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anchor of many independents. Fertilizer is a natural adjunct of that. Most of these small companies didn't have good direct access to the chemical side of the business.

IS PRIMERATURF A COLLECTIVE PURCHASING ORGANIZATION IN THE TRUEST SENSE?

We've chosen not to work as a purchasing co-op. We negotiate supply arrangements for our members. The transaction still takes place between the manufacturer and the member, but we've helped to set most of the terms and conditions for our members. It's much like collective bargaining, but the member is the final judge of what he takes advantage of. He can choose to pull a deal with a supplier off the shelf or not.

IS A CO-OP DIFFERENT THAN A MASS-PURCHASING GROUP?

There are a range of different co-ops. Some are general like us, some are true co-ops like Ace Hardware where everything is centralized or there are small businesses like IGA stores that give up their identity. We offer a minimal level of cooperation and coherence. The commonality is that we operate in a small market. Our members collectively represent about \$350 million in annual sales. That's probably a shade under 10 percent of the market for the products we're most interested in – fertilizer, chemicals and seed. We might grow some, but it's not realistic for us to believe that we'll be a billion-dollar co-op.

That dictates how we go about the business. Our members don't want to build up an empire with a huge office staff and a lot of overhead. It doesn't make sense given the small size of our market. We'll do as much as we can with a minimal resource commitment. We only have two employees (Jager and his second-in-command, Terry Boehm). As a member, you've maintained your independence except you've chosen to source your products collectively.

SO, HOW DOES THAT BENEFIT THE AVERAGE SUPERINTENDENT?

Competition. It guarantees they have a choice

between Wal-Mart and the local store. They can do business with a large corporation that can probably get them anything, or they can do business with guys they've known all their lives and can trust most. It preserves that option.

WHAT ARE THE BIGGEST CONCERNS YOU AND YOUR MEMBERS HAVE ABOUT THE HEALTH OF THE MARKET?

Regulatory issues are probably at the top of the list. We're losing the battle against the people who feel that applying anything to turf is unnecessary. Canada is a great example, but there are pockets in the United States that want to eliminate the freedom to use tested, well-regulated products. RISE is warning the new leadership of the Democratic Party side is going to put a lot of these issues back on the Congressional agenda, but the biggest threat is still at the local level.

WHERE DOES PRIMERATURF STAND ON THE GENERIC CHEMICAL ISSUE?

Our members are voting with their pocket-books. They understand that the difference between branded and post-patent products in terms of performance can be minimal. But we've embraced the concept of a balanced approach because we believe the brands are an important element to keep value in the marketplace. If this was just a completely generic game, nobody would make money. The end user might benefit to some extent in the short term. The expiration of patents means competition and lower prices. But in the long-term, I can't see a scenario in which the business would stay healthy for our members if that part of their business isn't profitable.

People should maintain a balanced approach and do what's best for the customer's comfort level. Conversely, if the customer

PrimeraTurf members

COMPANY NAME	LOCATION	COMPANY NAME	LOCATION
Advanced Turf Solutions	Fishers, Ind.	Maxwell Turf & Supply Co.	Wyandanch, N.Y.
Agra Turf	Searcy, Ark.	Newsom Seed	Fulton, Md.
AG Rx	Oxnard, Calif.	Nursery Connection, LLC	Hubbard, Ore.
All Pro Horticulture	Farmingdale, N.Y.	Outdoors	Maple Heights, Ohio
BTSI	Frankfort, Ill.	Penn State Seed Co.	Dallas, Pa.
Central Farm & Garden	Wooster, Ohio	Pro Chem Sales	Amarillo, Texas
Conserv FS	Woodstock, Ill.	R. F. Morse Turf & Ornamental	West Wareham, Mass.
Dickens Turf & Landscape	Nashville, Tenn.	Seeton Turf Warehouse LLC and Atlantic Golf & Turf	Mount Laurel, N.J.
Fertizona-Fennemore LLC	Waddell, Ariz.	Sigma Organics	Nashville, Tenn.
Gard'N Wise	Wichita, Kan.	Southern Seeds	Middlesex, N.C.
Grass Pad	Olathe, Kan.	Spring Valley	Jackson, Wis.
Green Industries	Italy, Texas	S.R.C. Corp. dba Steve Regan Co.	Murray, Utah
The Greenkeeper Co.	Omaha, Neb.	SynaTek	Souderton, Pa.
Green Velvet Sod Farms LTD	Bellbrook, Ohio	TenBarge Seed and Turfgrass	Haubstadt, Ind.
The Chas. C Hart Seed Co.	Wethersfield, Conn.	Tri-Turf	Traverse City, Mich.
Herod Seed	Richmond, Va.	Turf & Garden	Chesapeake, Va.
Horizon	Orange, Calif.	TurfLinks	Hudson, Mass.
Howard Fertilizer & Chemical Co.	Orlando, Fla.	Veatch Chemical Co.	St. Louis, Mo.
J Mollema & Son	Grand Rapids, Mich.	Walker Supply	Bridgeville, Pa.
Landscape Supply	Roanoke, Va.	Westchester Turf Supply Co.	Lincolndale, N.Y.
Matrix Turf Solutions, LLC	Warners, N.Y.	ZIMCO Supply Co.	Sioux City, Iowa

