

Off The Fringe

Business briefs

FWS's proposed regulation addresses geese problem

Superintendents with geese problems on their golf courses will be glad to hear the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) has proposed new regulations to give state wildlife agencies permission to reduce flocks of Canada geese that nest year-round. That means superintendents could, by year's end, eliminate geese on their courses. In making the proposal, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service decided the Canadian geese problem can be best addressed at the state level. "We're committed to providing state wildlife management agencies with as much flexibility as possible to address the issue," a spokesman said.

Bayer must divest Fipronil

While the European Union has given conditional approval to Bayer AG's acquisition of Aventis CropScience AG, the new company must divest itself of Aventis' best-selling insecticide, Fipronil. The new company, called Bayer CropScience, may license the product back for regions outside of Europe and the United States, however.

Guerra leaves AGC

In the wake of its merger with National Golf Properties, American Golf Corp. no longer has two CEOs. Co-CEO Joe Guerra has left the company to pursue other interests, according to AGC. Guerra was with AGC for 15 years. AGC's other co-CEO, David Pillsbury, is now president of the company.

National Golf also announced that James M. Stanich resigned as president, but will remain as a member of the board of directors.

New CEO plots LESCO's future

Less than a week after being named CEO of *Briefs continue on page 16*

Book 'Em, Dougo

SLEUTHING DISTRIBUTOR HELPS BUST GOLF COURSE VANDAL

By Larry Aylward, Editor

Doug Hill is general manager of Turfgrass South, an independent distributor in Florence, Ky. But Hill also possesses the sleuthing savvy of Lieutenant "Whadya Pay for Those Shoes?" Columbo.

In April, Hill helped bust a man who vandalized the Fort Mitchell (Ky.) CC, near Florence and about 10 minutes from Cincinnati. On March 22, the 25-year-old numbskull drove his Ford Explorer onto one of the course's bentgrass fairways and did an estimated \$1,300 in damage. The man also wrecked his vehicle, which came back to haunt him. Its fender and fog light were left behind amid the golf course damage.

On March 31, Hill, a member of the Fort Mitchell CC and also its past president, was leaving a restaurant with his son after having brunch. On the way out, they bumped into another member of the course, who tipped them off about a vehicle parked nearby with a missing fender and fog light. Hill and his son drove past the car. Even after nine days, there was still bentgrass sod hanging from the vehicle's axle. Hill's teenage son knew the man who owned the vehicle.



Doug Hill says he recognized the chunks of turf hanging from the damaged vehicle were bentgrass.

Hill called the club's president and told him about the vehicle. He picked up the president, and they drove back to where the vehicle was parked and took digital photos of its front end. Then they e-mailed the photos to Fort Mitchell's chief of police.

Two days later, the police busted the vandal, who admitted his stupid stunt. "It was *so* satisfying to catch him," Hill says.

So satisfying because Hill knows how much superintendents despise vandals.

"Superintendents are my customers," Hill says. "You can see the stress on their faces when you talk about vandalism. Superintendents will be happy to learn that one of these guys got caught. You never read about these guys getting caught."

Here's to Doug "Sherlock" Hill for helping to do the catching.

Caretakers of the Game



Shawn Emerson
CGCS
Desert Mountain
Scottsdale, Arizona

As we celebrate Father's Day in June, I am fortunate to be able to count myself among those sons who have followed in their father's footsteps.

B i l l Emerson, my father, was a golf course superintendent (CGCS) from 1962 through 1994. In the '60s and '70s, my Dad typically mowed greens at 5/16" to 3/16", and players at that time were content with the speed of the greens. It wasn't until the 1980s, with the advances in mowing equipment, and the subsequent demands by golfers for faster greens, that spike marks became a major problem in the game.

Today, our greens are regularly cut to below 1/8". My Dad and I agree that without plastic cleats, the more tightly mowed greens of today simply could not withstand the damage brought on by destructive metal spikes.

Putting green quality has been vastly improved, and the overall conditions at golf facilities are better today than ever before. Having been the superintendent at a course which has hosted a Senior PGA Tour event, I also have seen firsthand that better greens can lead to lower scores.

My Dad still is involved in the industry, marketing products to golf course superintendents. Along with Brooks Robinson and Johnny Unitas, my Dad remains one of my childhood heroes and my mentor to this day.

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Public Golf – Plight or Passion?

By **Jim Black**

Maybe you can help me with something. I've been wondering for some time about when and why being called a "public golf course" became a bad thing. Or when and why it became a bad thing to be the superintendent of a public golf course. It would seem that somewhere along the line, somebody attached some sort of negative stigma to golf courses that are accessible to those who wish to play the great game of golf. I find this hard to understand.

The terms "daily fee" and "semi-private" are glaring attempts to glamorize those types of golf clubs that should ultimately be held in the highest honor — those courses open to the public.

So dust off your father's clubs and come discover why he was obsessed with the game. Bring your children and introduce them to the ultimate in sportsmanship. You can even walk if you want. There's no monthly minimum, no initiation fee and no "cart path only" at public golf courses.

So tell me: What is the bad here?

