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WHO LIKES
working with
PEOPLE.”

Marian Weber
Technical Operations Manager

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Read about a complete system overhaul at Val Halla Golf and Recreation Center in Cumberland, Maine, in the July Online Extras section at golfcourseindustry.com.

Technical difficulties

A high-tech renovation makes life at Starmount Forest Golf Club a lot easier. BY EMILY MULLINS

When Mike Brown solved an irrigation system maintenance problem from 600 miles away, he knew he'd chosen the right system.

"With three keystrokes, I fixed the problem from my hotel room while at a staff

boro's ever-changing water use mandates. Brown needed an irrigation control system that would best use the course's two holding ponds, each providing 3 million gallons of water that can stretch over three-and-a-half weeks, and prolong the need to tap into the

any computer with Internet access through John Deere's server. The program is also BlackBerry and iPhone compatible, which was another plus for Brown.

"We log in to our own secure page that stores our information," Brown says. "Any system upgrades happen from John Deere's end, so I never have to worry about having the most up-to-date version of software."

Brown's assistant took part in the purchasing process, traveling to meetings to test the systems in real-world settings. Brown also invited Deere representatives to present the system to the club's board and, in the end, Starmount chose an E Aurora John Deere control system that cost \$75,000. "I wanted the board and committee to know this was the product I recommended, but I also wanted them to know it's a new system on the market," Brown says. "I thought it was important that they take ownership of the decision."

With the new system, Brown and his crews spend maybe an hour a month on programming and setup issues, compared to about six hours they used to spend maintaining the old system. In addition to the ease of virtual maintenance, Brown also has seen vast improvements in water management and turf quality. For example, the course used 20 million fewer gallons of water from March 1 to Dec. 1, 2008, than during the same period in 2007 – and Greensboro was in a drought both years. This savings includes 10 million gallons of water the course would have had to buy from the city.

"It was great not to have to use the community's resources and it was also a huge monetary savings for the club," Brown says.

While he believes he took a leap of faith by stepping outside of his comfort zone, Brown is truly pleased with his decision.

"I consider myself a bleeding-heart liberal in a sea of conservatives," he says, laughing. "A lot of people in the industry would have been stuck with a tried-and-true system and raised their eyebrows when I went with John Deere," he says. "But it's working out so well." **GCI**

Emily Mullins is a freelance writer based in Lakewood, Ohio.



Starmount Forest Golf Club in Greensboro, N.C., installed an E Aurora control system in March 2008.

conference in Myrtle Beach," says the superintendent at Starmount Forest Golf Club in Greensboro, N.C. "And all it took was an Internet connection."

However, life wasn't always so easy for Brown, who manages the 18-hole private course with an annual maintenance budget of about \$800,000. Before the club's irrigation control system renovation in March 2008, he and his crews operated a Toro LTC, a first generation DOS-based central control system installed at the course in 1994.

"When we'd call Toro for software support, they would have to put us on hold to research our problem because our system wasn't even part of their active troubleshooting manual," Brown says. "Needless to say, it didn't have the sophistication we needed."

Not only did Brown need a more technologically sophisticated system, he also needed a system that could keep up with Greens-

boro's six wet wells of city water, or "liquid gold," as Brown calls it.

The facility was at the half-life of the system's previous renovation that took place in 1999, so the pipe, heads and other components were still in working order. Brown's focus was on a control system that would stay relevant for as long as possible, ideally until the system's next scheduled overhaul in about 10 years. His top three picks were Rain Bird, Toro and John Deere.

"Originally Deere wasn't at the top of my list," Brown says. "But because of their solid reputation on the equipment end of things, I decided to check them out."

Brown was drawn to John Deere's strictly Internet-based control system. Unlike other companies' "PC anywhere" aspect, which means a system can be controlled from any computer with the appropriate software, the John Deere system can be controlled from



WHAT RECESSION?

“There’s no recession here,” says The Meadows Golf Club owner Hank Finelli Jr., whose 18-hole public golf facility is located 20 miles west of New York City in Lincoln Park, N.J. With golf course superintendent Andy Schuckers, CGCS, The Meadows has, before, during and presumably after these tough times, created an enjoyable, well-conditioned and challenging golf atmosphere with a maintenance budget that’s about 50 percent less than industry standards.

With a full parking lot and no gaps between groups, I toured the golf course with Andy to see what advice he could offer those struggling this season.

Q With financial cutbacks occurring throughout our industry, what have you and The Meadows GC done to remain busy and successful?

A We’re on a small piece of property (130 acres), which helps with keeping expenses to a minimum. However, we must maintain quality conditions or our customers will go elsewhere. We do this by continuously reviewing our finances; forecasting upcoming expenses and potential increases in equipment, supplies and labor as early as possible; pre-ordering our entire agronomic inventory, which saves a minimum of 10 percent; and relying on used equipment more than new equipment.