has a budget issue and he's better served by it, the generic solution might be better. We're also urging our members to look at the new proprietary chemistry. If you're in the distribution business, the last place you want to be is 100 percent generic. The short-term margins might be good, but a short-term situation isn't viable in the long run.

HOW WOULD THE INDUSTRY CHANGE IF GENERIC PRODUCTS DOMINATED THE MARKET?

First, there's not much new chemistry in the pipeline, so post-patents will dominate the market. And there's probably less of a need for new proprietary products than ever. There are few agronomic issues that haven't already been addressed by existing products. But better environmental characteristics and things like that are still desirable. The basic manufacturers almost have ceased to be manufacturers. They're milking the same basic products they've had for years and almost stopped looking for new chemistry.

Remember, our little market isn't driving new products. All the agricultural research has shifted over to genetic engineering and biotechnology. That's not in our favor. The ag business has shifted. Where they've lost value, they've gained value in genetically modified organisms. I don't see that happening in turf.

There needs to be a shift to providing services as much as products. Call it 'consultative selling' if you like. Also, distributors will look to other areas besides chemicals (foliar fertilizers, supplemental products, etc.) that offer good value and good profits.

It's even a bigger challenge for the national distributors than it is for our members. They rely so heavily on the chemical products. If you're a LESCO or a Helena and your profits on the chemical side of the business are eventually going to be a third of what they are now, it's going to have an even bigger impact. Independents are going to be much more creative finding solutions and staying profitable.

SOME SUPPLIERS OFFER INCENTIVES FOR

PURCHASING RANGING FROM DONATIONS TO TURF RESEARCH TO VACATIONS, AND THE GCSAA RECENTLY ISSUED A VALUES STATEMENT THAT SEEMS TO TAKE ISSUE WITH ACCEPTING PERSONAL GIFTS FOR GOLF COURSE PURCHASES. WHAT'S YOUR TAKE?

It could change the landscape dramatically, particularly for the branded companies. Those incentive programs are a huge factor in maintaining their position in the market. That said, for the health of the business at large, they're the wrong thing to do. It's not healthy for a superintendent or customer to be driven toward a product if he's only buying to get a big-screen TV or a trip to Hawaii. If I were the owner, I'd go crazy about that. Yet, it's one of the unspoken reasons behind loyalty to brands.

WHAT ARE THE PROS AND CONS OF AGENCY PRICING PROGRAMS?

Agency pricing doesn't make much sense over time and on a large scale. Call a spade a spade: When older products came to the market on agency pricing, it maintained the price in the market when it otherwise would have collapsed. Agency is getting undermined by all sorts of offerings, such as supplier programs that offer rebates to distributors for meeting sales targets. The net deal is different based on how much they're selling, how competitive the market is, generic pressure, etc. Ultimately, you have to go thru peaks and valleys. If I was an end-user, I'd feel duped by all these schemes. They want solutions at a fair price. Anything that takes away from market competition isn't fair to them.

WHY ARE MOST OF YOUR MEMBERS DOING PRETTY WELL DESPITE GOLF BEING RELATIVELY FLAT FOR THE PAST DECADE?

It's because independents are better at servicing the market. They're doing a great job of gaining market share and competing. We help, because we give them better access to products and fair pricing. Also, they're placing a lot of emphasis on other areas: sports, ornamentals, tree care, etc. They're successful because they look for every opportunity in their market.

WHAT FACTORS ARE ON THE HORIZON THAT COULD HURT THE MARKET?

For the next 10 years, regulation and generic chemistry will be the biggest problems. Strategically, the regulatory and environmental issues are deadlier. It's so hard for us to defend ourselves against activists.

WHY ARE YOU OPTIMISTIC?

