technical field staff will work with you to select the best program, monitor the applications and gauge the program effectiveness throughout the season.

Attend a local Roots Challenge Technical Conference for all the details.

Take The Roots Challenge and see for yourself – Consistent color by the numbers.

roots® ... Our Name Says It All



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Do you use any organic fertilizers or pesticides as part of your turfgrass management program?

Source: GCN online poll of 110 respondents



by the NUMBERS

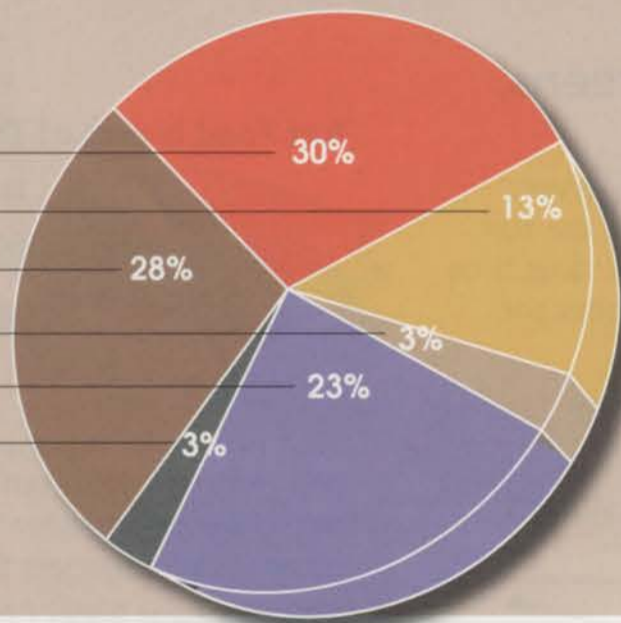
Many people in the industry talk about ways to grow the game of golf and the need for that. The First Tee is one organization encouraging young people to play the game. Here's a look at The First Tee's reach and revenue.



unaudited
Year ending Dec. 31, 2005

Revenue:

Founding partners	\$4,009,000
Individuals	\$1,794,000
Corporations	\$3,682,000
Foundations	\$435,000
Government	\$3,025,000
Other	\$453,000
TOTAL	\$13,398,000



300,000

The number of students in The First Tee National School Program during the 2005-06 school year

5 The number of The First Tee international chapters

The number of affiliated relationships The First Tee has with golf courses

209

217,000

The number of young people introduced to golf through The First Tee in 2005

800 The number of schools in The First Tee National School Program during the 2005-06 school year

52

The number of dedicated golf-learning facilities opened worldwide by The First Tee in 2005

QUOTABLES

"Superintendents need the courage to tell ownership they're in a tough situation and have to change mowing heights for a few weeks to get through a tough period until they can get the course back to where it needs to be." - **Mike Stamey**, golf course superintendent at the 18-hole Maggie Valley (N.C.) Club Golf Course

"We're the only golf course in U.S. history to be accepted into any EPA program." - **Pat Blum**, golf course superintendent at Colonial Acres Golf Course in Glenmont, N.Y.

"The whole staff, from the general manager to part-time employees, needs to understand what the reality of a small budget is. We all want the best possible product to give to the public/membership, but the reality is that we're going to have to compromise on most all facets of the operation." - **Teron Bay**, CGCS, at The Willows at Kenton County in Independence, Ky.

"Golf course management is more than cutting greens one-eighth of an inch. It's about dealing with people. Our job is to expand the students' views." - **Karl Danneberger**, turfgrass professor at The Ohio State University



Conditions worthy of devotion.

Golfers will work around just about anything to play a well-conditioned course. It's that commitment that motivates Syngenta to provide you with what you need to enhance play. Products like Heritage® fungicide ensure that turf is disease-free and best able to respond to your agronomic plan and course schedule. It controls a broad spectrum of diseases from the inside out so that neither weather nor mowing can hinder its effectiveness. Heritage is an important part of a preventive spray program, which you can find for your area at GreenCastonline.com.



At Syngenta, we understand why golfers schedule their lives around ideal conditions. Our job is to create products that help make those conditions happen most often.

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Back to basics

WHY ONE GOLF COURSE SUPERINTENDENT SHUNS THE QUICK-FIX CHEMICAL CURE FOR TURFGRASS PROBLEMS

by
DAVID
WOLFF

Photos also by David Wolff

GCN INTERVIEWS
MIKE STAMEY,
GOLF COURSE
SUPERINTENDENT
AT THE 18-HOLE
MAGGIE VALLEY
(N.C.) CLUB GOLF
COURSE.

Mike Stamey's path to become a Class A golf course superintendent was a bootstrap journey.

In 1982, Stamey's first job after high school was on the maintenance staff of a resort course, the Great Smokies Hilton in Asheville, N.C., where he worked for superintendent J.W. Tipton. Tipton started his career at Asheville Country Club, which his father helped build. After leaving Asheville, Tipton helped build the Maggie Valley Club Golf Course. In fact, he sowed the fairways by hand. After 10 years at Maggie Valley, Tipton left to work at the Great Smokies course. While at Great Smokies, Stamey told Tipton that one day he'd be superintendent at Maggie Valley.

"Mr. Tipton told me I had a long way to go," Stamey says. "He said I had potential, but I'd have to stay at the Hilton, dedicate myself, and grind and strive to learn everything I could."

Eleven years later, Tipton retired, and Stamey became superintendent at Great Smokies. A few years later, the Maggie Valley job opened up, and Stamey applied. He was chosen among 45 applicants.

"The general manager and golf professional wanted someone familiar with the resort business," Stamey says. "But they looked at my greens and felt I was more knowledgeable and would fit in at Maggie Valley. I worked my way up the ladder and became a Class A superintendent in 1988, even though I've had no formal turfgrass education. It's difficult to do what I did these days."

Q You call yourself an old-school superintendent. Why?

I'm big on cultural practices, not quick fixes with chemicals. They're good tools, but it's all about how you prep your soil and grass. That's what really pays off and saves money. I don't spend much on chemicals and am

not into fertilizing heavily. I keep my grasses hungry. My course is on a good nutrition program, but if the grass is hungry, it doesn't have a chance to develop too much top plant or leaf blade.

We don't have problems with brown patch during hot summer months. Sometimes we have issues with dollar spot, but I handle them with a preventive fungicide spray program.

Nowadays, cultural practices are forgotten at times. Young people coming out of turf schools are taught to look for specific chemicals to fix problems.

Q What's your budget?

Last year, my maintenance budget was \$415,000. I spent \$38,000 on chemicals and fertilizer, even though we were budgeted for \$45,000. I'm expected to deliver the best quality golf course with the budget I have.

Q Why have cultural practices become forgotten?

Young superintendents are taught the basics of mowing, fertilization and aerification, but they aren't told the consequences of mowing low when it's hot and wet, for example. They're going to get disease and will have to apply more chemicals. Ownership or management wants tournament conditions every day, year-round, and it's not always possible to do that. You have to know when it's not going to work and catch potential problems before they get really bad.

Many times young superintendents are afraid to do that, and that's when they get into trouble and lose two or three greens. They ask themselves what happened. It must have been something in the soil or the weather wasn't right. But basically, it was their fault. If you lose turf, it's your fault because you didn't look out for the right cultural practices. If you keep cutting bentgrass greens at 0.155 of an inch when it's 90 F

with afternoon thunderstorms, you didn't do what you needed to do to maintain the greens properly. Superintendents need the courage to tell ownership they're in a tough situation and have to change mowing heights for a few weeks to get through a tough period until they can get the course back to where it needs to be.

