

# Off The Fringe

## Business briefs

### Simplot plans aggressive move in golf market, Barker says

Following on the January promotion of Larry S. Hlobik to CEO, Boise, Idaho-based J.R. Simplot Co. named two more industry veterans to key management positions.

Joel Barker, formerly vice president of finance and administration for the Turf & Horticulture Group, was named the vice president and general manager of the business unit. His responsibilities include Jacklin brand seed products, BEST and APEX professional fertilizers, the Simplot Partners distribution network, and international seed and fertilizer sales. Bill Whitacre, formerly president of the Turf & Horticulture Group, replaces Hlobik as president of Simplot's AgriBusiness Group.

Barker says his immediate intent is to make an aggressive move in the golf/landscape/sports turf market.

"Over the last couple years, in building our turf business, we've had to look inward to structure ourselves properly to gain the focus and alignment we needed," he said. "I feel we've done that now, and we now have something of value to provide customers."

Barker didn't rule out acquisition as an aggressive growth strategy.

"We will continue to grow but not at a huge pace," he says. "It will be very strategic and based on acquisitions that fit our core businesses."

### Toro creates financing division

Bloomington, Minn.-based The T Toro Co. has created Toro Financing to help U.S. golf courses, universities municipalities and sports fields to acquire irrigation systems and maintenance equipment. Toro Financing is a partnership with GE Capital Vendor Financial Services.

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## Agronomy Experts Talk Technology

GREEN SPEED IS 'OUT OF CONTROL,' USGA'S MORAGHAN SAYS

By Larry Aylward, Editor

**T**im Moraghan, chief agronomist for the United States Golf Association, and Jon Scott, vice president of agronomy for the PGA Tour, didn't hold back their opinions when commenting on the technology of the game during a seminar on the last day of the GCSAA Conference and Show in February.

Scott and Moraghan expressed pointed views on equipment and maintenance issues during the seminar, "Current Issues in Golf Technology: Where Is the Game Headed?" Moraghan, who recently began his 16<sup>th</sup> year in his current position, says a lot has changed since the days he was a superintendent.

"I don't know if it's good or bad," he adds. "I'll say that superintendents are tremendously skilled, and the technology available to them is exceptional. But I also feel the superintendent can be his own worst enemy by taking that technology to such a degree that the players

who come out day in and out [to his course] expect perfection. Other than God, I don't know that perfection can be achieved."

Moraghan said green speed is "out of control." He said Mark Michaud,

superintendent of Shinnecock Hills GC in Southampton, N.Y., recently informed him that the height of cut on his greens at Shinnecock was lowered to .065 inches.

"Take that for what it's worth," Moraghan said. "Maybe we'll go back to sand greens and not have to worry about height of cut."

Scott touched on the current equipment controversy. Critics, including Moraghan, admit it's no fun to watch a PGA player hit a pitching wedge into the green on a par 4, 425-yard hole. But Scott says

the equipment issue is exaggerated.

"It makes a really good story to talk about the club controversy, USGA testing methods and equipment as a whole," Scott said. "But is it as big of an issue as it's made out to be?"

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**"Maybe we'll go back to sand greens and not have to worry about height of cut."**

Tim Moraghan,  
USGA Chief Agronomist



## Business briefs

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In other company news, Toro announced that revenues for the first quarter ended Feb. 1 were \$277.9 million, compared to \$280.4 million last year.

### **Deere introduces One Source**

John Deere Golf & Turf has adopted a new strategy to serve superintendents. Deere's One Source program is designed to better serve superintendents' needs for parts, maintenance and financing.

"It's a process we've been thinking about a long time," says Gregg Breningmeyer, director of marketing and sales. "We wanted to create something where a superintendent could make one phone call and have all his needs met"

In other company news, Moline, Ill.-based Deere & Co. reported a net loss of \$38.1 million for the first quarter ended Jan. 31, or \$.16 per share, compared with year-earlier net income of \$56.4 million or \$.24 per share.

### **Syngenta profits up for 2001**

Syngenta AG announced a 2001 net profit of \$213.37 million despite an overall 4 percent decline in sales. In the professional products division, the company said turf and ornamental sales declined 4 percent from 2000 as a result of reduced pest and disease pressure in the United States.

### **Tyler back in operation**

Masterblend International LLC's purchase of Tyler Enterprises has been finalized, and Tyler is back in operation as a premium specialty fertilizer formulator. Under the agreement, Tyler will operate as a division of Cleveland-based Masterblend and will continue to have its headquarters in Elwood, Ill.