I talk to vendors to see who’s selling a quality unit with low operating hours, look for golf course lease agreements that are ending to locate certain low-mileage specialty units, search the equipment Web sites and pore over equipment records and base purchasing decisions on operating hours and the type of repair work accomplished to a particular unit.

We also:

- Talk with area superintendents to see who may have equipment ready to sell or exchange with a unit we have;
- Look for employees who have varied golf course experiences in construction, maintenance, equipment management, landscaping, turfgrass and who really want to work hard;
- Provide each employee a 40-hour work week, without overtime, with four, 8-hour work days and two

4-hour work days to accomplish necessary tasks each day;

- Aerify during spring break so we can employ part-time labor, such as vacationing college students, to assist in the process and clean-up;
- Schedule agronomic practices to coordinate with on-course activity such as outings, special offers, tournaments, leagues and general daily play. Often we’ll accomplish work very early or late in the day so as not to interfere with play or slow down our operational pace; and
- Implement daily multitasking with on-course assignments.

Q Your putting surfaces (Poa/bent) are outstanding for the volume of play they receive. What cultural practices are involved in their maintenance?

A Our turf quality is based on our budget. However, we realize 50 percent of a round of golf is played on the putting surfaces. With this reality, the majority of our efforts are dedicated to the greens.

We focus on early season deep-tine coring to vent the subsoil, smooth the playing surface, reduce compaction and we follow up with ¼-inch hollow tine in mid-April (spring break) to stimulate root growth and follow with sand topdressing.

We’ll hollow core again in August using ½-inch tines and topdress accordingly. Using the large pull-behind top-dressing units, we light topdress our greens throughout the season and match the amount of sand with plant

growth rates. All work is accomplished while we have a full labor source.

We use plant growth regulating materials regularly to reduce costs. We apply trinexapac-ethyl to all surfaces as well as our bunker banks/faces, around tree basins, cart path edges and curbing and within the primary roughs to reduce mowing frequency, keep turf density and allow players to locate their golf balls without impacting pace of play.

I believe in the appropriate height-of-cut for all surfaces, especially greens. A proper cutting height reduces mowing, pesticide and labor costs. Fast greens are difficult to maintain and affect pace of play, which limits the amount of play on the course.

We routinely apply wetting agents to decrease all forms of irrigation, and I use agronomic forecasting updates to coordinate pesticide and fertility applications.

Q What do you look for beyond agronomics to assist your operating philosophy?

A Much of the work accomplished to the golf course during my 13 seasons has been done in-house. We enjoy accomplishing as much as we can without outside help. Also, I consider the following: accomplish as much work as possible prior to play; hire the right people who you can trust; create a schedule for all present and future operations, on and off the golf course; be flexible, especially with Mother Nature – don’t let weather add to your work load; if no work can be accomplished due to weather issues, head home for the day; multitask; do more with less; treat equipment like the owner is riding in the seat next to you; be open-minded and look hard for the right price – it’s out there; and keep prices fair and competitive. **GCI**



Terry Buchen, CGCS, MG, is president of Golf Agronomy International. He's a 41-year, life member of the GCSAA. He can be reached at 757-561-7777 or terrybuchen@earthlink.net.

HOLD THE LADDER

Equipment manager Gary Slaughter and Jed Spencer, CGCS, designed and built a ladder holder for the 1998 Club Car Carryall II equipment manager's vehicle at the Chenal Country Club in Little Rock, Ark.

The ladder holder is made of 1-inch by 1-inch, thin-wall ($\frac{1}{8}$ -inch thick) square tubing that has two vertical supports at 40-inches high each. The supports are 44 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches apart, 25 inches wide over the top of the canopy with two 6-inch long vertical brackets that support the ladder. Cross braces provide added support.

The ladder holder is attached to the turf vehicle's canopy uprights with $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch diameter bolts, washers and nuts; $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch spacers are used in between the ladder holder and windshield so the windshield can be opened or closed. An 8-foot long aluminum ladder is transported permanently where one side of the ladder is placed in between the two 6-inch long vertical brackets. A 20-foot fiberglass extension ladder also can be transported with ease. It took about two hours to design, cut and weld the ladder holder. The materials cost about \$30.



SPREADING IN STYLE

At the Great Southwest Golf Club in Grand Prairie, Texas, equipment manager Jeff Jamnik designed and built a 12-volt fertilizer spreader. He attached a Lesco #80 Electric Truckster Commercial Plus Spreader to a 2005 E-Z-Go MPT 1200 G turf vehicle with a 2-inch square tubing ($\frac{1}{8}$ -inch thick) frame. The frame is 27 inches high and the section that goes into the receiver is 18 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches long and has a triangular-shaped brace where all pieces are welded together. Jamnik painted the brace with three coats of glossy black enamel.

