

Off The Fringe

Business briefs

Fungus controls turfgrass insects, researchers say

A seed-borne fungus present in various fescues and ryegrasses is an effective means of controlling certain turfgrass insects, according to the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center in Wooster, Ohio. The finding may offer turfgrass professionals an alternative to using synthetic insecticides.

Ohio State University entomologists found that overseeding endophytic perennial ryegrass into existing stands of nonendophytic grasses and Kentucky bluegrass slowed the spread of hairy chinch bug, bluegrass billbug and bluegrass webworm populations and their damage.

"Below ground-feeding insects aren't affected so much," said Doug Richmond, a researcher at the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center. "But the chinch bug, billbug and webworm all feed above ground or at the surface, so it works extremely well on them."

Toro contest winners will work on Southern Hills during U.S. Open

Knowing where they want to be in 10 years netted three GCSAA members slots on the maintenance team at the U.S. Open at Southern Hills CC in Tulsa, Okla., as part of the Toro Championship Tournament Training Program. Contest applicants submitted essays on where they see themselves professionally in the next 10 years and what they hope to accomplish during that time.

The winners are Dan Tolson, a junior at Colorado State University in Fort Collins, Co.; Brian K. Pardoe, assistant superintendent of Bethesda CC in Bethesda, Md.; and Brian Thompson, assistant superintendent of Elcona CC in Bristol, Ind.

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Business As Usual

ECONOMIC SLUMP? WHAT ECONOMIC SLUMP?

By Todd Stumpf

The stock market is a yo-yo and disposable income is no longer stretching the leather in wallets. But despite the economy's fickleness, folks in the golf industry aren't overly concerned that their business will see a downturn. Even if golfers' disposable incomes take a hit, the prevailing theory is that they will find other things to cut from their budgets so they can keep playing.

Still, industry veterans are prepared for what could happen if their economy turns sour. If the cash doesn't continue to flow, the maintenance department may take the heaviest hit.

Courses might have to curtail plans for aesthetic changes or large-scale renovation projects.

"If [revenue] is down, you streamline your operation as much as you can," said John Dodge, owner of Eldorado GC in Mason, Mich. "You could put off marginal or cosmetic improvements that might cost money."

Keith Ihms, superintendent at Bent Tree CC in Dallas, said some money-saving measures don't necessarily affect people or the quality of course conditions. Fewer overtime

hours might mean less income for employees, but at least it's not a job loss. Ihms seconded Dodge's idea about postponing visual changes, like flowerbed and tree plantings. He also suggested leasing, rather than purchasing, big-ticket equipment items for the short run.

Interestingly, Ihms believes a continued sagging economy could increase the availability of labor. Ihms has trouble keeping a full staff during

peak economic times because he can't compete in wages with area fast-food chains and retail outlets. Should there be layoffs in those areas, Ihms believes he'll have a better crop of potential help at his course.

"We're understaffed and getting employees is a problem," he says. "A lot of people work in construction, but that's one of the things people pull their horns in on when there's not a lot of money. If the economy [continues its] downturn, it will be easier to get employees."

Judy Thompson, spokeswoman of the National Golf Foundation, said the economic slump outside the golf industry could actually spur business within it. Even if they lose their jobs, dedicated golfers will view their situations as having more time to play golf, Thompson said. "They may not

Money-saving Measures

- Institute fewer overtime hours for labor
- Postpone plans for renovation projects
- Lease big-ticket equipment for short run

play as expensive courses, but they'll probably play," she added.

Another theory is that competition among courses will increase if the industry begins to struggle financially. Judy Hutt, owner of Shadow Valley GC in Boise, Idaho, says increased competition could initiate a change of attitude about customer service. "Golf courses are known for not having good customer service," she adds.

High-end public courses, the most popular among new courses, could take a hit if there's an economic slowdown in the industry. Consumers would play less glamorous courses to get more holes for their buck.

If the golf industry's economy does suffer, money will become even more of an issue than it is now. "Affordability is one of the great issues the industry has dealt with for years," Thompson says.

Stumpf is a free-lancer from Akron, Ohio.

Quotable

"The first time I ever saw a golf course laid out on paper, I said, 'Mr. Kidwell, that's what I want to do for the rest of my life.' He said, 'If you want to learn, I'll try to teach you all I know.' "

— Mike Hurdzan on his mentor Jack Kidwell, a famous Ohio architect who died in April at 82 after battling Parkinson's disease for more than 20 years. (*The Columbus Dispatch*)

"It's not always easy being a Supreme Court Justice. ... But not all of their decisions are tough, and the pending one involving Casey Martin ranks in that class. This should be a slam dunk. Ladies and gentlemen of the court, give the man his cart."

