

Off The Fringe

Business briefs

Deere refocuses GPS Research

Moline, Ill.-based John Deere Co. announced that it will shift its energies from developing GPS technology for golf cars to developing it for its turf equipment.

A company spokesperson said Deere will stop pursuing its SkyLinks GPS golf car system, which allowed golfers to measure distances from their cars to pins, fairways or hazards. Instead, Deere wants to add GPS tracking ability to its maintenance equipment to focus on its main customers — superintendents and landscape contractors. This will allow them to add maintenance vehicle tracking, as well as precision mowing and spraying applications, to its existing line of turf equipment.

Deere says it will continue to support courses that currently employ the SkyLinks system.

In other Deere news, the company acquired Alpharetta, Ga.-based McGinnis Farms, a provider of products and services to landscape and irrigation professionals; and Jeffersonville, Ind.-based Great Dane Power Equipment Co., which manufactures mowing equipment.

GCSAA membership reaches 21,000

Continuing a trend of membership growth that began in the mid-1990s, GCSAA announced the association's membership has climbed past the 21,000 mark. Since January 1994, GCSAA membership has grown 58 percent (up from 13,300).

United Seed Production formed

United Horticultural Supply has announced a strategic agreement with a newly formed company, United Seed Production, which provides it with marketing rights to myriad grass seed varieties.

Chain Reaction

GAS CRISIS FUELS FERTILIZER PRICE INCREASE

By Frank H. Andorka Jr. and Ron Hall

If you think the money you're shelling out for natural gas this winter is outrageous, wait until you try to buy your next bag of fertilizer.

Fertilizer? What possible connection is there between the sticker shock you've experienced this winter and your prices for keeping your turf healthy? The answer, as it turns out, is plenty.

Double and triple-digit increases in natural gas costs are driving nitrogen fertilizer prices up 50 percent or more around the country because natural gas is a critical component of fertilizer production. Natural gas provides anhydrous ammonia, a building block of nearly all nitrogen-based fertilizers. It takes nearly 33,000 cubic feet of gas to produce one ton of the ammonia.

Higher gas costs mean less fertilizer production at higher prices, according to Jim Montgomery, president of Greensmiths, a Frisco, Texas-based company that specializes in solving water and soil problems.

"We're looking at the likelihood of at least double the usual price for fer-

tilizer," Montgomery says. "Manufacturers are finding it's more profitable to sell the natural gas stockpiles they ordered last year at low prices than to use that gas to make fertilizer."

Richard D. Harrell, of Grand Rapids, Mich.-based NU-GRO

Technologies, says even the manufacturers aren't sure what the final prices will be.

"Everyone is really stumped on this one," Harrell says. "We do know that the prices are going to go up, but we really don't know by how much."

Although prices may spike this year, they've been creeping up for about a year, says Bill

Hubbell, vice president of service centers for Cleveland-based Lesco.

"It wasn't so noticeable because [the 2000 season] was a soft demand year for fertilizer," Hubbell says. "We had plenty of rain in the North and there was a drought in the South."

So experts are advising to buy as early as possible because prices will continue to rise as the natural gas shortage becomes even more acute. Otherwise, you could be left out in the cold.



PHOTODISC

An (Intra) Net Gain for Landscapes Unlimited

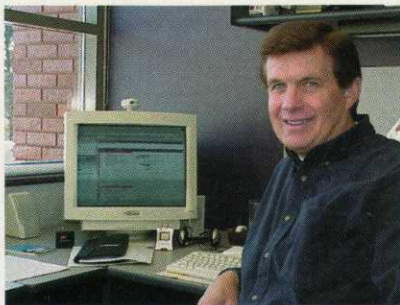
By Larry Aylward, Editor

C. David Rolfe looks as at home behind his cutting-edge computer as Jeff Gordon does behind the steering wheel of a suped-up race car. You can tell that Rolfe is enjoying his job as chief information officer of Lincoln, Neb.-based Landscapes Unlimited.

Rolfe is the brains behind the golf course building company's intranet site, which has worked like a charm for the company the last two years.

"We're taking the Web site to our clients as a service," says Rolfe, who has 25 years of experience in the technology industry in addition to a passion for golf. "It's a quick and easy method of communication."

Brad Schmidt, vice president of operations for Landscapes Unlimited, says the company's CEO, Bill Kubly, demands that building projects be finished on time and within budget without sacrificing quality. Schmidt says Rolfe and the intranet play a vital role in fulfilling Kubly's mission.