Q What's the key element of your cultural practices?

Aerifying wall to wall twice a year. The course has pushup greens that were built in the early 1960s. When I came here, they had been overtaken by *Poa annua*. They were about 90 percent *Poa* with some bentgrass. They'd get so hard in summer that I couldn't get any water into them. We began a deep-tine aerification program, and today, the greens are 85 percent Penncross bentgrass. We pushed the bentgrass and let the *Poa* struggle. Doing that in summer really develops bentgrass.

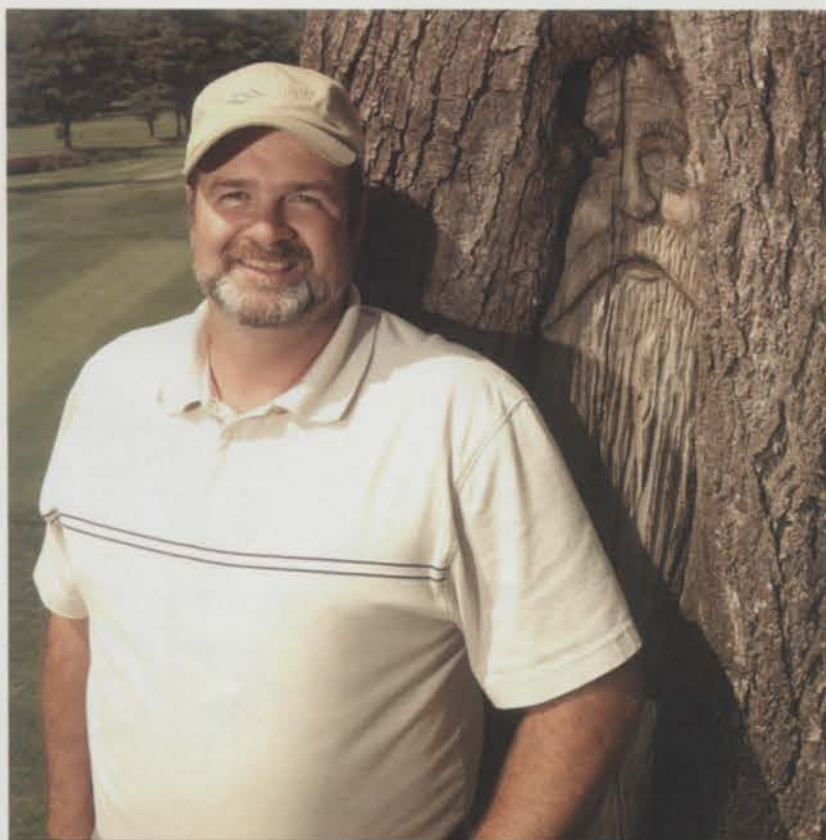
Q What is your target for root depth?

With pushup greens, there's no drainage. Aerifying with small tines affects only the first two or three inches of the soil. That's as far as the root system will develop. We use a vertidrain machine in spring and fall. On our greens, we go down 10 to 12 inches. We're taking out the nasty stuff and adding new topdressing – a mix of 85 percent sand and 15 percent peat. We've developed the root system six- to eight-inches deep. This improved the greens and kept us from having to rebuild them. Our greens are in great shape now.

Q When do you aerify?

I convinced the club's ownership to give me a window of the last two weeks in March and the first two weeks of September. Most golf clubs will push back mainte-





Mike Stamey says superintendents can't just keep mowing low to get a fast green speed. They have to have a program that fits the conditions.

nance because it's disruptive to golfers. They want you to do it when play slows down. The club doesn't schedule tournaments or outings during those times. If it rains, we can hold off. With two weeks, I can pick the sunny days.

Q Which aerification period is most important?

Fall is the most important time for a golf course. In summer, it's hot, and we're irrigating and mowing every day. The soil is being compacted. In fall, the turf is going through a transition period, and it needs to breathe and get nutrients. One aerification in spring doesn't do enough to prepare the course for the hot weather in summer. It needs a fall aerification, too.

What you do in September is what your course will look like the following season. The goal is to develop the roots and plants before cold weather hits. We can have frost in October, but we want four weeks of good growing weather. Some courses around here push their aerification into late October. By doing that, the holes stay open all winter, and the greens struggle.

Aerification and fertilization get the turf back to top condition before winter, which is just as stressful as summer. If we can make it through summer and prep the course in fall, we'll have it in great condition for winter and ready for freezing temperatures and rain.

Q Have you modified your aerification program?

Now that we have the greens where we want them, we did a small-tine aerification with a Ryan GA-30 this spring. In spring, many golfers are coming back and want to play. We use a smaller aerator because the greens heal much faster. We used one-half-inch coring tines and applied fertilizer when the holes are open. After aerifying, we go right behind with a greens mower to clean up the top surface.

The GA-30 comes in handy at other times. If the greens need to breathe a little bit, we put on solid quad tines and poke holes in the greens during the evening. After we've mowed the next morning, no one knows we've aerified.

We do the greens first, then tees and fairways. We don't pick up cores on fairways. We let them dry and mow at one-half inch. Then we blow off the tufts of grass into the roughs.

Q What is your irrigation philosophy?

Again, I consider this part of my cultural practices. I look at each green individually. If I insist each green get 20 minutes of water one night, some might be getting too much, and that creates disease or compaction. If part of a green is in shade and gets too much water, there will be problems. I change irrigation heads or nozzles to find the balance each green needs. I stay on top of issues and fix potential problems before they come up.

Good turf management is about seeing what can happen if you don't do certain things.

Q Is mowing a cultural practice?

Absolutely. We usually mow our greens at 0.155 of an inch. But in summer, when it's starting to get hot and there are thunderstorms, we raise the cutting height a bit. We'll take off the grooved rollers and put on solid rollers. We want to let the grass grow and thicken a bit because the summer heat is already thinning out the turf. We don't need a grooved roller to thin them out anymore – the grass is in a stress period.

Superintendents can't just keep mowing low to get a fast green speed. They've got to have a program that fits the conditions. If you have to raise cutting height to keep a quality surface, then that's what you need to do. Sometimes you have to give up a little speed. If the greens are at eight or nine on the Stimpmeter, maybe they need to be at seven for a while to keep a good, quality green throughout the season.

Q Is most of the work done by your staff?

Besides myself, I have an assistant, Robby Henderson; a mechanic, Horace Downs; and six full-time, year-round employees. We do everything in-house. I guess that's another part of being old school, and it can pay big dividends.

The owners had a four-year plan to complete the infrastructure, renovate the bunkers and construct a large tee complex on hole No. 1. They asked if we needed to hire an architect, and I said no. I redesigned 32 existing bunkers, built 12 new ones and completed the other two projects all in one year.

Conservatively, I'd estimate that doing as much as possible in-house saved the club more than \$150,000.

Q What other cultural practices do you use?

I use growth regulators on fairways and tees only. Our cool-season grasses come on pretty strong in spring. However, I don't use growth regulators on the greens. They're managed strictly by cultural practices. As for wetting agents, we apply them through our irrigation system.

I rotate fungicides, but I don't use a lot of biostimulants such as kelp or microbial inoculants. I call this witch-doctor stuff. I've tried them but have never gotten any results.

I'll spoon feed my fertilizer in the summer with liquid growth products and do this every two weeks from June through August.

Finally, I take soil samples every year and send them to three different labs, then take an average of the results.

Q What advice would you give to young superintendents to become proponents of using cultural practices instead of seeking quick-fix, chemical cures?

