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EQUIPMENT IDEAS

A fan for cleaner air

Ralph Arnt, equipment manager at Hazeltine National Golf Club in Chaska, Minn., since 1988, is highly skilled at fabricating anything from scratch. Arnt built an exhaust fan for the express dual-reel grinding machine to remove iron filings when reels are ground and improve air quality for the operator.

The fan's framework, which was welded together, consists of 0.040-inch-thick aluminum sheet metal (\$35) that measures 22 inches by 52 inches, aircraft-type rivets (\$25) and 17 feet of 1-inch-by-1/8-inch square steel tubing (\$1.13 per foot).

The exhaust fan, which fits in the back of the grinding machine, sticks out from the machine 16 inches at its deepest point. The 12-inch-by-25-inch-high outlet opening allows the fan and motor to fit inside comfortably. Two 20-inch-by-25-inch, pleated furnace filters (\$6.50 each) catch the iron filings so they don't contaminate the air in the mechanic's shop area. They're replaced as needed. The used 1,450-cubic-feet-per-minute exhaust fan and motor (\$30, \$306 new) came from a heater furnace.



A box for tourney prep

Ronald McNeill, director of golf course operations at the Doha (Qatar) Golf Club, hosts the annual Qatar Masters Tournament on the European PGA Tour in January. McNeill's staff installs all of the tournament equipment (gallery ropes, stakes, etc.) during advance week then tears it down after the event.

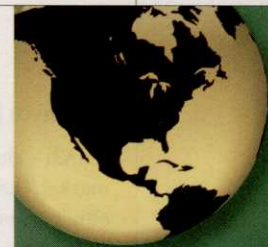
To help with the installation and tear-down of the tournament equipment, the maintenance staff built oversized wooden boxes and installed them on the back of golf cart-type maintenance vehicles after the golf bag racks were removed.

The two metal brackets behind the seats are used to mount the fiberglass top used during the rest of the year. It was removed for the tournament so the maintenance carts could drive underneath the tournament ropes with ease.

Each box is made of 3/4-inch-thick, marine-grade plywood measuring 47 1/4 inches by 35 1/2 inches by 11 3/4 inches. The sides are held together with industrial glue and L-shaped screw-type metal brackets. The plywood is coated with water-repellent stain.

The underframe was built using 2-inch-by-4-inch and 4-inch-by-4-inch construction-grade wood held together and mounted to where the rear bumper formerly was with nuts and bolts and heavy-duty nails.

It took about four hours to build each box, and materials for each cost \$70. **GCI**



Travels With Terry

Globetrotting consulting agronomist Terry Buchen visits many golf courses annually with his digital camera in-hand. He will share helpful ideas relating to maintenance equipment from the golf course superintendents he visits – as well as a few ideas of his own – with timely photos and captions that explore the changing world of golf course management.



(continued from page 41)

March – during which we almost don't have to market," he says. "So we focus on the months on either side of that time and during the summer. As a result, we've filled tee times during those months."

McCoy also is trying to increase league play, trying to attract more charity tournaments and is working on service club angles.

In Oregon, Doyle's marketing of Diamond Woods has included two-for-one coupons that were good Monday through Thursday.

"We got 2,500 rounds for that, but last year, we eliminated it because we didn't get any loyalty," he says. "One big change we made for the people that came out a lot is gave them frequent

play cards and the best price. If we see a person out there two or three times a year, we offer them a frequency card. The card cost nothing, but they can put hundreds of dollars on the card. We allow two players on one card. It builds loyalty."

In the past Doyle's marketing efforts included TV, newspaper and radio ads that promoted the frequency card.

"This year is our 10th anniversary, so we're going to promote that in a TV ad," he says. "But people know we're always busy making improvements to the course. It's what we're known for."

Doyle is joining with other Lane County golf courses and is working with hotels to make sure traveling golfers know about Diamond

Woods. And the future looks promising for the course because the area is growing. There are two subdivisions under construction that will include between 500 and 600 homes in nearby Junction City.

"We might be fortunate that way, but another golf course can go in," Doyle says. "Golf sells real-estate. We're in a pretty good position going forward."