The spreader is mounted to a 21-inch by 4-inch ($\frac{1}{4}$ -inch thick) piece of flat steel (which is welded to the tubing frame) with $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch by 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch bolts.

The electric wires were run from the motor and attached with alligator clips to the vehicle's 12-volt battery. The meter flow cable lever, with the on/off switch for the 12-volt motor, is mounted to the operator's plastic seat grab-handle with $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch bolts. The wires and cable are protected and encased in 1-inch outside diameter loom-split poly tubing. The spreader is easily transferred to other vehicles. Jamnik had all of the scrap steel in inventory. With the hardware the project cost about \$40. The design, build, electrical wiring and installation took about six hours. **GCI**



Travels With Terry

Globetrotting consulting agronomist Terry Buchen visits many golf courses annually with his digital camera in hand. He shares 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.

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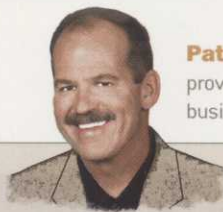
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GOVERNMENT THAT'S NOT DUMB

Big ideas sometimes come in small packages. I recently found one right in the palm of my hand.

The other day, I grabbed a can of Coke for a little mid-afternoon pick-me-up. I popped it open, took a gulp and glanced at the printing on the can to distract myself from the 93 things I needed to do for work. Isn't procrastination wonderful?

I noticed the can had some kind of ad or offer printed on it. You see these a lot. Usually it's a little promo that advertises some kind of discount for a theme park, renaissance festival (ack!) or NASCAR race or whatever.

But this ad was different. It was for the Cleveland Metroparks golf courses. It was a "buy one, get one" deal that allows two golfers to play for the price of one during limited hours.

I was – to use a wonderfully emotive Briticism – gobsmacked.

Someone at a municipal golf operation overseen by a bunch of county bureaucrats had created a brilliant idea to drive rounds and promote their facilities. I immediately wondered who dreamed this thing up, how much it cost and whether it was working.

So, I e-mailed my buddy Sean McHugh, CGCS, who's been the big cheese of Cuyahoga County's golf/turf department for years, and asked him if he was the super-genius behind the scheme. In a rare burst of honesty, he admitted he wasn't the originator of this scheme and gave all the credit to Jane Christyson, the director of marketing and clubhouse operations for the Metroparks. It turns out that golf is just one of her babies along with the parks themselves, various nature centers, facilities and programs. She does it all on a shoestring...but it's a pretty cool shoestring.

Every year, the Metroparks buys a lot of stuff – pop, bread, buns, beer, etc. – plus the inevitable balls, shirts,

clubs and turf products. They provide 108 holes of damned good golf to Greater Clevelanders and they generate about 340,000 rounds annually. So, because of the purchasing leverage they command, they are able to get – and I use this term bluntly for entertainment purposes only – kickbacks from the various suppliers.

Happily, those kickbacks – er, I mean marketing partnerships – are used for public good instead of personal gain (which is quite rare in Cuyahoga County, as I understand it from the appalling things I read in the paper lately). The Metroparks actually reinvests the money and other benefits into the system. What a concept, huh?

One of the benefits is a relationship with the local Coca-Cola bottler that makes it possible for them to put this amazing ad on a bazillion cans of pop. So, every time some hacker opens a soda can, he/she sees the cool Metroparks Golf logo and is offered a chance to fill a tee time during the slower hours on the sheet. And, gee whiz, it's actually a measurable promotion. They can count the number of can/coupons redeemed. "We know how it benefits us and they (the bottler) like the idea of a 'pour' off of a sponsorship," says Christyson. "It's not a warm fuzzy thing. We show them value of the investment."

But wait – as they say in the ShamWow infomercials – there's more!

Christyson and McHugh are also driving rounds through a modest media buy with a local TV station... which offers a value-add under which the station's very popular morning host does video podcasts. The local TV guy plays with the pro on the Metroparks courses and gives tips. The program is underwritten by a local bank sponsorship.

They're also using social media like Twitter and Facebook. Twitter "follow-

ers" can get updates on weather, aeration, special deals and other things that might affect play. There's even a Twitter-driven trivia contest that ties into the local TV deal. Again, they're measuring what works, according to Christyson: "We count column inches (of articles generated by PR), minutes on TV and radio and use a monitoring service and then we assign a dollar value to that exposure. Over ten or 12 years, we've had \$12 million in 'earned media' through those programs. Obviously, that's really important when we're reporting to our board."

What else? Among many other things, they're using "mystery shoppers" to secretly visit, observe and report on the experience of playing at the county's courses.