They've got to get back to the basics. What grows grass? It's good aerification, irrigation, fertilization and topdressing programs. It's the basics of turf management. Don't buy and try everything the chemical salesmen bring around. My soil analysis tells me what the turf needs, and that's what I give it.

There are no quick fixes. It takes time to solve problems or reverse trends. Develop a program that best fits your golf course. The environment and situation could be totally different 20 miles down the road. GCN

Mike Stamey can be reached at mstamey@maggievalleyclub.com.



THE PAST IS THE FUTURE: New Breeding Improves Upon Tried-and-True Turf Varieties

Since the 1950s, Penn State University has been developing seed varieties that are universally respected and proven reliable due to a half-century of turf trials and widespread use by superintendents. Today, through state-of-the-art breeding techniques, those dependable breeds are taking on new, desirable traits while retaining the attributes that first made them popular.

The latest advanced bentgrass varieties - resulting from research at Pure-Seed Testing, Inc. - are PennLinks II and Penneagle II, the namesake offspring of their well-known predecessors, PennLinks and Penneagle.

Trials and Tributes

Both varieties, PennLinks II and Penneagle II, score well on mean turf quality ratings for creeping bentgrass entries in fairway and tee evaluations. Similarly, both rank well in color, leaf texture and summer density ratings. However, resistances to brown patch and dollar spot—two of the most common diseases found on fairways and tees—are the characteristics by which PennLinks II and Penneagle II distinguish themselves.

As the graph entitled “2004 Mean Brown Patch Ratings” indicates, Pen-

neagle II exhibited no signs of brown patch in fairway/tee turf trials in Illinois and New Jersey; PennLinks II also demonstrated superior resistance. Furthermore, the graph entitled “2004 Mean Dollar Spot Ratings” shows that PennLinks II possesses strong resistance to dollar spot, while Penneagle II also ranks above-average. Finally, the graph entitled “Dollar Spot vs. Brown Patch” records that, of all the varieties tested in the 2004 turf trials at Pure-Seed Testing facilities in North Carolina, Penneagle II displays the best overall resistance to brown patch, and PennLinks II displays the best overall resistance to dollar spot.

Disease resistance actually turned out to be a fortunate side benefit while seeking other traits in what would become PennLinks II and Penneagle II. While seeking to quantify endophyte levels in the parent cultivars of the original PennLinks variety, Pure-Seed Testing and Rutgers University screened for and found good resistance to dollar spot, which became a primary characteristic of the next generation. In the meantime, Pure-Seed Testing president Crystal Rose-Fricker and Dr. Duich were working to improve turf quality and seed yield in Penneagle,

at which time they discovered brown patch resistance in the variety, leading to its new incarnation.

Mix and Match

From there, it was a short leap of logic to blend the two, creating a stand of turf with resistance to both diseases. “The PennLinks II and Penneagle II, in side-by-side plots, looked like they would blend well, and because of those two disease resistances, that’s why we’re recommending blending them,” observes Rose-Fricker.

Blending is beneficial especially if the seed is to be used in more than one location, which is usually the case, creating a more uniform result across the entire area. Using a blend also hedges the turf’s performance bet against multiple pressures that could cause problems, and it allows for less fungicide and herbicide in the long run, saving associated labor and material costs.

Rose-Fricker cautions, “Unless you have some new super variety that tolerates everything and doesn’t die or get disease, you’re open to a number of problems. Whereas if you blend varieties that have distinct genetic backgrounds, you really help yourself in the long run.”

The best thing about this new blend is that, at its core, it’s not so new at all. What was reliable about PennLinks and Penneagle in the past remains so for their combined descendants.

The new options only improve upon what superintendents have relied upon for so long.

Meanwhile, those superintendents who remain cautious of new varieties are wise to do so. The latest entrants to the market are generally university tested, but such trials don’t fully evaluate performance in real world conditions.

“Some of the other bentgrass varieties look really nice in turf trials, but then you get them under a little pressure of disease and they blow up and you’ve got to apply a lot of fungicide,” explains Rose-Fricker. “Why would you want to have that risk, have that worry, and spend a lot of money on a bunch of fungicides when you can use proven varieties that will tolerate things a little better, and give you peace of mind in the long run?”

Penn bentgrasses not only look beautiful in turf, but they’ve been fully tested for years - in the lab and in the field - so there’s no guessing at what you’ll get when you seed with them.

2004 Mean Brown Patch Ratings

Entry	IL	NJ	Mean
Penneagle II	9.01	9.0	9.0
Declaration	9.0	9.0	9.0
T-1	9.0	9.0	9.0
Alpha	8.3	9.0	8.7
Bengal	9.0	7.7	8.3
SR 1119	8.7	7.7	8.2
PennLinks II	8.0	8.0	8.0
Independence	7.0	8.3	7.7
Penncross	7.7	6.0	6.8
L-93	6.0	5.7	5.8
Seaside	4.7	3.0	3.8
LSD (0.05)	1.4	1.4	1.0

¹9 = no disease

2004 Mean Dollar Spot Ratings

Entry	IN	KS	MD	NJ	PA	VA	WI	Mean
Declaration	8.71	8.3	7.7	9.0	7.7	5.7	8.3	7.9
PennLinks II	8.7	7.3	7.0	8.0	5.3	5.7	6.0	6.9
Seaside	7.0	5.3	7.3	7.3	6.7	6.0	4.0	6.2
L-93	8.7	6.3	5.0	6.7	5.0	5.7	5.7	6.1
Penneagle II	8.0	5.3	4.3	5.3	4.7	5.3	5.7	5.5
Penncross	7.7	6.0	4.7	6.0	4.0	4.0	4.7	5.3
Bengal	5.7	6.7	3.0	4.7	4.0	7.0	5.7	5.2
T-1	7.0	6.7	2.3	5.0	4.0	6.0	5.7	5.2
Alpha	7.0	8.3	2.3	4.7	3.7	5.0	4.7	5.1
SR 1119	6.7	4.3	3.0	4.3	4.0	7.7	5.7	5.1
Independence	6.3	5.3	1.7	3.3	3.0	5.7	4.7	4.3
LSD (0.05)	1.4	2.7	2.0	1.3	1.3	2.8	1.5	0.7

¹9 = no disease

Dollar Spot vs. Brown Patch

Entry	Dollar Spot	Brown Patch
Penneagle II	5.71	8.21
Seaside II	6.3	8.0
Independence	4.0	7.9
L-93	6.3	7.8
Bengal	5.0	7.6
PennLinks II	7.3	6.9
Penncross	5.3	6.1
Seaside	6.0	5.9
LSD (0.05)	1.3	1.5

¹9 = no disease



Go with the flow

A FIELD-DESIGN APPROACH YIELDS COST SAVINGS FOR DEVELOPER

by
PETER
BLAIS

While many golf course projects are the result of hours spent on computer screens and drafting tables, a more field-design-oriented approach can yield high-quality layouts and substantial cost savings for developers. An example is the nine-hole addition at the Golf Club at Devils Tower, which is scheduled to open this month in Hulett, Wyo.

Working with developers James and Jim Neiman and project manager Darren Flanagan of The Golf Course Co., Kevin Atkinson of Phelps-Atkinson Golf Design crafted nine holes and renovated the existing nine into an 18-hole layout.

"The organization of the construction contract at Devils Tower was created with the understanding that many of the greatest golf holes weren't necessarily designed in

detail on a plan but discovered in the field during construction," Atkinson says.

