

Off The Fringe

Business briefs

Textron, ProLink form alliance

Textron Turf Care And Specialty Products has formed a strategic alliance with Tempe, Ariz.-based ProLink, an inventor of Global Positioning Satellite (GPS) golf course information management systems. Under the agreement, ProLink will utilize Textron's E-Z-GO branch network to sell and service GPS systems in the United States and Mexico.

Simplot buys Lange-Stegmann line

Boise, Idaho-based Simplot Turf & Horticulture purchased the professional product line from St. Louis-based fertilizer formulator Lange-Stegmann, which includes Lange-Stegmann's production facilities for its professional products in the golf market.

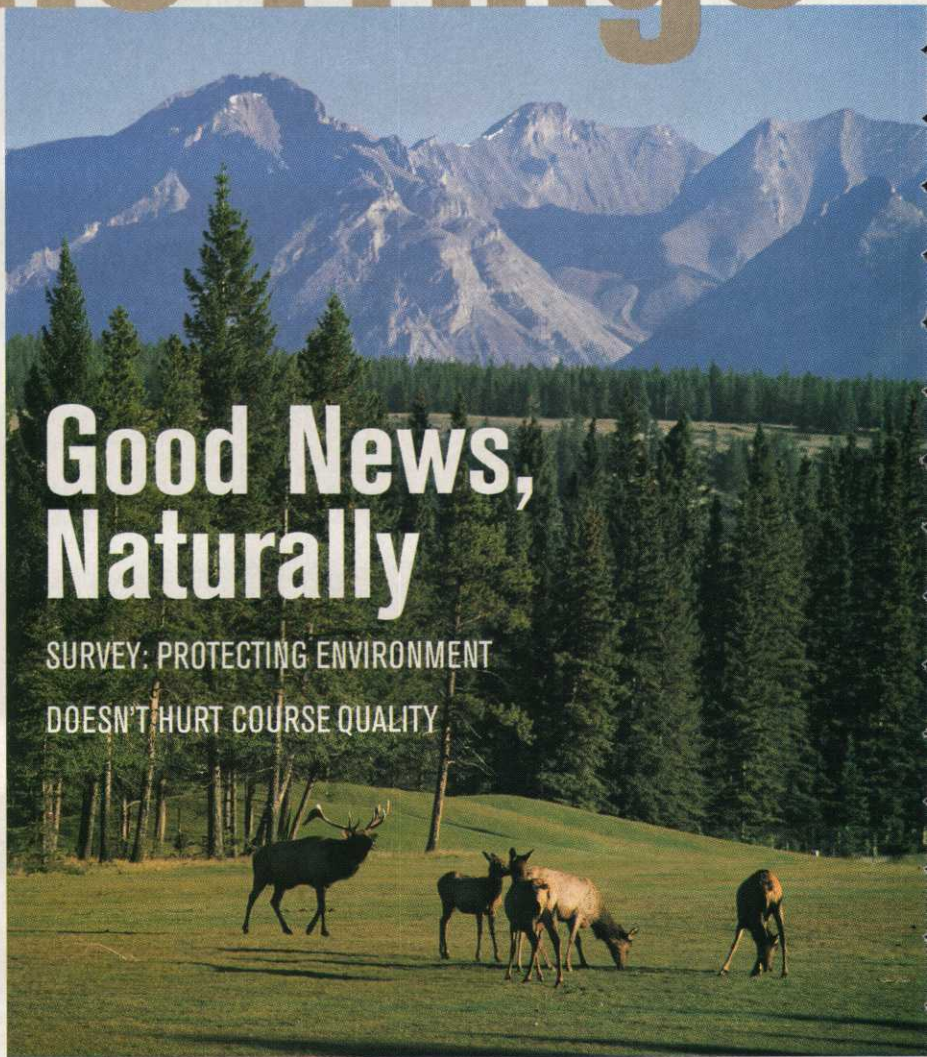
E-businesses open for business

Tampa-based Golfbusiness.com has opened its business-to-business e-commerce network, a joint venture between Apollo Real Estate Advisors Principals and the National Golf Course Owners Association. Golfbusiness.com is an open market place for all golf courses and ranges. Golfbusiness.com will target the current 5,000 NGCOA members and customers in the United States.