JOIN THE CLUB

Membership is another revenue area of focus for Stephens and McCoy. Even though Wildcat is a public course, it has 220 members. The facility generated \$467,000 from membership in 2005 and \$604,000 in 2006. The annual program





used to cost \$3,000, which was paid up front and gave a member access to the course for a calendar year.

"But we struggled with that," Stephens says. "People felt it was too much to pay up front. Now we've implemented a monthly fee. It started out at \$250, but now it's \$275. Members get unlimited play, range balls in the cart and can make advance tee times. Having 36 holes helps. It's difficult to implement these member benefits at an 18-hole course. Attrition has been low considering the alternatives in the city."

At Capri Isles, membership was 225 to 230 before its renovation. Now it has 280 members, but because the facility is part of a retirement community, attrition hits the club every year. Single

membership is \$1,700 annually and \$2,800 for a family. It's a one-time annual payment.

"It has increased, but we're trying not to raise it every year; however the fees need to be adjusted every two to three years based on the bottom line," McCoy says. "We're on the lower end of the scale for the cost of membership, but we're fair."

MANAGEMENT STYLE

Renovations, marketing and membership all fall under a management philosophy about operating a golf facility. Stephens' philosophy is to be a leader not a follower.

"We brainstorm internally and don't rely on following competition," he says.

Stephens' philosophy includes hiring the best people he can find.

"We have had little turnover," he says.

He also believes in giving back to the community and charities.

"They have paid big dividends because people see us doing our civic duty," he says.

The key to success is figuring out how to get golfers to return to the course, McCoy says.

"You need to make them feel at home and provide a good product for a fair price," he says. "People feel comfortable here. It's an attitude. Say hello when golfers walk in the door, call people by their names, ask how they played or if they had a good time. Ask yourself, how would you like to be treated when playing golf?" **GCI**

Even though it's a public facility, Wildcat Golf Club generated \$604,000 from membership in 2006. Photo: Wildcat Golf Club



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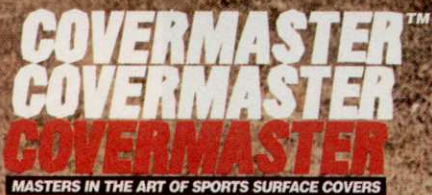
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www.stablizednitrogen.com			www.nufarm.com		
Andersons Golf Products	63	36	Nutramax Agriculture	29	46
www.andersonsgolfproducts.com			www.macro-sorb.com		
Arysta LifeScience	61	35	PBI Gordon	25	24
www.arystalifescience.com			www.pbigordon.com		
Bayer Environmental Science.....	4*, 34-35, 54-55		RainBird	11, 13, 15	13, 15, 17
www.bayer.com			www.rainbird.com		
Buhler Mfg.....	57*	34	Roots.....	79	26
www.buhler.com			www.rootsinc.com		
Exide Technologies.....	14	16	Sisis.....	48	31
www.exide.com			www.sisis.com		
Ensystex	40	27	Standard Golf Co.	9	12
www.ensystex.com			www.standardgolf.com		
FMC Corp.	69	37	Subair Systems	85	41
Floratine	117	43	www.subairsystems.com		
www.floratine.com			Syngenta Professional Products	118	44
JWB Marketing	47	19	www.professionalproducts.com		
www.geesedamage.com			Tee-2-Green	2	10
Jacklin Seed.....	101	42	www.tee-2-green.com		
www.jacklin.com			TifSport Growers.....	57*, 77*	33, 38
John Deere Golf Irrigation	18-19	21	www.tifsport.com; www.tifeagle.com		
www.JohnDeere.com			Turfco	41	28
Kalo.....	4*	19	www.turfco.com		
www.kalo.com			TurfWorks International	85	40
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www.LawnSolutionsCP.com			Varmitgetter	16	18
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WHAT'S IN THE INBOX?