The construction contract was structured so shapers Greg Martin and Ben Chambers, along with Flanagan, were paid a fair monthly fee, while the owner supplied most of the equipment, materials, fuel and some local labor, according to Atkinson, who estimates the owners saved as much as 35 percent on earth-work costs.

"This unique structure allowed all the people involved to concentrate on creating the best golf holes possible within a reasonable budget, without the worry or hassle of change orders and the heartburn typically associated with them," Atkinson says. "The arrangement also allowed the owner to use his own heavy-construction equipment and local operators to clear trees and complete the heavy earth work."

Flanagan, who has built golf courses throughout the world, says this concept was something he wanted to try in the United States.

"The joy is that it minimized the cost to complete the project," he says. "We could make changes and field adjustments without the ownership absorbing additional costs through change orders. Given a choice, I would build 90 percent of my courses this way."

Preserving natural beauty

During the development of the course, the Neimans wanted to maintain the area's cultural and natural history as much as possible. For example, the family requested Atkinson and Flanagan preserve a stand of trees that grew from seeds that sprung roots in tracks along a high bluff used by wagons making their way West in the late 1800s. The family also restored the 1800-era Charlie Maze cabin located between the 16th green and 17th tee.

The Neimans encouraged Atkinson to use as many native plant species as possible.

"Doing this the way we did gave us the ability to protect certain areas and enhance their natural beauty," Jim Neiman says. "To capture the natural beauty of an area is

difficult to do from a map and blueprints. You need some flexibility to work with the trees and the landscape."

The Neiman family – who operates Devils Tower Forest Products, the area's largest employer – was focused on helping the community grow. Their idea was to draw visitors and second-home buyers to the area. So, they hired Dick Phelps to build the first nine holes, which opened in 1998.

The family's plan was to tie the golf course in with a recently built neighboring airport that has a 5,500-foot airstrip, allowing it to accommodate small- and medium-sized jets. Those flying into Hulett can land, be picked up in a golf cart and be standing on the first tee within five minutes.

"When I started looking at the best group of visitors to attract to our community, pilots, golfers and hunters seemed an ideal mix," Jim Neiman says.

The original nine ran over fairly open, high-prairie land. The new nine was slated for a more challenging piece of ground incorporating large red-rock canyons and cliffs, along with dramatic views of the surrounding Black Hills and Devils Tower – a monolith that rises 1,267 feet above the meandering Belle Fourche River that was dedicated 100 years ago as the nation's first national monument by President Theodore Roosevelt.

Local help

When Atkinson started the project, he didn't have much time to develop construction documents for the new nine holes. The only drawing he did was a basic routing plan.

Atkinson also planned renovation work to the existing nine: rebuilding bunkers; adding a few tees; upgrading the irrigation system; widening fairways; incorporating native grasses; and transplanting and removing trees that yielded a more open, high-prairie feel to the existing front nine. Flanagan figured out how to implement these plans cost effectively.

"When we first looked at the site, we

AT A GLANCE

Golf Club at Devils Tower

Web site:	www.devilstowergolf.com
Location:	Hulett, Wyo.
Course type:	Semiprivate
Cost:	\$2.6 million for the new nine, \$600,000 in renovations to the existing nine
Construction began:	September 2004
Course completion:	July 2006
Yardage:	7,020 from the back tees
Par:	72
Number of bunkers:	76
Average green size:	6,100 square feet
Greens:	Penncross (front nine) Pennlinks 2 (back nine)
Tees:	Bluegrass
Fairways:	Bluegrass
Superintendent:	Jeremy Christensen
Architects:	Kevin Atkinson, Dick Phelps
Design firm:	Phelps-Atkinson Golf Design
Builder:	The Golf Course Co.



During the development of the Golf Club at Devils Tower, much of the area's natural history was preserved.
Photo: Phelps-Atkinson Golf Design



Plans call for the addition of another nine holes to the Golf Club at Devils Tower.

started thinking about the high mobilization costs of getting equipment into the area," Flanagan says. "We noticed the Neiman family had a lot of equipment, scrapers and track hoes. We convinced them they could use the equipment and local operators under our direct supervision, which would allow us to create the new nine and the renovations more economically without the need for the administration of work orders and projects that were not specified in the contract."

The owners liked the idea because it allowed them to participate directly in the project development. James Neiman built all the stone walls with large boulders he'd been collecting for 10 years from various construction projects in the area and during construction of the golf course. He used one of his logging trucks with a claw-like loader to place each stone.

Using scrapers, bulldozers, lumbering and specialized golf-construction equipment, local labor and six golf-construction specialists assembled by Atkinson and Flanagan, the pair basically designed and built the course in the field. Flanagan characterized the golf-construction veterans as a group of experienced shapers and drainage experts who were good at what they did and adaptable to changes in daily equipment and labor conditions.

"We brought in the experienced personnel we needed, and using local labor minimized the overhead," Flanagan says. "We saved them 20 to 25 percent on the total job cost."

From a design and construction standpoint, Atkinson says he couldn't have been

happier with the project.

"There was something great about just starting a golf hole without a piece of paper and figuring out what you wanted and needed to do on the fly," he says. "I hope to do more projects like this because of the quality that resulted from field design. Sometimes we moved a little bit of dirt, decided after a couple of hours the hole wasn't right, and then made a change in a different direction."

Golf course superintendent Jeremy Christensen joined the construction crew in July 2005. Christensen came from Rochelle Ranch in Rawlins, Wyo., where he grew in the new 18-hole course.

"They had just seeded three holes and were getting started on the renovation when I arrived," he says. "The big difference [between this project and the last one] was the design philosophy and amount of owner participation. Kevin would design the hole, look at it, make a few changes, and he and Darren would just work together on the final product. Jim Neiman did a lot of the dirt work, moving gravel and sand."

A course blend

Although the two courses were built eight years apart, the renovations to the older nine helped reduce the number of differences between the older and newer holes.

"We changed some bunkers and added some additional bunkers on the front nine to match the back nine," Christensen says. "The soil types are pretty similar. The new nine uses some of the newer bluegrass blends, which are a little darker, but most people will never notice the difference. The

old nine has Penncross bentgrass greens, and the new nine has Pennlinks 2, so they're slightly different texture. The older greens have a little more organic texture simply because they're older. Otherwise, the two nines present little difference."

Additionally, retrofitting the greens and tees on the old nine holes with dual-irrigation heads to match the new nine holes will help save water, a scarce resource in the arid West.

Pros and cons

Everyone involved with the project agrees the advantages of field design and combining the owner's equipment and labor resources with specialized equipment and personnel far outweighed the disadvantages.

The only disadvantage of using inexperienced golf-course workers and construction equipment not specifically designed for golf course construction was the operators' lack of knowledge concerning the importance of grade and how it ties into other areas, such as surface drainage, according to Flanagan. But even course-construction companies working with only their own personnel will have newer workers with little specific golf-construction experience.

Another minor inconvenience was that a few operators could only work limited hours.

The most obvious advantages were design flexibility, cost savings and avoidance of administrative headaches associated with change orders.

Another advantage was having access to equipment that could be used for golf and road and residential projects that are an



30th Anniversary of Stores-on-Wheels

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Research: 2004, Dr. J. Neal, N.C. State University.

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COMMITTED

Meeting customers' needs remains company's goal. BY CINDY CODE

LESCO's foundation was built on its people. Founded in 1962 by Bob Burkhardt and James FitzGibbon, the company and its founders became integral to the success of turf managers big and small.

Now, 44 years later, the national formulator and distributor is striving to return to its roots. With 311 Service Centers and 114 Stores-on-Wheels vehicles, the company's scope is far-reaching. Yet, its focus throughout the past few years wasn't always squarely on the customer.