The demographics work in the favor of the independents. Our business thrives when customers want extra support. Information technology for our members will change the landscape and allow them to provide services they couldn't before. Wireless communications gives them instant access to data on pricing, availability, etc., as well as the ability to serve customers better in the field. Salespeople will have the ability to know as much about a customer's business as he does.

I preach that our members have to learn to sell solutions rather than products. As long as you think your business is selling product XYZ, you're held hostage by the manufacturers. But if you have the choice to sell solutions and package products as part of them, you have flexibility and can serve them right. All customers care about at the end of the day is that their turf is as healthy as it should be and they can achieve their goals within their budgets, and that doesn't necessarily have anything to do with products. Who cares what the product is as long as the golf course is in tip-top shape and they get help and support from local experts they know and trust?

LAST THOUGHTS?

End-users are well served with a healthy network of independent distributors in our business. They have everything to lose and a lot to gain when their customers succeed. That's not necessarily true for the nationals. Our members aren't going anyplace. If PrimeraTurf is successful making its members successful, that's good for the end user. **GCI**

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by PAT JONES

IT PLAYS IN Peoria

Making integrated facility management more than just lip service

There's no question the traditional American private golf club currently is more vulnerable than a baby bunny in a cage full of hungry pythons.

Though the number of golf courses has increased almost 40 percent during the past two decades, the number of private facilities is actually just about the same – about 4,500. That means for every new club that's opened, another has converted to a semiprivate or daily-fee facility, or simply ceased to exist. The golf boom has been a public phenomenon, and clubs have been the victim of the free market.

Society, too, has changed. The days of dad visiting the club four or five days a week to play golf, hang out and spend money are over. And mom's not playing as much golf or sitting in for bridge games every Tuesday and Thursday. She's either working or running the local PTA. The kids? Well, instead of being "club rats," they're busy playing video games, cram-

ming for the SAT, surfing on MySpace.com or going to lacrosse, dance or soccer practices.

So, how does a traditional private club – historically run "the way we've always done it" with almost separate operations in maintenance, food and beverage, and the pro shop – survive in this hostile environment? Two words: teamwork and creativity.

Clubs throughout America are reinventing themselves because, quite simply, they have to. One traditional private facility – the Country Club of Peoria in Illinois – is breaking the mold, becoming more businesslike and taking its destiny into its own hands. As the old show biz saying goes: If it plays in Peoria, it'll play anywhere.

TYPICAL CLUB, UNIQUE STAFF

The Country Club of Peoria is a classic Midwestern gem. Formed 110 years ago, the club sits near the Illinois River on an

unusually hilly spot in an otherwise flat-as-a-pancake part of the nation.

Like many century courses, the club has undergone numerous development phases, expansions and redesigns through the years. The core design of the golf course is credited to F.M. Birks, one of the club's organizers, but the course was rebuilt dramatically in 1997. It's short (6,200+ yards), tight and woody.

And, like many mature clubs in smaller markets, the facility began feeling the pinch of economic pressures, particularly as the fortunes of Caterpillar – the region's dominant employer – rose and fell. At the same time, membership and revenue declined because of the social challenges facing all clubs.

That was the situation facing the management team that came together in 2005: golf course superintendent Andrew Morris, general manager Mark Bado, CCM, and golf professional Scott Brownfield.

"Before I came here, I worked for an ac-

At the Country Club of Peoria in Illinois, golf course superintendent Andrew Morris (right), general manager Mark Bado, CCM, (below left) and golf professional Scott Brownfield have worked well together to increase membership and find new revenue sources. Photos: Terry Farmer



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FACILITY OPERATIONS



The golf course irrigation system needed to be replaced, and that tied to the club's need to host golf outings to generate more revenue. Photo: Country Club of Peoria

counting firm in Pittsburgh that handled club business," Bado says. "With that background, I learned how important it is to open yourself to the whole operation. I never knew there were walls between departments at some clubs, so it was natural for the three of us to team up."

Morris also has a nontraditional background for a superintendent. It's his second career after serving as an executive chef at SeaWorld in San Diego and working in restaurant management.

"Obviously, my experience helps me have a much better understanding of the food-and-beverage side, but I also got indoctrinated in management cultures that emphasized teamwork," he says.

Brownfield has been at the club almost continuously for about 20 years and, obviously, had seen numerous management and leadership changes.

"But I immediately liked these guys," he says. "It was easy to get excited about doing new things."