One day, I decided it would be educational for my kids to hear about what it was like to work in a magazine office in olden times. I regaled them with descriptions of rotary telephones that were actually dialed, typewriters that made a “click clack” sound, blue language that would make a crack junkie cringe, ink-stained copy editors wearing fedoras and smoking fat cigars, and the time-honored tradition of chasing buxom young secretaries around desks. My kids seemed to really like that last part, but then snuck away to play Wii.

My daily routine back then included sorting through a dozen envelopes containing press releases from various manufacturers, firms and associations in the golf business. The majority were straightforward and not exactly earth-shaking.

Times have changed. I can't remember the last time I received an old-fashioned paper press release via snail-mail. Instead, they arrive in my e-mail inbox with a deceptively pleasant ding. And arrive and arrive and arrive. E-mail has made it too easy to send announcements to the media. Instead of eight or 10 a day, it's often dozens. I still try to read most of them, but my finger usually hovers over the delete key as I do so.

I hesitate to call many of these digital announcements news releases. Few, if any, are newsworthy in the “stop the presses” sense. And even fewer contain anything I didn't already know. Interesting product innovations have usually been “sneak previewed” in the market for months before an official announcement is made. And, I often hear through the grapevine about personnel changes ages before a company or golf facility gets around to telling editors about them formally.

Yet, I received two news releases recently that got my complete and immediate attention.

The first was about John Deere agreeing to buy Lesco. It was no surprise to anyone

Lesco wanted to sell. Rumors had been flying for years. The company had done everything short of putting a “For Sale” sign in front of its Cleveland headquarters. Its shareholders – big institutional investors who are interested in profits – wanted out.

Lesco is a great company with a long tradition of service and success in the green industry. But during the years since founder Jim FitzGibbon retired and subsequently passed away, things had changed. It went public, deviated from its core distribution business and unwisely misjudged customer loyalty by eliminating its golf

The second press release that really grabbed my attention was the GCSAA's announcement it's partnering with the LPGGA.

sales team. Independent distributors, who feared extinction during Lesco's meteoric rise, fought back hard. Thus, the Goliath of the industry felt the impact of the hard work of many smaller Davids.

Lesco forgot its roots and floundered, particularly in geographic areas where small, nimble independent distributors provided better service and support. The lesson is that you can be a powerhouse business, but people buy from people. If you forget that, you won't succeed.

That said, there's no better company than Deere to try to take on the challenge of fixing the Lesco network. The acquisition has the potential to increase the presence of John Deere Landscapes significantly on the lawn-care side of the business. Its impact on golf is yet to be seen. The question is whether Deere can or will even try to maintain the Lesco brand in the golf

market in light of its commitment to the Deere One Source concept.

The second press release that really grabbed my attention was the GCSAA's announcement it's partnering with the LPGGA to provide an agronomist for events on the ladies tour.

At first blush, it seems like a slick idea. It's a decent profile-raiser for the GCSAA and, theoretically, will help relationships between tournament host superintendents and the LPGGA staff and players. But, consider it a little more, and maybe you'll wonder about the same things I did. Who's paying for it? Is it a potential conflict for a GCSAA staff person to be in this position? Is this the beginning of a larger effort by the GCSAA to get into the agronomic consulting business?

Bryce Gartner, the GCSAA's managing director of marketing, says the association will fund salary and related costs of the position, but the LPGGA will cover most travel expenses. However, he says the GCSAA will receive considerable promotional opportunities to communicate the value of GCSAA members through many of the LPGGA media outlets.

Also, Gartner describes the new job as a liaison who helps the host superintendent and LPGGA agree on conditioning issues: “The agronomist will assist in this translation to help set expectations on both sides. Additionally, the agronomist will assist the LPGGA in focusing its efforts on more uniform playing conditions week to week.”

Finally, he says the positives in the relationship far outweighed the negatives. Good answers, for the most part, but I still wonder how it will work.

Am I alone in my concern the GCSAA is shelling out major bucks to maybe have an impact on how a tournament host superintendent is perceived at LPGGA events – where there's never been much of an image problem to my knowledge – or, of perhaps greater concern, that the association is getting in the business of consulting in which a member of the staff has to try to serve two masters? That's my take. What do you think? **GCI**

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