With much-publicized personnel changes at the management level and the elimination of its tenured direct sale reps, LESCO is committed to snatch back its core philosophies.

"Sound customer service ... we got away from it in the past five years," says Jeff Rutherford, president and c.e.o. "The problems were never about the people in the field, but the support of them. In the middle of that, we lost good people."

Part of the problem stemmed from rampant growth. In 2005, the company expanded its Stores-on-Wheels fleet from 75 to 111. To accommodate this growth, the company had to move people from outside sales or regional management positions to staff the larger fleet. These moves eliminated the tenured golf sales reps, which created some lapses in the field and, in turn, sales losses.

In anticipation of turning the tide, the company now strives to reinstate its direct sales representatives and put it in the best position possible for the 2007 season.

"The decision to disband the sales representative program did not adequately take into consideration our customers' needs," Rutherford says. "I have spent considerable time talking to current and former LESCO customers, and many have taken business elsewhere because they lost their relationship with LESCO's sales representatives."

Working the direct sales representatives back into the fold will take some time. Twenty to 30 positions were immediately created. Half will be filled internally, and the remainder will be filled from outside the company. Most of the internal moves reflect employees, who had been



Jeff Rutherford (center) and the rest of the LESCO team is focused on sound customer service. The company recently reinstated direct sales representatives.

reassigned in the organization, returning to their former roles.

In addition to the disbandment of its direct sales reps in early 2005, field-level personnel also were disparaged by corporate decisions to shift capital from the Stores-on-Wheels fleet to the manufacturing side of the business. However, by the end of 2005, the company sold its manufacturing assets and is now focused on its distinctive tandem of the Stores-on-Wheels fleet and Service Centers.

"I can't stress enough that we haven't lost focus in the field," Rutherford says. "Our company was split culturally between the field, who were

"Our No. 1 value is field focus – getting back to people who can make decisions."

focused on customers, and corporately, who were focused on other things.”

The company is working every day to change that culture.

“Our number one value is field focus – getting back to people who can make decisions,” Rutherford says. “Stores-on-Wheels has been around for 30 years. We have a history of customer service and what it should be.”

In addition to reinstating the direct sales reps, the company is strengthening its sales model even more. Direct sales rep and national account teams will be led by Steve Vincent, channel vice president, golf; and Paul McDonough, channel vice president, lawn and landscape sales. Both will report to Richard Doggett, senior vice president of sales.

While the company’s overall financial projections have been revised because of the sales losses stemming largely from a lack of a direct sales force, the company has added three Stores-on-Wheels vehicles this year and plans for more. In contrast, it will open about 39 Service Centers this year. For the next five years, the company’s strategic plan

The company plans to open 39 Service Centers this year.



There’s a seamless, coordinated effort between Service Centers and Stores-on-Wheels vehicles.

calls for about a 10- to 15-unit increase per year. Service Centers will be added in markets that include golf courses and lawn care customers.

The company’s model is a seamless, coordinated effort between Service Centers and Stores-on-Wheels vehicles with no barriers between the two. When the new trucks were introduced, some customers questioned whether inventory would be available.

“The new models may not carry all the bells and whistles, but we have Service Centers nearby that can plug any gaps,” Doggett says.

Field reps are given latitude to find product to fulfill customer requests. In some situations, a golf course superintendent might stop by a Service Center on the way home and pick up a product for the next day’s use.

“We want our customers to go where they’re most comfortable and where it benefits them,” Doggett says. “Our reps have turf and product knowledge. If a superintendent needs a product that we don’t have on the truck, our rep will find the product he needs at one of our Service Centers and vice versa.”

In a turf market that’s continually changing, the company is committed to supporting superintendents and suppliers.

“There’s more pressure on superintendents today than ever before,” Doggett says. “Superintendents are being asked to do more with smaller budgets.”

Field reps make sure superintendents understand product availability and choices. Whether through field testing, understanding product needs or partnering with vendors to help end-users receive chemistry training so they’re comfortable with the products they’re using, the company wants to be there for its customers.

As competition in the golf market remains stiff, the company differentiates itself through its people, size and products.

“With relationships comes trust,” Rutherford says. “We’re going to be here. We’re not going anywhere. This is our business.” ■

COVERING THE COUNTRY

Company improves and expands distribution through its Stores-on-Wheels approach. BY JOHN WALSH

During the early 1970s, LESCO had a problem with its distribution system. What the company did to remedy that problem changed the way it did business for good. To this day, no distributor or supplier delivers golf course products to superintendents the way LESCO does on a national level. That way is the Stores-on-Wheels vehicles.

As the company was expanding from Northeast Ohio to Michigan and Pennsylvania, it was having trouble shipping materials to its customers on time. Bob Burkhardt and Jim FitzGibbon, co-founders of the company that started in 1961, realized 300 miles was the furthest they could travel delivering products in a timely manner weekly. When the company entered the Chicago market, materials never got there on time, according to Burkhardt.

Then, in 1975 at the GCSAA Conference and Show, FitzGibbon met a distributor from San Francisco who was using a beverage truck to deliver products to superintendents at their courses, however, he was only covering the San Francisco market. There was also a distributor doing the same thing covering the San Diego market.

"The beverage trucks worked because the weather was nice, but we knew we had to have a truck that people could get in and out of," says Burkhardt, who's director emeritus of LESCO's board of directors and a consultant to the company's management team.

The company ended up using a one-ton pickup truck with a 32-foot cargo trailer that had electric brakes. The trailer held enough supply for deliveries for one week. The original trailer truck, which contained parts, accessories, pesticides and fertilizer, lasted two or three years. Then the company switched to gas mobile-home toters. In the 1980s, the company began using mid-range, diesel, single-axle trailers.

Burkhardt and FitzGibbon chose to expand their distribution with the cargo trailer in Florida because of the number of golf courses in the state and the fact they could conduct business 10 straight months.

"In 1976, we put the first truck and trailer in Florida with a guy who had been in the industry, but he didn't work out because he was using the truck as a warehouse instead of driving around to the courses," Burkhardt says.

That first sales rep in Florida was replaced by Ed Williams, who worked for the company in inside sales. Williams worked in Florida for a year, then Phil Gardner, now manager of international and national accounts, replaced him. The original sales route, which still exists today, was a three-way turn in which the sales rep would visit all three areas in his territory every week but visit different customers in each area.

"Nobody had it like the way we eventually did it with routes and territories," Gardner says.

When the first Stores-on-Wheels truck started in Florida, the only other thing that was going on similar to that was in California where a LESCO customer was carrying various products around in small vans, Gardner says, referring to the distributor FitzGibbon met at the GCSAA Conference and Show. At the time, conventional sales reps were driving around in station wagons or pickup trucks but didn't have the selection Stores-on-Wheels offered, and few carried a complete package, according to Gardner.

Shortly after the Stores-on-Wheels concept worked in Florida, FitzGibbon put a truck in Ohio and sales improved quickly, according to Gardner. Stores-on-Wheels also entered markets in Chicago; Erie, Pa.; and the Carolinas.

"There were a few competitors that tried to copy the Stores-on-Wheels approach, but they never seemed to make it work."

The Stores-on-Wheels approach to sales started in Florida before expanding throughout the country.





The Stores-on-Wheels concept exceeded the expectations of the company's co-founders, Jim FitzGibbon (left) and Bob Burkhardt.

"In fact, there have always been a number of Stores-on-Wheels reps who are former superintendents."