Sacramento, Calif.-based golfgm.com recently launched its site, a Web-based marketplace for golf industry business-to-business buyers and sellers

Husqvarna purchases Bluebird

Charlotte, N.C.-based Husqvarna finalized an agreement to purchase Denver-based Bluebird International. Husqvarna will continue to market the Bluebird brand through its existing dealer and distributor network and will also introduce Husqvarna branded models. The Bluebird operation will be organized as part of Husqvarna's U.S. turf care operations.



Good News, Naturally

SURVEY: PROTECTING ENVIRONMENT
DOESN'T HURT COURSE QUALITY

Consider this a victory for golf course wildlife and natural resources.

Eighty-six percent of golf courses participating in the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program for Golf Courses (ACSP) have reduced pesticide use without sacrificing playing quality, according to a recent survey by Selkirk, N.Y.-based Audubon International, which launched the ACSP program in 1991.

ACSP is an environmental education program designed to help golf courses enhance and protect wildlife habitat and natural resources. About

2,140 U.S. courses are enrolled in the program and 219 have achieved designation as Certified Audubon Cooperative Sanctuaries.

Audubon International's survey also reveals that members increased acres devoted to wildlife habitat nearly 75 percent — from 40 acres to 75 acres per course, on average — after joining the program. Seventy-nine percent of members decreased the amount of managed turfgrass after joining ACSP. Sixty-four percent of members now monitor wildlife activity, a 48 percent increase since they joined the program.

MIKE KLEMM

A Look Back

REPORTER EXPLORES OLD DAYS,
WHAT INDUSTRY HAS BECOME

By Peter Blais

I've covered the golf course industry for nearly 11 years, and it's good to see the game grow in popularity and the superintendent's profession rise in status.

Many of the stories I covered in the early days focused on the shortage of golf courses. Golf participation rates grew faster than the number of facilities. That meant too many golfers and too few places to play.

"A new course a day" was the battle cry a dozen years ago, and the industry responded. The number of new courses opening annually zoomed into the 300s, then the 400s and last year into the 500s as the industry danced through the 1990s.

Now that the growth in golf course supply has caught up and even surpassed demand, the industry is trying

to gently tap the golf course development brakes without putting the pedal through the floor board. "Sensible development in markets that make sense" is the new battle cry.

Pessimists argue that the growth in supply and a stagnant demand can only spell disaster for the golf industry — but all the courses I see seem to be full or close to it. While the number of U.S. golfers remains around 25 million, there are reportedly another 40 million who would like to take up the game if it weren't for cost, skill and intimidation barriers. The challenge is how to remove those barriers and bring that untapped resource into the game.

It still surprises me what a big business golf has become. Still, many of the companies I covered back in the early 1990s are gone. A few have gone out of business, but most have merged with other firms and taken on new names.

Wall Street is a financial thoroughfare many course operators are traveling to find additional money for their developments and acquisitions. The financial road doesn't only lead to the local banks anymore.

As for marketing, you rarely heard

the expression "customer service" spoken at golf courses a dozen years ago. Now it seems every management firm and individual course operator in the land has those two words etched into their mission statements and employee psyches. The back-of-the-house maintenance staffs of the 1980s are moving toward the front, led by superintendents who know that exceeding customer expectations is part of their jobs.

The growth in new courses meant several things, including the need to train more superintendents and assistant superintendents to staff the facilities. Turf students often had a dozen job offers before they left school. Some were hired out of college to fill head superintendent positions at salaries that 10- and 15-year turf veterans envied. Stories about experienced superintendents making six-figure salaries became more commonplace.

But all good things come to an end. More people entered the profession as universities added or expanded turf-management programs. Most recent grads now consider themselves fortunate to start as first assistants.