C. David Rolfe is the man behind Landscapes Unlimited's enlightening intranet site.

"If we provide more real-time information, we can make better decisions as we go along," Schmidt says.

The company's intranet functions as a daily report. Landscapes Unlimited construction superintendents can take digital photographs and download them to the site so clients can view them. The superintendents also have laptop computers to write reports and post them on the site. "As a course moves through construction, [a client] can see the progress on a daily basis," Schmidt says.

Schmidt recalls the first project — a Tom Fazio track in Barbados — that

used the company's intranet technology. Fazio was in North Carolina, the golf course owner was in Ireland and Landscapes Unlimited was in Lincoln. But all three could simultaneously review reports and photographs of the project on the intranet.

"If Fazio wanted to know about a bunker on a course, the superintendent in Barbados would take digital photos of that bunker and download them," Schmidt says. "Then Fazio could see them within 15 minutes."

Rolfe says it's important to keep technology simple for construction superintendents so they spend most of their time on courses, not on computers.

"They don't have to be tech-savvy," Rolfe says. "We use technology in the most simple form we can find to make it easy for them."

No one is saying that the intranet can replace the real thing, however.

"We still have to go to the construction sites," Schmidt says. "But the intranet allows us to participate in a visual sense more often."

Quotable

"It was a grueling experience. I think I pulled every muscle in my legs, and I could barely walk for three days. But it was well worth it, and I'd definitely do it again."

— Mark Phelps, assistant pro at Portage CC in Akron, Ohio, on golfing 300 holes in one day to raise \$17,000 for Akron Children's Hospital.

"Rabbit shooters and rabbit killers weren't good enough for them, so

we started calling them pest controllers."

— Eddie Adams, head greenskeeper of St. Andrews, talking about changing titles for some of his crew members.

"All George Bush had to tell Al Gore was the Rule 2-4 was in effect."

— David Finney, certified superintendent of Virginia National GC, referring to the rule of golf that prevents players from rescinding concessions.

"It has been a good run."

— Agronomist Stan Zontek, who celebrates his 30th anniversary with USGA this month.

Off The Fringe

You Go, Cobb

Patricia A. Cobb, a long-time extension entomologist at Auburn University, is the first woman in 26 years and the second woman ever to receive USGA's 2001 Green Section Award.

The annual award recognizes persons for distinguished contributions to golf through work with turfgrass and is selected by a panel of experts in the field. Fanny-Fern Davis, the acting national director of USGA's Green Section from 1943 through 1945, was the first woman to win the award in 1975.

Cobb, who resides in Opelika, Ala, will receive her award at the GCSAA Conference and Show in Dallas this month.

"I wanted to be an entomologist since I was 8 years old, and getting to be an entomologist and working with the golf industry has been the cake," Cobb said. "Getting this award is the icing on the cake."

During her 21-year tenure as an extension entomologist at Auburn, Cobb has specialized in turfgrass integrated pest management, management of soil insect pests, and IPM for landscape and woody ornamentals.

While at Auburn, Cobb conducted more than 175 field trials and demonstrations that enabled her to make reliable insecticide recommendations and to develop new IPM strategies. These programs resulted in substantially reduced costs and pesticide use, as well as increased environmental awareness.

Harp Plays Own Tune

By James E. Guyette

Mark Harp plays his own tune, stringing a series of superintendent and golf course construction/consulting gigs into a fascinating world of international adventure.

"You don't know where that boy is going to go next," says the top authority on these types of matters, Harp's stateside mother.

That "boy" is a 48-year-old Vietnam combat veteran who recently finished a three-year tour with the U.S. Marine Corps on the island of Okinawa, where he was the superintendent/construction consultant. Prior to that, Harp worked for the U.S. Army at Camp Zama, Japan, where he was the designer/builder for a USGA greens renovation project. Previous superintendent jobs had him working in Guam, Hong Kong, mainland China, Japan and other faraway lands in need of his maintenance/construction/design expertise. Turkey may be his next stop.

"I know several different languages, not fluently, but enough to get by," Harp says.

"It's a trade-off," he says of seeking the security of a full-time position in the United States vs. striking out on



Superintendent Mark Harp enjoys the nomad lifestyle and working in faraway lands.

his own in foreign lands. "I'm exposed to different cultures, and I learn different construction techniques. I know how to operate every piece of equipment on a golf course."