### **Textron closing Cushman plant**

Textron Golf, Turf & Specialty Products will close its Cushman plant in Lincoln, Neb., by the end of the year, according to a report. The plant has been open for more than 100 years and about 415 people will lose their jobs. Textron will move vehicle production to Augusta, Ga., and production of turf care and aeration equipment to Charlotte, N.C.

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Scott said golfers' improved physical condition (he probably didn't mean John Daly, though) has plenty to do with them driving the ball more than 300 yards — and accurately. He notes there are two conditioning vans for players to work out on every PGA Tour stop.

"They'll spend almost as much time in the conditioning vans as they do on the driving ranges and putting greens," Scott said. "It's part of the practice to keep their muscles toned to strike the ball more cleanly with more power, force and control."

Moraghan agrees with Scott on the conditioning issue. He says many golfers are basically more powerful than a locomotive these days. He cites Tiger Woods — "6-foot-2, 195 pounds, not an ounce of fat on his body and a clubhead speed of 140 mph" — as an example. Moraghan relates this story about Woods during the 2000 U.S. Open at Pebble Beach Golf Links.

On the Friday during the tournament, play was suspended not even midway through Woods' round. So on Saturday, Woods had to play 11 holes in the morning and 18 holes in the afternoon. After play had concluded and fans had gone home, Moraghan got in a golf car and took a final spin around the course before nightfall. "I'm going down the fairway at 6:30, and I see this knucklehead jogging down the middle of the 10<sup>th</sup> fairway," Moraghan says.

Moraghan put the pedal to the medal in his golf car and caught up with the knucklehead. It was Woods.

"I said, 'What are you doing?' He said, 'I gotta get my run in, man.' He's played nearly 30 holes and he's out jogging."

Power and players hitting wedges into greens on par 4s aside, Scott says the game "isn't going to hell in a hand basket just because the scores are getting lower."

"It's still exciting because most of the game is still watched on the putting surface," Scott says. "I guarantee: No matter how far we decide to make the golf course, some John Daly, some Tiger Woods or some kid is going to overpower that golf course — not just tame it, but put it to bed."

## Quotable



**"I'm one of those guys you don't want around the golf course. I just tear up stuff and apologize for it later."**

—Mike Singletary, featured speaker at the recent GCSAA show and former middle linebacker for the Chicago Bears, on his golf game.

**"We've been accused of trying to protect some grand old courses. Guilty as charged."**

—Dick Rugge, USGA's senior technical director, addressing criticisms of his organization's regulation of golf equipment.



## Off The Fringe

# Petersan's Protégés

VETERAN SUPERINTENDENT'S PUPILS

FORM SOCIETY TO HONOR HIM

**N**ot every superintendent gets his own society. But Doug Petersan, superintendent of the Austin (Texas) GC, is *not* every superintendent.

That's why two of Petersan's former protégés, certified superintendents Tom Athy and Chris Ayers, organized the Doug Petersan Society.

The group consists of nearly 30 former Petersan assistant superintendents and interns who have moved on to bigger and better things. For the past three years, they've met at the GCSAA Conference and Show to drink a few beers,



Chris Ayers (left) and Tom Athy (right) organized the Doug Petersan Society to honor their mentor (center).

share Petersan stories (some they can't talk about in public) and talk turf. They met in a small room at a local hotel during this year's show.

Athy, director of grounds at Omaha (Neb.) CC, worked for Petersan in the mid-1970s at Fremont (Neb.) GC. Ayers worked for Petersan in the '80s at Baltimore CC. They both praise Petersan.

"Doug doesn't know the meaning of the word 'ego'," Ayers says. "He's a teacher and mentor to everyone in this room."

"Have you ever worked for someone who was very knowledgeable about what he did, but had a way of conveying that knowledge to you without making you feel like a dummy?" Athy asked. "We're just a bunch of guys who share a common respect and admiration for Doug."

The modest Peterson, who recently turned 60, says he's not sure he deserves the attention, but he appreciates it.

"I'm proud of all the people who worked for me," he said, scanning his eyes around the room. "If I leave a legacy, this is it."

— Larry Aylward, Editor

## Awful News That Will Make You Scream

We've got bad news, terrible news and absolutely awful news.

The bad news: There's a new slasher movie coming out.

The terrible news: It's called *The Greenskeeper*.

The absolutely awful news: The film stars embattled Texas Rangers pitcher and gay/minority basher John Rocker.

It's bad enough they made a horror movie with a murderer dressed up as a superintendent. It's worse they picked the obnoxious Rocker to star in the role. (But even in a terrible movie, he's probably a better actor than he is a closer.)