Continued on page 14

Quotable

**"We haven't had rain in 84 days.
Not a drop."**

— Tom Kastler, superintendent of the Club at Runaway Bay, speaking on Sept. 21 about the severe drought in north Texas.

**"When I'm down there among
the fish, none of them know
who I am."**

— Tiger Woods, arguably the world's most recognized athlete, on the benefits of his new hobby — scuba diving. (The Cleveland Plain Dealer)

**"He has turned out many
superintendents, but they will all
probably tell you that he was the
biggest son of a &#@!*, b*\$%*!#,
f?!+*\$#@ ever to work for.
You hated him — but you loved him.
Because when you got your own
golf course, all of the sudden you
realized why he did what he did.
Dick made you a better
superintendent because he was
so diligent and intense."**

— California CGCS Jim Ferrin on Dick Bator, renowned former superintendent and consultant.

Off The Fringe

Perc Test Needs Evaluation

MILLER WORKING WITH USGA TO STANDARDIZE LAB TESTING

Amid charges of politics and loose methodology among soil testing labs, the USGA believes it's on the verge of a breakthrough to standardize testing methods and put an end to six years of tepid relations between labs and golf course contractors, builders and soil blenders.

"I'd love to put out a new method — and verify its strengths and correct its weaknesses for several months — and then release a final version by the first of the year," said Bob Miller, an affiliate professor at Colorado State University, who's working for the USGA to standardize testing methods among the country's labs.

The USGA has agreed to share costs with the labs if they need retooling. "While the labs' analysis for organic matter and soil chemicals are 'rock solid,' the bad news is the saturated hydraulic conductivity [percolation] test [is not]," Miller said.

The problem is the test method itself — the way it is written has signifi-

cant weaknesses, Miller noted. "No two labs are on the same page or in the same book," he said.

Indeed, the "perc test," as it is called, is the most important of all the analysis measures. The test determines how many inches per hour of water percolates through the root zone beneath a golf course green.

At the summer meeting of the Golf Course Builders Association of America (GCBA), the importance of the perc test was driven home.

Miller said: "One of the builders said to me, 'I produce X thousand tons of material on my construction projects each year. If a lab can tell me that a 90-10 (sand-to-peat) blend works better than 85-15, I can write off several million dollars in construction costs.'"

Therein lies part of the rub. Labs feel that if they tighten up their tolerances, they will lose customers, critics of the test say. So they widen the tolerances and lean up the mixture by using less peat.

"This was the dirty little secret of the industry," Miller said. "When a supplier sends a sample to the lab, he

sends a good sample. If he doesn't like the numbers he gets, he sends it to another lab."

Eight soil testing labs are now accredited through the American Association of Laboratory Accreditation, but Miller said "accreditation is empty unless you test for peoples' performance." Some labs have chosen not to seek accreditation, which costs \$25,000 to \$30,000 every three years.

The fact that soil testing labs use different equipment is not the primary problem, according to Miller, who holds a Ph.D. in soil science and for 10 years ran a lab at University of California-Davis.

"That is a misconception," he said. "If I ranked the top three problems, equipment would be third. Technique is the operative problem."

To correct the situation, Miller and the USGA are taking steps to make the process less sophisticated, but codify the steps more rigidly.

"The bottom line is that we use a robust method, which means anyone can do it and get the same numbers," Miller said, "If we get less than 5 percent to 7 percent difference [from lab to lab], that's fine with me."

— Mark Leslie

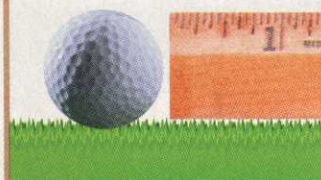
Calling the Shots

Gimmie!
Gimmie!

Is close enough good enough, or should you have to go the "hole" way?

Concede: **63.9%**

Make 'em putt: **36.1%**



HEY!
Mulligan
Mulligan



When you end up in the drink, should you get another shot?

