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## IRRIGATION

### Use It or Lose It

Does an unused function become obsolete?

Both Hunter Industry's Randy Mills and Rain Bird's Paul Roche balk at the notion that certain functions have become so underutilized that they've become obsolete.

"We don't see these functions becoming obsolete at all," Roche says. "These features have been asked for by irrigation system managers and added to software at their request. We routinely see irrigation system managers rediscover software functions and incorporate them into their daily routines."

"To me, something becomes obsolete when it used to be used all the time and over time its use has gradually dropped until it stops being important," Mills adds. "The only things I can think of which fit into that category are features which support irrigation equipment which is rarely used nowadays. For example, there are features designed to help you work with fixed-drive pump stations. Fixed-drive pump stations are disappearing – they are being replaced with VFD (Variable Frequency Drive) pump stations. Eventually there won't be any more fixed drive systems, so those features will be unnecessary.

"Most underutilized features I can think of would truly benefit the superintendent," he adds. "Pick lists, for example, save a lot of time when adjustments are needed."

at choosing the correct runtimes, though they often tend to err on the side of too wet as opposed to too dry. Changing from minutes of runtime to inches of water is difficult, No. 1, because they are completely different kinds of units, so it is important for the software to have a way of showing sprinkler runtimes for a given ET. The second problem is most of the time, the way weather stations have been configured, calculated runtimes do not match the runtime the superintendent wants to use, causing distrust in the value.

"To address this problem, the software needs a way for the superintendent to enter the runtime he wants (which is usually very close to the correct one), then the software needs to calculate an adjustment factor to be applied to the weather station ET so the resulting runtimes are automatically adjusted to the minutes the superintendent expects," Mills says. "Over time, the superintendent will see that the weather station is automatically calculating runtimes that fit

his expectations and he will spend less and less time making changes to the computer."

At Rain Bird, staying current on a Global Service Plan (GSP) entitles users the latest version of software. Bulletins and updates are mailed and emailed to keep superintendents up to date on the latest features.