— CNN.com's "The Hot Button" columnist Jack McCallum on the impending Casey Martin vs. PGA Supreme Court decision

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GCSAA teams with XS Inc. for e-commerce program

GCSAA Communications, a subsidiary of GCSAA, has entered into an agreement with Raleigh, N.C.-based XS Inc. to bring e-commerce to superintendents. The program began with a soft launch in May so that "GCSAA and XS can work with buyers and sellers to develop the best possible service prior to making a decision on a full-scale Internet commerce presence," according to GCSAA.

Eco Soil merges with PHC

Rancho Bernardo, Calif.-based Eco Soil Systems merged with PHC (Plant Health Care), a privately held company with manufacturing headquarters in Pittsburgh.

Eco Soil is the surviving corporation in the merger and PHC stockholders will receive shares of Eco Soil stock. Both companies manufacture biological products that are alternatives to chemical pesticides and fertilizers.

Bayer changes name

Bayer Garden & Professional Care is now known as Bayer Corp., Professional Care. The company said the new name better reflects the company's increased focus on the professional service provider.

Bush Hog building new facility

To meet growing demand for its golf course maintenance equipment, Bush Hog will construct a new 330,000-square-foot manufacturing facility in Jonesborough, Tenn. Bush Hog is based in Selma, Ala.

Disney courses receive Audubon designation

Audubon International designated the five championship golf courses at Walt Disney World Resort as Certified Audubon Cooperative Sanctuaries.

"We have a strong commitment to maintaining the balance between golf and the environment," says Gary Meyers, manager of sports turf and golf course maintenance at Walt Disney.

Shopping for Hand-held Power Equipment

DO YOU KNOW WHAT TO LOOK FOR?

How many hours a week would you say your hand-held power equipment is in use, especially during your peak season? Are you ever worried that it's going to break?

To get the most out of your equipment — and your crew — you should purchase hand-held power equipment with these key factors in mind:

- Evaluate the durability of the product to ensure a good long-term investment.
- Test the power and power-to-weight ratio for maximum performance.
- Review important, and often overlooked, ergonomic features that lend to a better personal working environment — leading to reduced fatigue, increased worker productivity and improved worker satisfaction.

Generally, you should purchase equipment and accessories from manufacturers that spend a lot of time collaborating with professional users. As a professional, you benefit from the hours of hands-on research that goes into designing and manufacturing equipment to perform powerfully and comfortably.

Durability

Your crew works hard, which means your equipment takes a beating. Ensuring that your equipment will run long and strong depends on your initial purchase decision and your ongoing maintenance. While many manufacturers use the words "tough" and "durable," take a closer look at the equipment to decide for yourself. Here are a few examples:

- How are the parts assembled? For example, check out the crankshaft. A forged connecting rod and forged three-piece crankshaft will provide longer life.
- When purchasing a string trimmer,



HUSOVARNA

Hand-held equipment should be easy to use so it doesn't tire out your workers.

look for a unit with fully enclosed throttle cables to reduce snagging and breaking when handling and storing the equipment. Also look for a solid steel or a tubed drive shaft to provide more durability and less vibration than a cable drive shaft.

- Does the equipment carry a good warranty? Buy from a manufacturer that backs its products.

Don't sacrifice power

Look for equipment that provides the highest power-to-weight ratio available. Perhaps the equipment is light enough to handle, but does it provide enough power to accomplish all the tasks it's intended to do? For example, a power-to-weight ratio above .18 kw/kg means you've got high power combined with lightweight. Anything above 2.0 is exceptional.

In addition, you'll want to be mindful of recent regulations to reduce engine emissions. Some manufacturers have sacrificed power and increased weight in effort to be compliant. Look

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for a low-emission engine with the power you need and a low weight that is comfortable for the user.

Ergonomic considerations

Ergonomically advanced equipment, including many of today's hand-held chain saws, trimmers, brushcutters and blowers, fight vibration and fatigue through the use of an anti-vibration system that isolates the engine from the handle.

When purchasing a string trimmer, be sure it has an anti-vibration feature. Take a close look at the handle mechanism. Can it be adjusted for the different people who use it? An adjustable loop handle can slide up or down the shaft to provide comfort for users of varying height.

Finally, always look for unique user-comfort features that can maximize productivity. For instance, look for a harness with good weight distribution on a backpack blower. Typically, a backpack blower hangs from the operator's shoulders. However, units that feature a hip pad distribute a good portion of the weight onto the operator's hips, like a true hiking backpack, which reduces some of the weight on the shoulders. That's an important benefit to the operator saddled with the weight of a two-cycle engine on a warm summer day.

The author of this story, Mark Michaels, is the business unit manager of hand-held products for Husqvarna.

All Spikes Not Created Equal

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY SURVEY SHOWS DIFFERENCES IN ALTERNATIVE PRODUCTS

By Frank H. Andorka Jr.

Researchers at Michigan State University concluded that the green-friendliness of alternative spikes relates directly to the material used to manufacture them.