There is good news, though. There's a strong chance (99.999 percent, we guess) that the movie will go straight to video. Translation: It stinks.

The filmmakers say they're looking for national distributors. Sorry, but anybody willing to put up the jack to distribute this film is off his rocker (pun intended).

We love what Ken Rudolph of Fox Sports Net had to say about the film:

"Rocker had such a good time making the movie, he plans to star in another horror film this summer entitled, 'The Texas Rangers Pitching Staff.'"

Can you say, "Blown save?"

## Don't Forget to Sign Up for Major Challenge

John Deere and *Golfdom* have joined forces to present the Major Challenge, an online fantasy golf competition for superintendents and other turfheads who want to test their luck against colleagues around the world.

You can register online now by visiting [www.majorchallenge.com](http://www.majorchallenge.com) or by clicking on the Major Challenge link at [www.golfdom.com](http://www.golfdom.com). Contest information, complete rules, eligibility, standings, stats and player information are also available on the site.





# Unions Are Alive and Well, But Industry Is Better Off Without Them

**Q** How active are unions in trying to organize golf course maintenance workers?

**A** In recent years, they've been very active. A recent edition of the *Los Angeles Times* carried a story in the business section by the paper's labor writer under the headline, "New Group of Union Leaders Ready." The article opened with this paragraph: "The UCLA Labor Center graduates its first class of trained union leaders — 26 low-wage immigrant workers who have spent the last week studying labor history and learning to be better organizers and strategists." The article went on to say: "... The seminar ... was the first in a union leadership series ... funded by the state through the Institute for Labor and Employment."

Let's leave aside the obvious question of why California is using tax money to pay for union-organizer training, when unions themselves have plenty of cash in the form of dues and fines from their members. What jumps out is that the U.S. labor movement at present is focused on the "low-wage immigrant worker." That description fits a lot of our permanent and seasonal hourly golf course maintenance workers in many areas of this country. Several unions have, at various times and places in recent years, made golf course maintenance workers a primary organizing target.

One might think that only a few national unions (The Teamsters?) would be interested in organizing our labor force. But people I'm acquainted with in this industry have faced off recently against the Longshoremens, Service Employees International, United Culinary Workers, UAW and others. With union

**Been there, seen that**

BY MIKE HEACOCK



membership continuing a steep 30-year decline in the United States, most unions feel free to organize wherever they see opportunities.

While there are a fair number of unionized course operations in the United States, Las Vegas is the only major city I'm aware in which most golf courses are unionized. Las Vegas is a "union town," but even so there are still many nonunion courses. How do some courses in Las Vegas remain nonunion? One key, of course, is economic — wages and benefits must be competitive in the local market. They don't have to equal or exceed the highest-wage union courses, but they have to be competitive.

This doesn't always work, however. I know of one course that went union because the crew — all young, single men with nothing to lose — was convinced that the union could get them double the area-wide wage through collective bargaining. That never happened, they all quit to do something else, and that union went away.

Surprisingly to some, wages and benefits are not the primary reason some golf course maintenance workers vote to bring in a union — or to keep one out. I've been a member of five different unions at various times in my checkered working career, including one of the U.S. Postal Workers' unions for a few years. Working conditions in the U.S. Postal Service are typical of the

original recipe that created unions, and which still result in management vs. union strife on a continuing basis. Management in the postal service, at least in the bigger cities, tends to treat workers as anonymous, interchangeable low-value units rather than unique individuals. Time pressures are usually tight; workloads can be very high; the work is repetitive, physical, often mind-numbing; and one letter carrier (worker) can substitute for another. This general description could apply, as well, to some course maintenance operations.

Unions are invited by workers to try to organize when the brightest workers in the company no longer trust management to communicate respectfully with them as valued individuals, and when workers feel that management makes arbitrary decisions that have a negative impact on them.

An example I've seen of management mistreating workers is the superintendent who's having marital problems and takes his frustration out on his crew. Another is the manage-by-intimidation type, a management style that is thankfully disappearing along with the dinosaurs who practice it.

The bottom line: You'll retain more management flexibility and have fewer grievance-type problems to deal with if you can avoid unionization. Everyone is better off if your management style is enlightened enough that a union is not warranted. That won't guarantee that union organization won't happen, but it will give you a much better chance to avoid it.

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*Editor's Note: Mike Heacock, former vice president of agronomy and maintenance for American Golf Corp., fields your questions in his bimonthly column. You can reach him at: [mike.heacock@verizon.net](mailto:mike.heacock@verizon.net) or 310-849-5011.*