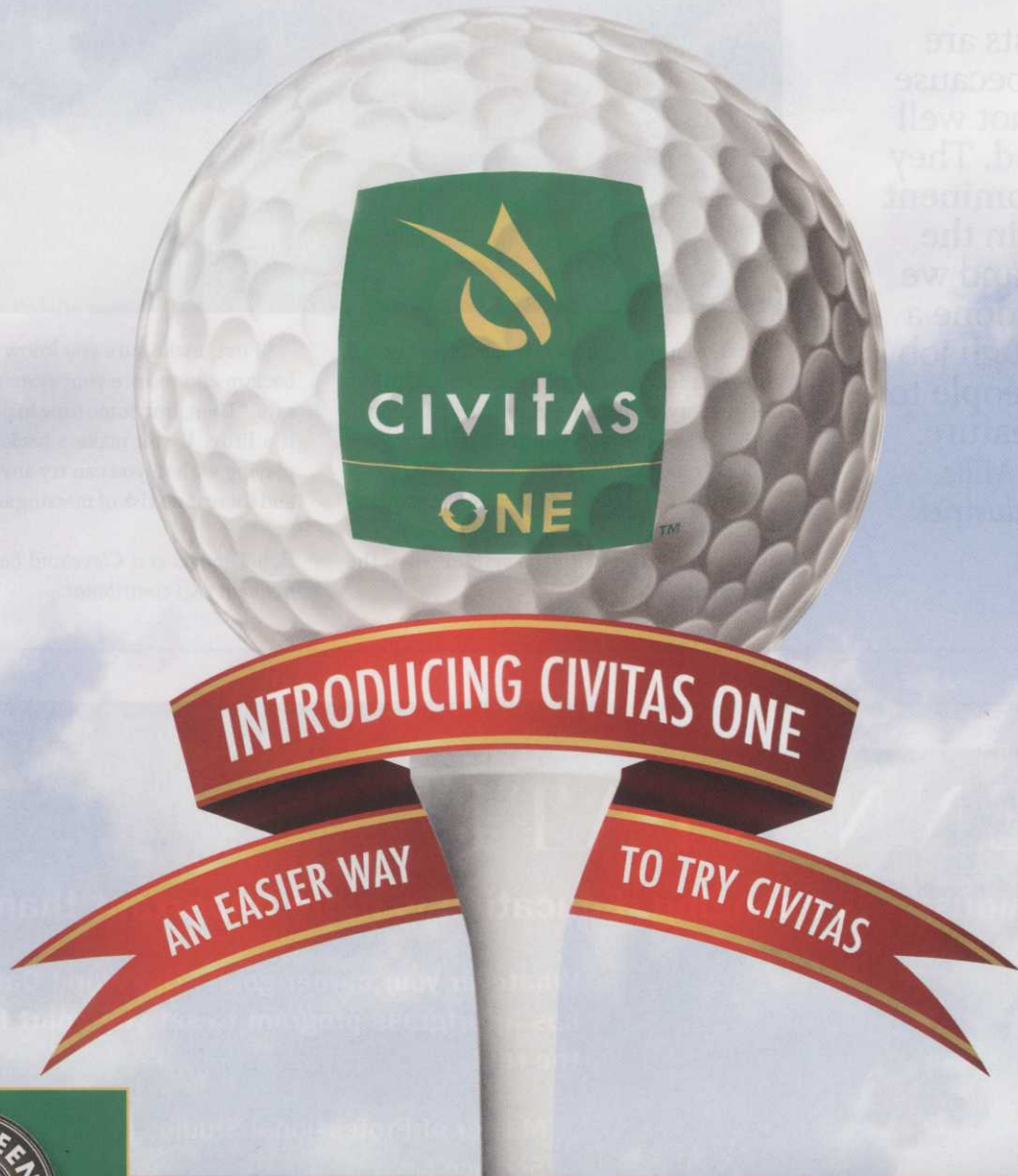
"Irrigation distributors are also a great resource to point out some of the latest and most used features," Roche says. "On the manufacturing side, annual software classes are offered around the country. It's always a good idea to attend every few years or attend a local distributor's workshop."

For those looking to better utilize their irrigation systems, Roche recommends education.

"We strongly suggest [superintendents] attend software workshops every few years to keep abreast of the latest technology and to rediscover some existing functionality they may not realize they have," he says. "Irrigation distributors are also



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“Pick lists are not used because they are not well understood. They are not prominent enough in the software and we have not done a good enough job training people to use the feature.”

– Randy Mills,  
Hunter Industries



a great resource for how software is being used and what features other managers are using. Global Service Plan representatives are also available for software questions and to answer ‘how-to’ questions.”

Mills agrees that checking with the distributor or manufacturer is a good idea, but also suggests tinkering with the system when the opportunity arises.

“First, make sure you know exactly how to backup and restore your system database,” he says. “Then, find some time to play around with it a little. If you make a backup right before playing with it, you can try anything you want and there is no risk of messing anything up.” GCI