"That market was tremendous," Gardner says about the Carolinas.

After the company's sales reps started using the Stores-on-Wheels trucks, they noticed a spike in business, according to Gardner.

"Jim's idea was to cover the country and open brand new territories," he says. "Back then, we didn't have a lot of support from plants and warehouses."

Continuing its growth, the company put two Stores-on-Wheels trucks in California, one in Phoenix and one in Denver during the mid-1980s. However, the trucks and reps didn't have the support they needed from warehouses, so the company brought back the two trucks from California and

the one in Phoenix and added new territories back east in Georgia and the Carolinas. At that time, the Northeast was already filled in, according to Burkhardt.

"Most of the outer areas didn't have much support," he says. "We had fertilizer plants in Wellington, Ohio; Windsor, N.J., and Sebring, Fla. But we would never be able to expand the Stores-on-Wheels if we didn't use the warehouses. Warehouses in Ohio, New Jersey, Florida and Dallas covered the country. Throughout the years, smaller warehouses were opened in North Carolina and Alabama."

The growth of Stores-on-Wheels happened quickly at times, according to Burkhardt. For example, LESCO bought a liquid fertilizer company in Marietta, Ohio, in the late 1970s, and that purchase gave the company a foothold on the East Coast and into areas it wasn't distributing.

"There were a few competitors that tried to copy the Stores-on-Wheels approach, but they never seemed to make it work," Gardner says.

SUCCESSFUL REPS

Overall, the growth of Stores-on-Wheels exceeded FitzGibbon's and Burkhardt's expectations. Producing sales; being dependable, consistent and convenient; carrying a wide variety of products and having knowledgeable sales reps contributed to success. But that success wasn't easy.

"Sometimes it took 10 calls to get a customer because they wanted to make sure you were going to be around," Burkhardt says.

Being successful was challenging because the

company's competitors claimed it was turning sales reps into truck drivers, so the company countered with advertising, beating the bushes for the right sales reps and word of mouth, according to Burkhardt.

"In fact, there have always been a number of Stores-on-Wheels reps who are former superintendents," he says. "As we developed along the way, we hired very few established sales reps from other distributors because they didn't follow our model. They were used to doing things their way."

"Historically, Stores-on-Wheels reps were chosen based on their golf course experience, providing them with a good feel for what the hot buttons are and what products and services superintendents are looking for," says Richard Doggett, senior vice president of sales. "And that's still a goal today."

Throughout the years, the company has had successful sales reps that didn't have turf degrees and a lot that did, according to Gardner.

"We've had guys with a lot of technical background but didn't have the personality," he says. "Superintendents want to spend money with someone they like and someone who appreciates their business."

Unlike 30 years ago, sales reps nowadays have the support of Service Centers, and many work out of them because they can stock their trucks daily if needed.

Training also contributes to the success. Stores-on-Wheels operators receive product updates through e-training, according to Jeff Rutherford, president and c.e.o. The reps also receive regional training from Stores-on-Wheels and service center managers, and some training is conducted in partnership with major suppliers.

"Stores-on-Wheels reps are selected based on their understanding of a particular marketplace - market by market and region by region," Rutherford says.

STILL GROWING

The Stores-on-Wheels concept still is growing 30 years after its inception. A new style truck was unveiled in February 2005 at the Golf Industry Show. Until last year, the Stores-on-Wheels vehicles were tractor trailers. The new trucks have evolved and include air conditioning and heat in the trailers, are easier for superintendents to enter and exit, and are easier to navigate around golf courses.

"We're improving their shopping experience," says John Schmidt, zone vice president of the Southeast who has been with the company for 25 years and who drove a Stores-on-Wheels vehicle for 10 years. "We're always looking at the product line, such as fertilizers and pesticides

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that change based on the turfgrass superintendents are managing. We continue to evaluate the products and take things off the truck that become obsolete."

Currently, there are 114 Stores-on-Wheels trucks nationally, 14 of which are in Florida and cover every golf course in the state. Last year was a big year for growth because the number of trucks increased from 75 to 111.

Presently, the company's growth is more deliberate, and it's increasing its focus on servicing customers. Three new Stores-on-Wheels vehicles have been added this year: one servicing central Virginia, one servicing Minneapolis, and one servicing Western Iowa and Eastern Nebraska.

Also, one truck was relocated from Connecticut to New Hampshire and Vermont.

As new golf courses are built each year, the company re-evaluates the size of each territory because a truck can only handle so much, according to Schmidt.

Looking toward future growth, additions to LESCO's fleet transpire based on market needs.

"We'll be circumspect about it," Rutherford says. "From a capital perspective, it's not an issue. It's leased trucks and inventory. We add them if markets really need them. We're currently settled into getting the 114 we have operating effectively." ■

FROM THE BEGINNING

One of the first Stores-on-Wheels representatives grows with the company. BY JOHN WALSH

Thirty years ago, Phil Gardner was a golf course superintendent looking to move to Florida. LESCO gave him that opportunity.

Gardner, now manager of international and national accounts, started with LESCO in 1976. For 10 years before joining the company, he was the golf course superintendent at Blackhawk Golf Club in Galena, Ohio, and Minerva Lake Golf Club in Columbus, Ohio.

While a superintendent, Gardner developed a relationship with Jim FitzGibbon, the co-founder of the LESCO. FitzGibbon accompanied the company's sales representative that called on Gardner and attended the Ohio Turfgrass Conference & Show and several turfgrass field days in the area. They talked and hit it off.

At the time, Gardner wanted to move to Florida. FitzGibbon told him about his idea of delivering various products to golf course superintendents with a truck.

"Jim explained the Stores-on-Wheels concept to me, and it was interesting," Gardner says. "At the time, there was no showroom of products for superintendents. You always went through the manufacturer. There was no place to look around and shop. The reason why I went to Florida was to see about breaking new territory with the truck."

Before Gardner went to Florida, FitzGibbon already had a sales rep there, but he didn't work out because he used the truck as a warehouse instead of visiting courses with it, according to Gardner.

"At that time, we didn't know if the truck would work," he says. "I wanted to go to Florida, but I didn't know much about warm-season grass. So I figured if working on the LESCO truck didn't work out, I would learn about warm-season grass and go back to being a golf course superintendent. But in the first three or four months, we knew it would work, and there was no turning back."

Gardner spent 10 years in Florida. His territory started out as the entire state. He spent three years on the truck and started calling on way too many golf courses – 200 or more a month. Once superintendents started buying products, they wanted to do so more frequently, so Gardner

needed to make more stops. The Florida territory eventually was split in two, and Gardner became a regional manager.

When Gardner was regional manager, the company built a fertilizer plant and warehouse in Florida to support its business. He oversaw the operations of both.

"There was a lot of competition in the state, so the truck, warehouse and plant gave us advantages," he says. "The advantage of the truck was that you could sell odds and ends right there in front of the superintendents, then work your way up to selling them pesticides, fertilizer and controllers."

Gardner says the key to making the truck work now is the same as making it work back then – consistency.

"You need to keep a route of consistency," he says. "Every two weeks, I'd always be back to the same courses regardless of what the superintendents were buying. I always believed a salesman who didn't make it on the truck didn't follow that consistent path."

Gardner believed that even though some superintendents might not buy much, or anything at all, that shouldn't deter a sales rep from consistently visiting them. The course might find new money or the superintendent might move on to another course with a much larger budget. Either way, building a relationship was the key.

After his success in Florida, Gardner was asked to relocate to Cleveland to work in the corporate office.

Gardner has been with the company for so long because he enjoys the work, has worked hard to develop many relationships throughout the country and loves the company.