Thom Nikolai, the turfgrass education specialist at MSU who oversaw the study, said alternative spike manufacturers must find materials flexible enough to be green-friendly while still providing adequate traction.

"The 8-millimeter metal spike damaged the turf by pulling it out of the ground," Nikolai said. "If alternative spikes do the same thing, what difference does the type of spike make?"

Softspikes, the original manufac-



Flexible material is key to a green-friendly spike.

turer of alternative spikes and maker of the Black Widow cleats, funded the 18-month study, which concluded earlier this year. Last year, the first generation of Black Widows alarmed superintendents because the damage they caused eerily resembled metal spike damage. "We wanted an independent study done that compared all the alternative spikes, including our reformulated Black Widows," said John Hyman, Softspikes CEO.

To create a standard test protocol, Nikolai and his researchers observed

wear patterns on golf course greens around the country. Then they simulated the patterns on their test greens with volunteers wearing the same size shoes.

"Other people had done other studies, but there was no common platform from which to work," Hyman said. "Therefore, the results varied depending on the size of the shoe."

Nikolai's study concluded that no brand on the market perfectly marries traction with turf friendliness.

Hyman said Softspikes will involve superintendents in future design plans. To achieve that goal, Softspikes created a superintendents' advisory panel earlier this year.

golf GIZMOS

Superintendents were polled as to what constitutes the most valuable item of personal technology they use at work. They said:

Personal computer:

41%

Two-way radio:

37%

Cell phone:

17%

FAX:

1%

PDA (Palm Pilot, etc.):

1%

Pager:

1%

Crystal ball:

0% (C'mon, 'fess up!)



SOURCE: GCSAA

ILLUSTRATION: DAN BEEDY

Off The Fringe

What It's *Really* Like to Work for a Management Company

Question: It looks like my course is about to be taken over by a management company. Having worked at American Golf, what are management companies really like to work for?

Heacock: They can be good, bad or indifferent.

First, understand that each management company has its own culture, style and business plan, and all these factors affect what that company is "like" to work for. They all differ, especially in culture.

Some management companies choose to own their courses, but most lease them or contract them from independent owners.

Some do business entirely on their own nickel — taking a risk in return for most of the profit and paying a guaranteed minimum rent to the course owner plus a percentage of gross income. The owner still gets paid the guaranteed minimum rent even if there's no net income. Management companies that utilize this style of operation prefer to manage the entire operation, not just golf maintenance. AGC and Club Corp are two examples.

Other management companies spend none of their money, take little or no risk, get a small upside potential (usually based on what they can save from some pre-agreed expense budget) and in return are paid a fee by the course owner. This arrangement is sometimes termed "contract maintenance," but companies that do it are still referred to as management companies. Some of Environmental Golf's operations are this type.

"Who's paying whom" factors significantly into the culture and operational style of any management company and has an impact on the superintendent. Let's contrast some examples:

■ Company A is paid a fee by the owner. In this situation, if the members like the superintendent because he does great work and/or schmoozes them, then his job is normally safe. This is similar to the typical private club job.



Editor's note: *Golfdom welcomes Mike Heacock, former vice president of agronomy and maintenance for American Golf Corp., to its editorial mix. Heacock, a certified superintendent who spent 17 years with AGC, wants to field your questions in this new bi-monthly column. What gives him the right to answer your questions? Well, in his prestigious career, Heacock cured a turf disease that no one else could and negotiated major purchase deals for AGC, among other things. In short, he knows the business — from economics to agronomics. So if you've got a question, fire away. You can reach Heacock at mike.heacock@verizon.net or 310-849-5011.*

Been there, seen that

You'll stay employed as long as you can keep everyone who counts happy.

■ Company B takes on all business risk and pays major rent to the owner. But let's say you're the superintendent at a high-end daily fee course that won't meet overly optimistic revenue projections because of a down economy. If you ignore financial reality and keep spending despite warnings from your boss, you'll be "adios, amigo."

And the company really doesn't care how much the members/customers liked you.

■ Company C is like Company B except that the superintendent conserves cash, comes in narrowly under budget and still keeps the course in decent shape while meeting or exceeding regional management's expectations. If they don't promote the superintendent to a regional position, he'll continue to be employed as the course's superintendent and earn accolades from management. He'll also be held as an example to the slackers around him, and he'll almost certainly get a raise during the next review period — though it won't be what he thinks he deserves.

The bottom line: Many management companies have commitments to banks, stockholders, and/or other entities regarding financial performance. So bad things will happen if they don't meet their numbers.

The only way to get away with underperforming as a superintendent is to stay below the corporate radar screen — and that's impossible in the long-term. The only way to do it as a career is to perform well as both a grass grower and a budget and personnel manager — every day.

For an expanded version of this column, see Golfdom.com.