*Rob Thomas is a Cleveland-based writer and frequent GCI contributor.*

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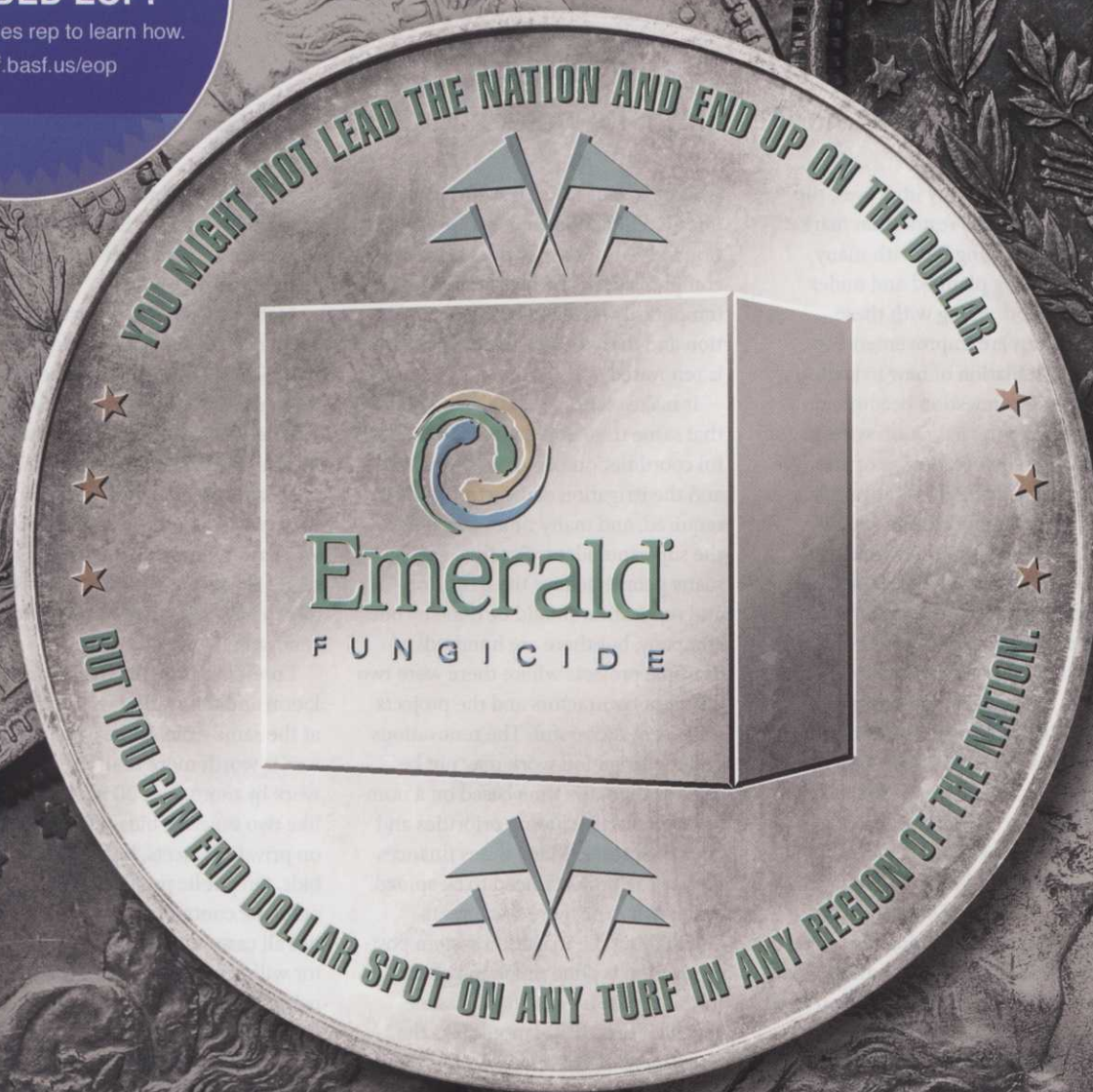


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**Brian Vinchesi**, the 2009 EPA WaterSense Irrigation Partner of the Year, is president of Irrigation Consulting Inc., a golf course irrigation design and consulting firm headquartered in Pepperell, Mass., that designs irrigation systems throughout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

## BEFORE, DURING OR AFTER

Why your course should go from its water source to one less expensive.

As the economy improves, the golf course restoration market is regaining life with many projects being planned and under construction. Along with these restorations are improvements to or the installation of new irrigation systems. The question becomes do you perform the irrigation system installation before, during or after the renovation? Each has its advantages and disadvantage, but the choice will be dependent on how much renovation work is being performed. On many projects, the irrigation work is worth more on a dollar-for-dollar basis than the renovation work. That said, is the project a new irrigation installation with some renovation work, or a renovation project with a new irrigation system? This not only dictates the philosophy of the project with the board, ownership or membership, but also dictates the contract holder and subcontractor.