"One of the things during my 30 years with LESCO is that I was fortunate to be with the company when it was in a growing mode," he says. "I did a lot of different things, such as work in plants, service centers, the lawn care division, and my job never became boring. One key to my success is that I always remember who the customer is and who the important people are."


In short, he never forgot his roots as a superintendent and those early days pioneering the Stores-on-Wheels.



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SAVING TIME AND MONEY

National Accounts program allows customers to manage their businesses more efficiently. BY STEVE AND SUZ TRUSTY

With LESCO's National Accounts program, one-stop shopping saves golf course management companies time and money. That consolidation of purchasing is an element management companies seek to run their businesses better, and LESCO has the products to fill 80 to 90 percent of their needs, according to Dave Wolfard, director of national accounts for golf.

"Our private LESCO label has grown tremendously," he says. "We're constantly introducing innovative new products and new formulations. We have multiple categories including fertilizer,

quality seed and control products. We can bring the best to the market in a larger sense in dollars and distribution."

The broad range of products is an advantage for development companies building new golf courses. The company works with architects and builders to provide services and products from construction through the grow-in, as well as for the management program once the course is opened.

In its seventh year of operation, San Diego-based Heritage Golf Group has partnered with

The broad range of products is an advantage for development companies building new golf courses.





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LESCO from the beginning. Heritage is a firm believer in consolidating purchases into one basket as it relates to product, according to Norm Goodman, vice president of development.

"We consider a national account agreement more than establishing the purchasing pricing," he says. "We're basically getting married to the company, doing business with them exclusively within that agreement. It gives us the ability to control and lower our pricing; and secondarily, it frees the golf course superintendents from price shopping and gives them more time to do what they should be doing — managing the golf course."

LESCO's national accounts program has grown

during the nine years of its existence.

"When I came on board about eight years ago, we were around the \$5-million mark," Wolfard says. "We've grown that to more than \$30 million. The largest golf course management companies probably handle around 80 percent of the managed courses, and we do business with the majority of them."

Wolfard works directly with four national account managers: Tom Comalli, Les Guedel, Eddie Fatica and Phil Gardner, who split the U.S. golf market. Additionally, Fatica covers Mexico and the Caribbean, and Gardner serves Canada, Europe, Australia and Asia.

But it's the combination of the big picture and the local footprint that ties it all together.

"With 311 Service Centers and 114 Stores-on-Wheels vehicles, we have the ability to provide personalized service for the superintendents delivered by individuals with a solid agronomic background and the latest technical training," says Bob West, the company's director of communications and industry affairs. "At the same time, we can maximize efficiency for the management companies. Their purchasing manager can work with Wolfard and his team to designate the products approved by their corporate office for purchase by the superintendents."

However, there's more than pricing involved in an agreement with LESCO: It's about relationships and trust.

"While I work primarily with their national account personnel, it's the local relationships we rely on to serve our golf course superintendents on a regular basis," says Stan Wreyford, senior vice president of agronomy for Century Golf, which manages 44 golf courses throughout the United States.

Most of the golf courses managed by Century Golf are served directly by the Stores-on-Wheels vehicles backed up by the local Service Centers.

Century met with all its property managers in June, and LESCO put on an educational session that addressed multiple issues on the golf course, focusing on much more than its products.

"I can negotiate price with anyone, but it's that kind of additional service and support that makes our relationship more of a partnership than a purchasing agreement," Wreyford says.

LESCO also has the challenge of being flexible enough to meet each company's needs internally.

"We become an integral part of their own system, working with them to customize a program

ANOTHER RESOURCE

Service Centers support golf courses, too

There's a perception in the golf industry that the Stores-on-Wheels program is the only way LESCO sells to golf courses, however, that's only part of the picture.

"Our Service Centers are in fixed locations with an even wider range of merchandise, and they are staffed by personnel with the same extensive technical training and background to meet our customers' needs," says Bob West, LESCO's director of communications and industry affairs.

The first Service Center opened in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., during the 1980s. By the end of the '80s, there were 39. The '90s brought even more growth, and there were almost 200 by the end of the decade. LESCO has 311 Service Centers in 39 states — 85 of them were opened during the last three years. Another 40 are planned for 2006, increasing the level of service to current customers and extending services to new customers.

The basic concept of the Service Centers is one-stop shopping. Superintendents can call, e-mail or fax in an order directly to their local Service Center to be picked up at a specified time. They can take advantage of the new LESCODirect feature at www.lesco.com and have the order delivered to their local Service Center for pick up. They also can stop into the Service Center and personally shop for products. Many superintendents use a combination of these methods.

Personal service is another important factor, according to Stan Wreyford, senior vice president of agronomy for Century Golf. He says the Service Centers are a great resource, especially for unplanned needs.

"One of our superintendents told me a scheduling change meant they could put some spray down before the golfers hit the course on Saturday morning, but they needed more material to finish the job," he says. "He went into the local Service Center, figuring he'd get the material as soon as they opened and try to get back in time for his crew to wrap up the procedure. The manager was already inside working when he pulled up. He unlocked the center and got him what he needed so he was back on the road and at the course in plenty of time to get the job done."

That kind of service, the broad assortment of products and the addition of new Service Center are vital building blocks for growing the company's overall golf course sales.

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to provide the reporting and tracking systems they want," Wolfard says.

Program components can include monthly purchasing reports, tracking by product categories and product, with comparisons to the previous year and to the projected budget.

The LESCO relationship has served Heritage well financially and logistically, according to Goodman. The superintendents have the personal service on the local level and can track their own courses' budgets.

"I get detailed, up-to-date financial information, so I can look at what the volume is as it relates to all of our courses covered by the national accounts," he says. "They have to be thinking about our business and how we can make our business more successful and be nimble enough to make suggestions and act on them.

"One of the things we do in our budgeting

process is ask the superintendents to give us a very detailed checklist of fertilizers and chemicals for their course," Goodman adds. "We zero-base our budget for those areas. We asked LESCO to look at those lists and review their product line to see if there would be any items in their inventory that would be as efficient but more cost effective. They were able to come back to us with a substantial amount of savings. Not making those suggestions would initially have generated more revenue for LESCO. But by doing so, they showed the strength of their commitment to serving our business."

National Account customers can get whatever they need, from a broad overview to the specific details, so they're able to manage their businesses more efficiently and profitably, at a higher level of service, according to Wolfard.

"That goes right to their bottom line," he says. ■

National account customers can get whatever they need so they're able to manage their businesses more efficiently and profitably.



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Fertilizer plants in Martins Ferry, Ohio (above), and Sebring, Fla., now are run by Turf Care Supply Corp.



PRODUCTION PARTNERS

Company teams with a manufacturer and growers to bring fertilizers and seed to market. BY JOHN WALSH

Even though LESCO sold its supply chain assets and consumable products inventory to Turf Care Supply Corp. last year, the manufacturing plants that were part of that sale are still vital to the company's business.

A seed plant in Silverton, Ore., and three manufacturing and blending fertilizer plants – in Martins Ferry, Ohio; Hartsfield, Mass.; and Sebring, Fla. – were part of the sale. Currently, LESCO is the only customer of TCS.

Part of the reason why LESCO sold its manufacturing assets is the company wanted to invest in opening new Service Centers and Stores-on-Wheels vehicles to boost sales, rather than invest in equipment and machinery in the manufacturing plants, according to chief operating officer Bruce Thorn. The company has 311 Service Centers and 114 Stores-on-Wheels vehicles throughout the country.