Yes **36.2%**
No **63.8%**

SOURCE: NATIONAL GOLF FOUNDATION
ILLUSTRATION: DAN BEEDY

A Look Back

Continued from page 13

The head superintendent jobs are available. It just takes a little longer to get there, which is probably a good thing considering the on-the-job training most young superintendents acquire before attaining top posts.

Superintendents have also upgraded their image. The battle to get others to call them superintendents, rather than greenkeepers, was still being fought 10 years ago. But with the new titles come new responsibilities, including budgeting, government regulations and personnel management issues. While enjoying their new responsibilities, many superintendents seem to miss the time spent outdoors, which is what attracted them to the profession in the first place.

Peter Blais, president of Blais Communications, can be reached at 207-657-7150 or pblais@maine.rr.com.

How to Tell Republicans from Democrats

The post-convention bumps have disappeared, the debates are over and Al Gore and George W. Bush have spent the next month trying to paint each other as a cross between Richard Nixon and Bill Clinton. The election can't come soon enough.

But some of you might want to know to which party your golfers belong, so here are some clues to help you figure it out:

- Democrats protect endangered species. Republicans prefer to hunt them.
- Republicans hire exterminators. Democrats just step on the bugs.
- Democrats name their children after currently popular sports figures, politicians and entertainers (look out for a future President Tiger from this group). Republican children are named after their parents or grandparents, according to where the money is.

- Republicans want to ban the FQPA. Democrats would like to expand it.
- Republicans play golf on grass. Democrats smoke it.
- Democrats give their worn-out clothes to the less fortunate. Republicans wear theirs.
- Republican boys date Democratic girls. They plan to marry Republican girls, but feel that they're entitled to a little fun first.
- Democrats buy most of the books that have been banned somewhere. Republicans form censorship committees and read them as a group.
- Democrats make plans and then do something else. Republicans follow the plans their grandfathers made.
- Republicans raise dahlias, Dalmatians and eyebrows. Democrats raise



- kids, Airedales and taxes.
- Republicans sleep in twin beds — some even in separate bedrooms. That's why there are more Democrats.
- Republicans smoke cigars. Democrats use them for — oh, never mind!

Sources: *Congressional Record* and *Frank H. Andorka Jr.*

IMAGES.COM/ROBERT DIERCKSMEIERS

Scanning the Web

Frank Andorka reviews **architect's sites**

My wounds have finally healed from the beating I took LAST time I examined architecture-related sites (for those of you who've forgotten the fun and frolic of my previous foray, see March and April's "Scanning" columns), so I decided to chance another peek. This time, I decided to look at architecture firms. If you're planning on building or renovating your course, here are some sites you might consider (all sites start with http:// unless otherwise noted):

**** – **Bookmark it and return frequently; ***
– **Look at only if absolutely necessary**

*****www.devriesdesign.com**— As someone who enjoys a minimalist approach in all things, I loved the opening page to Mike Devries' site — a stark white background with what looks like a pen-and-ink drawing of a flagstick. The site consists mainly of lists of Devries' accomplishments, which are considerable. But for an architect's site, I was surprised by the lack of photographs and the text-intensiveness of the site. I would have liked to have seen some pictures to illustrate his philosophy rather than just reading about it.

▼ ******www.csgolf.com** — A refreshing site that is the cyberspace home of Craig Schreiner Golf Course Architects. Its clean, uncluttered appearance makes it easy to navigate. It will take you step by step through the process of golf course design. It discusses

Schreiner's philosophy, introduces you to the staff (including extensive biographies) and allows you to view a project library with photographs. The only question I have is: If Schreiner is showing off his best work, why are the photos so small?

*** **www.hansegolfdesign.com** — Gil Hanse's site is also minimalist and primarily text-based, but it does contain pictures of both staff members and projects. Some of the photos are blurry, and the links page

actually contains no direct links but it does list one of my favorite Web sites — www.golfclubatlas.com.

*Scanning the Web is compiled by Frank H. Andorka Jr., *Golfdom's* associate editor, who still winces at the words "golf course architecture." You can reach him at andorka@advanstar.com with future column suggestions or sites you think he should visit.*