The advantage of doing the irrigation work before the renovation is you have coverage in all the areas you need to regrow, which is probably not the case with the old system. This works well when the renovation is on a smaller scale, such as green regrassing or bunker and tee renovations. I've seen it done on large projects

where most of the irrigation system is installed first, and where major renovation are to be done, such as a green complex, when the new system is temporarily attached to the old irrigation and then replaced once the feature is renovated.

It makes sense to do the irrigation at that same time as the renovation. Careful coordination between the builder and the irrigation contractor needs is required, and many times this falls to the superintendent. For this reason, many people believe the irrigation and renovation should be done by one company, but there are hundreds of example projects where there were two different contractors and the projects were very successful. The renovations and the irrigation work may not be done at the same time based on a number of factors including priorities and course closures. Many times finances dictate the project's need to be spread out over two or more fiscal years.

Installing the irrigation system post-renovation is done much too often. Installing the irrigation after some period of time has elapsed risks the investment of the renovation. During the renovation there are areas that are sodded (bunker faces) or seeded and most likely there is no irrigation system to water it in. Large amounts of time

are spent hand watering and many areas may not grow in very well. It also lengthens the duration of construction, interfering with play.

Unfortunately, the decision to sequence the renovation and irrigation work is rarely the superintendent's. You may give your opinion, but you will need to remind the powers that be that it will be harder to water the renovated areas and the grow-in results may not be as good as anticipated if you have no irrigation. You also need to get the renovation architect as an ally to have irrigation available for the renovated work.

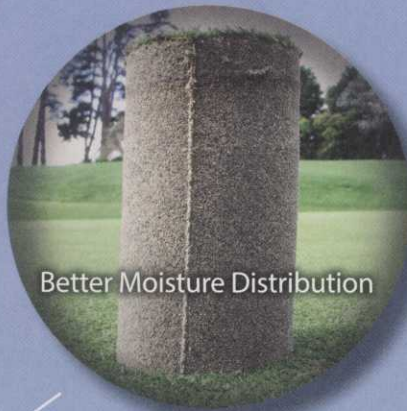
I prefer to have the irrigation installation and renovation work performed at the same time. If the irrigation system is worth more than the renovation work by more than 20 percent, then I like two separate bids. This works well on private projects, but not on public bids. On public projects there will be only one contractor and in most, but not all cases, the renovation contractor will be the general contractor, no matter what the value of the irrigation improvements. Many good renovation contractors do not do their own irrigation while many of the larger builders do. When bidding two separate packages (renovation and irrigation) those contractors who also do irrigation will bid both parts of the project and there should be some economies of scale.

What works for one golf course does not necessarily work for another. All stakeholders need to be involved in the process, including the board, greens committee, golf committee, irrigation consultant, golf course architect and of course the superintendent. GCI

“ The decision to **install irrigation improvements** or a new irrigation system before, during or after a renovation is one that requires a lot of thought and subsequent planning.

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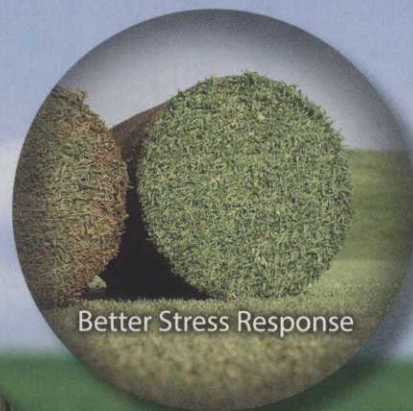




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# Master Painter

Rob Vaughan pioneers fairways to heaven. by Trent Bouts



Rembrandt did pretty well for himself in the 17th century — and his legacy extended beyond his brushwork, thanks to a less-celebrated secondary career as a teacher. Rob Vaughan's best works may never grace the Louvre but like the Old Master, his influence, albeit as an advisor of a different kind, is spreading far. Vaughan, the golf course superintendent at Brunswick Plantation Golf Resort in Calabash, N.C., pioneered the art of fairway painting.