"We've been doing this for a long time," says Brian Rowan, associate vice president of merchandising, referring to the company's distribution business. "It takes a long time to bring good

products to market, and the sale of our assets won't affect that."

Currently, LESCO is going through a transitional period with TCS, which has been smooth. There have been no changes or impacts that have distracted from the company's business, according to Thorn.

"We still have strategic partnerships with Turf Care Supply, and it's only going to improve," Thorn says. "The only time that we would go to another manufacturing company other than TCS is when the net cost would be better than



Rowan



Part of the company's continued growth is a pipeline of new granular and liquid fertilizer products.

what Turf Care can supply us, i.e., a remote market we want to enter.”

Part of the company’s continued growth is a pipeline of new granular and liquid fertilizer products, according to Rowan.

“We’re looking for more economical products and distribution,” he says.



Thorn

FERTILIZER PRODUCTION PROCESS

Fertilizer sales account for 25 percent of LESCO’s business, so it’s no surprise fertilizer production is important to the company. The plant in Martins Ferry, Ohio, is the biggest of the three fertilizer plants now run by TCS. There are 135 permanent workers, 30 supervisors and as many as 30 temporary workers there. The plant blends pesticides and fertilizers and produces sulfur-coated urea.

The plant, which is an old pipe-coupling factory that LESCO purchased in 1987, doesn’t have a perfect layout because it has been expanded throughout the years, according to Paul Ferrell, director of formulating. Urea is brought up the

Ohio River and unloaded at the plant – dumped onto a conveyer below ground that takes the urea above the plant via an elevator. About 100,000 tons of urea a year go through the plant.

During the past three years, the price of urea has increased 50 percent because it’s tied to natural gas.

Two tanks, each containing 30,000 gallons, heat the sulfur to 280 degrees. The urea is about 75 degrees. Because the process involves adhering them together, the urea needs to be heated. The coating occurs continuously in large, long rotating drums. When the sulfur-coated urea comes out of the drum, it’s 160 degrees. Then, the polymer is coated in another drum to seal the sulfur-urea mix.

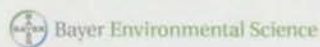
During the process some particles stick together. These are called “popcorn” and are unusable for the lawn care and golf markets, so the company sells them to farmers, who don’t need a specific size particle. One-half percent of the product produced is “popcorn.”

The urea is produced in three different sizes: the largest for the lawn care market, the smallest



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for greens and tees in the golf market, and the size in between for fairways in the golf market.

Another section of the plant contains bins that hold as much as 1,100 tons of fertilizer. All bins are filled by overhead conveyors.

For packaging, limestone is used as filler in the bags because the nitrogen-phosphorus-potassium ratio won't equal 50 pounds. Bulk density and particle size factor into producing bags of fertilizer. Corn cobs, nut shells and clay also can be used as filler, but clay tends to stick to the product, according to Ferrell.

Labels on the fertilizer bags aren't pre-printed because state regulations can change. The labels are approved by the Environmental Protection Agency and then stuck on the bags at the plant. The bags are color coded – red for insecticides, green for fertilizers, blue for post-emergent herbicides, yellow for pre-emergent herbicides and orange for fungicides.

SEED

Although it might be overshadowed by the fertil-

izer business, LESCO has a strong foothold in seed, which is 15 percent of its business. The big difference between the fertilizer and seed segments of the market is that with seed, the company is competitively in the same boat as everybody else because the majority of seed is grown in Oregon, according to Thorn.

"We work with a number of individuals to grow and test seed," he says. "Right now, we have the No. 1 [National Turfgrass Evaluation Program]-rated bentgrass – Authority creeping bentgrass. From our contract research and development folks, we'll have 15 to 20 new varieties a year. We're constantly looking for more seed varieties. When we see trends taking place, we can redirect our own efforts."

Despite all the new varieties, no contracted researcher and developer for the company is working on seashore paspalum.

Thorn says the company, now that it has sold its manufacturing assets, can be more focused on developing new products and look to other partners to manufacture them. ■

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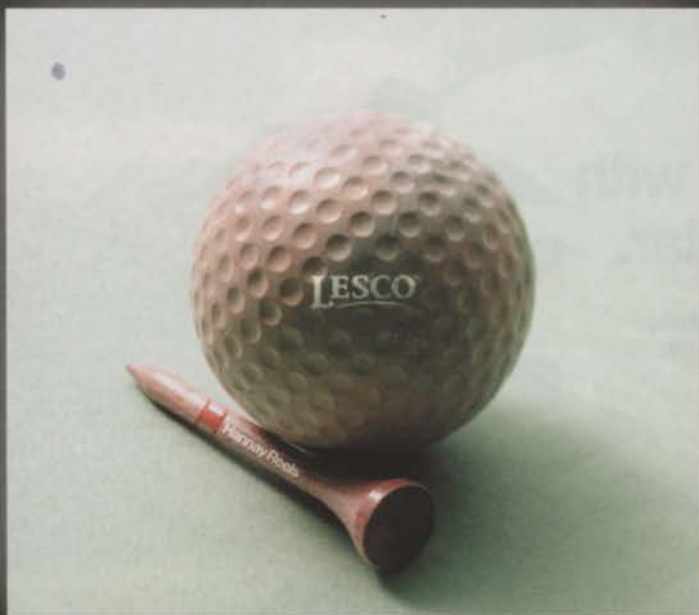
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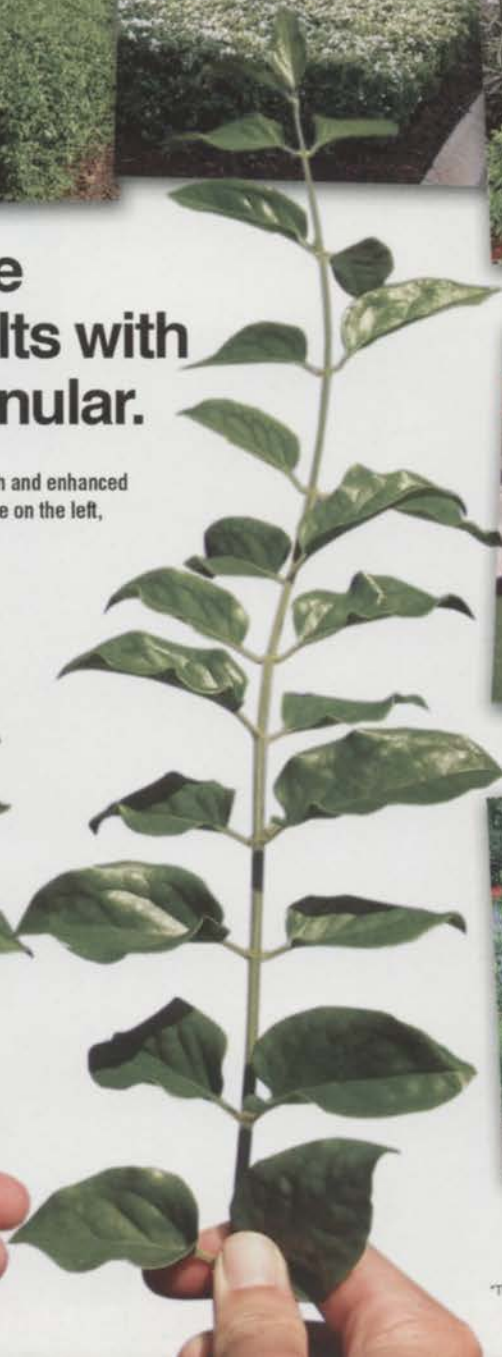
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