"Course condition is customers' No. 1 priority when deciding whether they come back again," she says. "So, it's critical that Sean and I work together on that."

How well do the turf guy and the marketing guru ham-and-egg it together? "It works out great," says McHugh. "We have a common goal... get more people on the golf properties. It's a no-brainer that marketing and maintenance work hand in hand."

The whole thing is part of a larger, decade-long branding effort to ensure that the Metroparks competes effectively in the Cleveland golf market. And, compared to the many government-operated facilities that are struggling, failing and getting spun off to management companies, Cuyahoga is doing quite well, thank you.

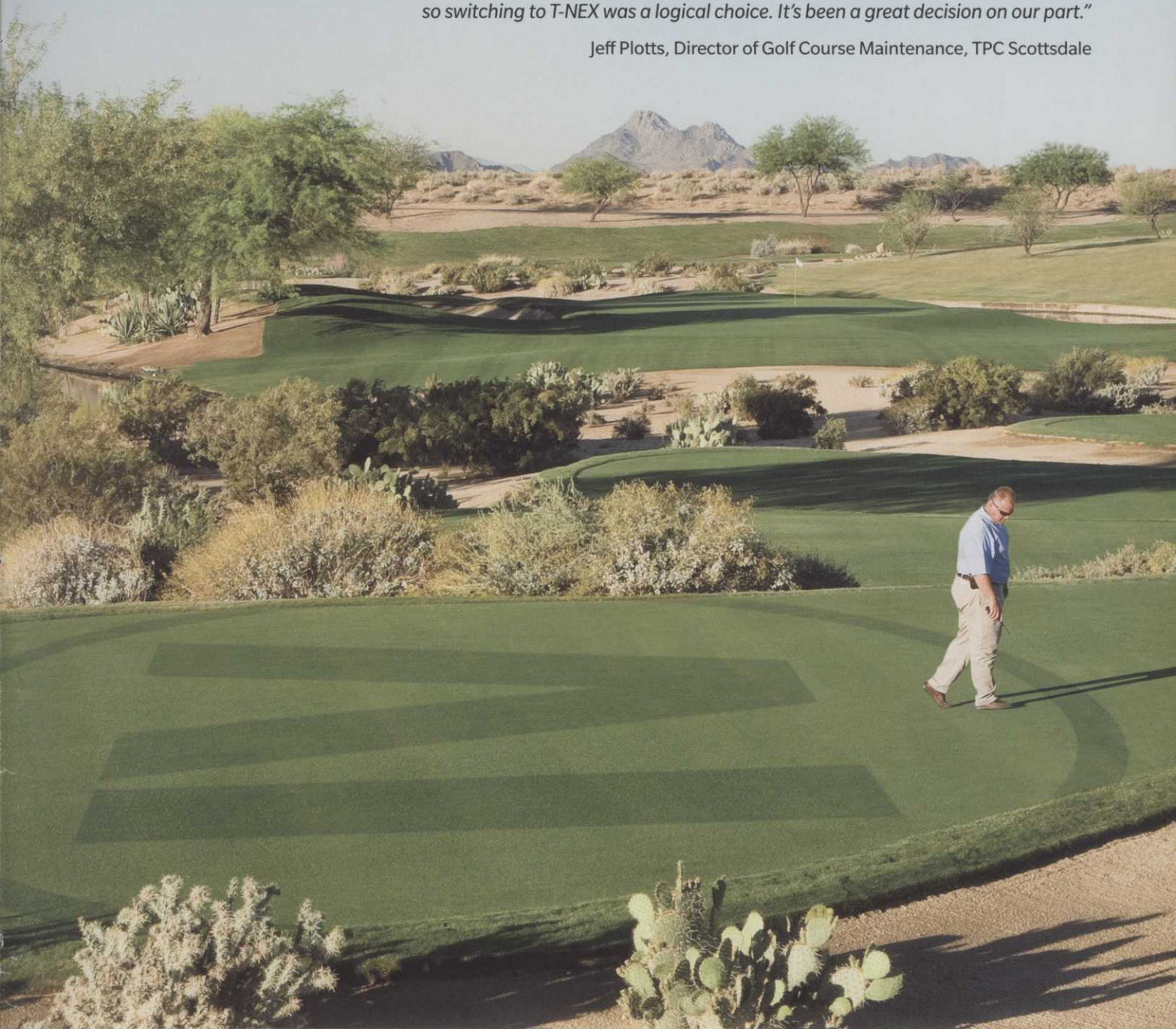
What hasn't worked? "Discounting!" they yell in unison.

"We've learned how incredibly careful you need to be to maintain your green fee structure," says Christyson. "You can't panic and cut prices. We may work for the government, but we're not dumb." **GCI**

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