THE "TO DO" LIST

The new things that needed to be done in-

cluded reversing the decline of memberships, finding new revenue sources, replacing an aging and unreliable irrigation system and making the club more family-friendly in the modern sense.

"Clubs can no longer be a one-stop just for the head of the household," Bado says. "We have to cater to the whole family. Twenty-five percent of our members have been here 30 years or more, but another 25 percent have been here three years or less. We have to meet all of those differing expectations and needs. Essentially, we have to be an extension of the home."

The first order of business building the team and accomplishing its multiple goals was setting up better lines of communication within the entire staff.

"We (the managers) meet weekly on a formal basis, but daily on an informal basis," Brownfield says. "We made a conscious attempt to work as a team."

Morris – who will conduct a seminar about the subject of team management at the GCSAA national conference in Anaheim – outlines his staffwide communication program:

- Weekly management team meetings

- Weekly meeting with the PGA pro
- Weekly meeting with the general manager/facility manager
- Daily meeting with the maintenance crew
- Daily communication with the support staff and assistants
- Ongoing communication with green committee and golf membership
- Facility communication board.

"A big part of our success has been letting each other into each others' areas," Morris says. "I have a better understanding what they do, and we've developed a level of trust. If they tell me things are OK, I know things are OK. We don't always agree, but we'll agree to disagree and laugh about it later."

One might question whether that threatens Morris' autonomy over the turf program.

"One thing I hear superintendents say is 'why would you share that information with them,' like somehow they don't want their g.m. or golf pro to know what they do. That's the complete opposite of what we should be doing. I let him know everything. He doesn't want my job. The more he knows about me and my operation, the better off we'll be.

Team character

Golf course superintendent Andrew Morris has looked beyond his own operation to prepare for his presentation about integrated team management at the GCSAA education conference. He identified these key characteristics of a good team:

- The majority usually consists of fewer than 10 members.
- It strives for something greater than team members could achieve individually.
- Members are accountable with and to their teammates.
- Members have the ability to engage in constructive conflict or agree to disagree.
- Members have commitment and trust in each other.

(Katzenbach and Smith, Harvard Business Review, 2004)

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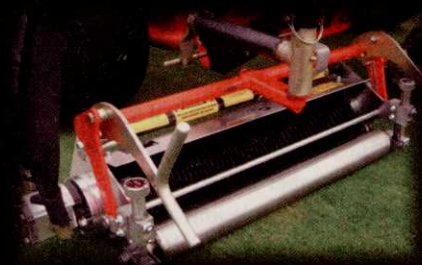
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By hosting 13 new events, the club raised \$750,000 for the community and exposed hundreds of golfers to the course and club. Photo: Country Club of Peoria

That information sharing is a huge part of our success.”

HIGH-TECH MARKETING

To address the need to recruit new members, this granddaddy of a club used a new-fangled idea: They produced a membership package that includes a slick DVD that focuses on the people and culture of the club. Surprisingly, it was Morris who wrote the script and helped drive the production.

“Potential members used to get two pieces of paper stapled together,” Morris says. “It just wasn’t representative of the type of club we are. Now we have a nice package to give to potential

members. Most of the time a superintendent would never have been involved, but Mark and Scott were more than willing to listen. I wrote the rough presentation and the dialogue and even presented some of the initial ideas to the board. We got professionals involved to clean it up and put some shine on it.”

Bado loved it.

“Andy really got engaged in the process,” he says. “He captured things about the club that the rest of us might not have understood as well.”

The DVD campaign was a roaring success, and the club attracted 52 new members at the standard initiation fee of \$22,000.

But, the new approach didn’t stop once the new member signed on the dotted line.

“When people join a club, it’s a huge commitment of money and time,” Bado says. “Part of our orientation is for members to go around to each department to meet the people who

might be serving them for the next 20 or 30 years. They meet everyone. They can put a face to a name and a name to a face.”

Brownfield agrees: “It puts a personal touch on the operation,” he says. “They feel much more comfortable using the facility. It can be a little intimidating, but it should feel like an extension of the home.”

Bado sums it up: “Clubs will go the way of the dinosaur unless they’re dynamic,” he says. “As a club, we have to change. It’s like grocery stores. In the ’70s, you just got your milk and meat there. Now, you have banks, ATMs, videos, etc. We have to be a one-stop shop for all of our members’ needs. So, we have wi-fi, a business center, etc. We have to embrace change without losing track of what makes clubs an extension of the home.”

OPENING THE DOORS

The club had historically avoided hosting