This fall, more courses than ever in the Southeast and elsewhere in the country will use turf colorants instead of ryegrass to give their dormant warm-season fairways the green that golfers love. They are saving tens of thousands of dollars in the process and greatly reducing interference that golfers endure when overseed is sown, grown and mown. Vaughan has helped many superintendents get their toes wet in paint, so to speak, by answering phone calls, emails, giving talks and even turning up on their doorstep to offer advice.

The USGA Green Section's Southeast region director, Pat O'Brien, projects within five years "maybe only a handful" of courses in resort areas like Myrtle Beach and Hilton Head will overseed. Some facilities that scrapped overseeding to save precious dollars during the recession are now digging deep for money to paint

with, excited by the prospect of attracting more play on green fairways in winter.

"I would call Rob Mr. Paint, or maybe Dr. Paint," O'Brien says of Vaughan's status as Rembrandt of the fairways. "He was the first. He's a rock star. He really is. This guy figured it out. The tough part was getting the colorant from the container and onto the fairway and that stuff wasn't intuitive for people. Not only that, he's been so generous sharing his knowledge and answering questions from all over the place."

Vaughan got his start in golf course maintenance in 1975 on the crew under the legendary Fred Meda, then at Raintree Country Club in Charlotte, N.C. When Meda left to join the Myrtle Beach National Company, Vaughan went to North Carolina State University to get a turfgrass degree. After graduating, he rejoined Meda and spent the next 15 years with him. Then he helped Bill Twigg during construction and grow-in of Man-O-War and The Wizard before a few years as superintendent at Buck Creek, now known as Aberdeen Country Club. In 1996, he moved to Brunswick Plantation and has been there ever since.

By his own admission, Vaughan was a little slow to adhere to the idea of painting turf which first took hold on Bermudagrass putting greens. Vaughan converted Brunswick Plantation's 27 holes to Champion in 2006 and



"Painting" dormant turf rather than overseeding with ryegrass is becoming more popular, especially in the southeast.





“I would call Rob Mr. Paint, or maybe Dr. Paint. He was the first. **He’s a rock star. He really is.** This guy figured it out. The tough part was getting the colorant from the container and onto the fairway and that stuff wasn’t intuitive for people. Not only that, he’s been so generous sharing his knowledge and answering questions from all over the place.”

—Pat O’Brien, *The USGA Green Section’s Southeast region director*

overseeded without a second thought. One November, he sent assistant superintendent Dave Rickenbrode to a winter management seminar at the Carolinas GCSA Conference and Trade Show. There, Rickenbrode heard plenty to like about painting greens as an alternative source of winter color.

“Dave came back and basically said we messed up by overseeding,” Vaughan recalls. “So I went to the same seminar the following year and I came back and told him, ‘Yeah, you were right. We did mess up.’” Vaughan has used a turf colorant on his greens ever

since. Ironically, his epiphany came about a decade after he himself had dabbled with the painting idea at the suggestion of his general manager at Buck Creek in 1996. “He wanted to try painting our 328 with a latex paint so we mixed up a batch,” Vaughan says, adding that the experiment was short-lived.

When the bottom fell out of the economy, Vaughan, like every other superintendent in the industry, was charged with reducing costs and getting more out of every dollar that was spent. He looked at what was being forked out on overseeding fairways and saw poten-

tial savings if he could successfully extrapolate what he was now doing on his greens.

He began mixing up different combinations of colorant and toyed with test plots. But he couldn’t find a solution that didn’t at some point turn the turf blue, which was far from ideal. As O’Brien says, “Golfers don’t like the idea of playing on Boise State’s football field.” Enter Jennifer Seevers, from Geoponics Earth Chemistries.

“She was standing in my office one day complaining that she couldn’t make a living selling fertilizers in winter,” Vaughan says. “By then I had about 60 different paint samples I’d worked up so I told her to take them and see what she could do. Then - it was October 1, 2010 - she came back out and said she thought she had something. As soon as that thing hit the ground I said, ‘This is it!’”

Vaughan went to his owners and said, “How about giving me nine holes? And they said if we are gonna do nine we might as well do all 27. They’re wonderful people to work



Robert Vaughan