What are his secrets for staying out of overseas trouble?

"Don't trifle with the locals," he warns, telling of watching a truckload of 40 Chinese men "trussed-up like hogs" and carted off for execution. "Avoid romancing the natives and 'don't stick out like a sore thumb.'"

These roving positions pay well, ranging from slightly above average to double what a stateside superintendent makes. (The pay grade can be on the lower side, however, when he accepts positions at military courses.)

His most recent assignment in Okinawa taught him the glory of Korai, a Japanese "greens-grade" zoysiagrass that is native to Korea.

"It has my utmost respect," Harp says. "It's a good grass to play golf on."

Its use on the military course on Okinawa caught the eye of Lt. General Frank Libutti, the commanding general of the Marine Corps Forces Pacific, who had nothing but high praise for the greens and the course.

Oregon Golf Legend Dies

Norman Joseph "The Chief" Whitworth died Dec. 6 from heart failure. Whitworth was born in St. Ignatius, Mont., on Jan. 5, 1938. He began Norm Whitworth Turf Products in 1970, and was the Northwest representative for Turf-Seed and Tee-2-Green, selling perennial ryegrass, fine fescue, Kentucky bluegrass, creeping bentgrass and wildflower.

In 1975, Whitworth helped start the annual Oregon golf tournament to raise funds for The Musser International Turfgrass Foundation. A 17-handicapper, golf was an important part of his life. Friends and associates remember his wit and golf tips, in addition to being a part of every golf association in the Northwest.

Off The Fringe

Old Farmer's Forecasts

Mother Nature took it easy on most superintendents last year, although the weather still presented a significant challenge to some superintendents, particularly in drought-plagued Texas. Here's what *The Old Farmer's Almanac* says superintendents can expect for the rest of the year:

Superintendents in the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic states can expect temperate springs and hot summers, with normal rainfall early, but spotty later. Extended heat waves will be the exception, although late summer could present problems.

The Midwest will experience a cooler-than-normal spring, which will change to a hotter-than-normal summer. The Great Plains and Rocky Mountain regions are in for generally cooler springs, with drought conditions in the summer.

The Southeast should see a typical spring with a hotter- and drier-than-normal summer. Above-normal rainfall is expected in late summer. The Deep South, Great Plains and Southwest regions will have drought conditions early in the year which will intensify as a hotter-than-normal summer takes its toll. The Pacific Northwest will have its normal wet year.

For more detailed information, visit www.almanac.com/weather.



SOURCE: NATIONAL GOLF FOUNDATION
ILLUSTRATION: DAN BEEDY

Scanning the Web

Frank Andorka reviews sites that help you find jobs

The power of the Web shows itself clearly when you're looking for a job. With the help of job-search sites, you can access jobs across the country. Here are some sites that will help you with your search (all sites start with <http://> unless otherwise noted):

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

***www.golfsurfin.com – You have to subscribe to the service to access the job listings, but there are no fees involved to do so. It's a hip-looking site on which you can search for jobs and post your résumé. It also allows you to receive responses by e-mail. I was a little surprised that there weren't more superintendent listings since it does contain the word golf in its URL. It

also has the title listed as "greenkeeper" (although it does list "assistant superintendent" as a category).

**www.greenmatchmaker.com – This new site (launched in December) is owned and operated by GreenSearch, a management search and human resources consulting company. It's a fairly interactive site that allows the usual posting of jobs and résumés, and it also has a useful career advice column as well as hyperlinks to other useful job sites. The early problem with this site is that it's limited to the Eastern half of the country. That could be a limiting factor until the site matures.

(No rating) www.golfutures.com – This Scottsdale, Ariz.-based company is also a

subscription site, but there are hefty fees involved. You can list your résumé for 90 days for \$40 and access the job listings by employers. Employers list their positions for \$300 for the same period. Since I didn't want to spend \$40 of the company's money for one-time access to the job listings, I can't evaluate how useful it would be for superintendents, although this site seemed focused on the operations side of the business, including superintendents.

Other job-search sites to visit:

golfcoursejobs.com
getajob.com
gcsaa.org
turfnet.com
greenindustryjobs.com

*Scanning the Web is compiled by Frank H. Andorka Jr., *Golfdom's* associate editor, who considers himself lucky to have a job. You can reach him at fandorka@advanstar.com with future column suggestions.*