I take great pride in being the superintendent of a public golf course. To me, it's the heart and soul of what golf is about. It's not about status and recognition. My customers come carrying bags full of sticks and orbs, ready to traverse the countryside in a battle of man vs. nature vs. self. My job is to make the course as fair and pleasing as possible so they will return. Granted, it's a challenging feat with a 12-man crew and a limited budget, but that's part of what makes it great.

We have aesthetically pleasing stripes, raked bunkers, trimmed trees, a great layout and, most importantly, satisfied customers. Whether or not these customers know or appreciate that I



Jim Black – public and proud of it

have a turf degree is not my concern. In fact, what my customers think of me is none of my business.

I've come to accept the fact that no advertising and no association can change the public's perception of who I am and what I do. Frankly, I don't care about that. What I do care about is doing my best every day and going home with no regrets.

The next time you encounter a member of your club who wants to second-guess what you're doing at your course, I invite you to remember this: Everybody thinks they can do everyone else's job better than they can. How many times have *you* said, "That doctor doesn't know what he's talking about." Or, probably a little closer to home, "That weatherman is an idiot!" It's no different in this profession, my friends.

My advice to you is be satisfied with yourself that you've done the best you can do. Don't feel sorry for me because I'm still at a public golf course. This may surprise some of you, but it's where I choose to be because I love my job, and I'm proud of the work I do.

Now, if you'll excuse me, I need to go and help mow fairways today.

Black is superintendent of Twin Shields GC in Dunkirk, Md.

Business briefs

Briefs continued from page 12

Lesco, Michael DiMino laid out his management team's vision of the company's future.

In a presentation to shareholders and the investment community in April, he described Lesco's new direction as a "back to basics," and called on a return to the philosophy of company founders Jim FitzGibbon and Bob Burkhart. DiMino said LESCO is on the road to a profitable 2002.

Syngenta still on track

Syngenta AG blamed adverse currency movements and continuing tough markets for first-quarter sales dip of 3.7 percent compared to last year. Although the company does not expect a sales boost soon, it says it's still on track to reach its goals of a slight improvement in margins in 2002.

Second course coming to Russia

Golf is coming to St. Petersburg, Russia, thanks in part to Illinois-based architect Dick Nugent and his firm Nugent Golf Associates, who will design and construct a 45-hole golf facility there. It's only the second golf course to be built in Russia — the only other course is the Moscow Golf and CC.

St. Petersburg is the most western and second largest city in Russia. It's probably the largest city in the world without a golf course, according to Nugent Golf Associates.

Rutgers explores transformation technology

An agreement between Rutgers and Japan Tobacco will enable Rutgers to develop and commercialize improved turfgrass varieties by using a pioneering plant transformation technology, announced William Meyer, head of the turfgrass breeding program at Rutgers. The new technology was developed by Japan Tobacco and modified for use in turfgrass by Barbara Zilinskas, a plant scientist at the Center for Turfgrass Science and the Biotechnology Center for Agriculture and the Environment at Rutgers.

"Long term, we believe that transformation technology will enable us to solve some unsolved pest and disease problems," Meyer said.

Steiniger, the 'Super Superintendent,' dies at 96

Eberhard "Eb" Steiniger, known as the dean of superintendents, died in his sleep April 13. He was 96.

Steiniger, who retired from Pine Valley (N.J.) GC in 1980 after more than 50 years, was also known in circles as the "Super Superintendent." The recipient of many awards, including GCSAA's Distinguished Service Award and USGA's Green Section Award, Steiniger was GCSAA's oldest member.

Golfdom recognized Steiniger as one of its "Titans of Our Industry" in 2001. Steiniger told *Golfdom* his secret to success was to treat members with the utmost respect. "I treated all members as if they were my bosses, no matter what they asked," he said.

If you would like to make a donation in honor of Steiniger's name, contact St. Paul's Presbyterian Church in Laurel Springs, N.J., at 856-783-1839.

Quotable

"Golf has helped me raise my family, put a roof over my head, food on the table and allowed me to meet some wonderful people."

— *Palmer Maples on being the first superintendent inducted into the Georgia Golf Hall of Fame (Augusta Chronicle)*

"We're a dying breed to have stayed at one course for as long as we have. But it's nice to be able to plant a tree and see how big it has grown seven years later."

— *Charlie Hadwick, long-time superintendent of The Country Club of Lincoln (Neb.), on longevity in the industry*

"God bless the muni golfer. God bless the hack, the chop, the scrape. God bless Joey Threerjerk over there, trying to hit a seven-iron with one foot on a sprinkler that won't shut off and the other on his bag of Cheetos that he's keeping from the pigeons. . . . Mostly, God bless the USGA for finally bringing the U.S. Open to the people, to a real muni, golf's chopphalla — Bethpage Black."

— *Rick Reilly from a recent Sports Illustrated column*

Deep Freeze

TOURNAMENT AT THE TOP OF THE
WORLD POSES CHALLENGES FOR
SUPERINTENDENT AND GOLFERS

By James E. Guyette

PHOTOS COURTESY OF SHILLAND COMMUNICATIONS

At the top of the world — almost 400 miles *above* the Arctic Circle — golfers need to be on top of their games when playing in the Drambuie World Ice Golf Championship. Described as “like playing on the moon,” those teeing off at this year’s tournament in March were far more likely to yell “brrr” than “fore” amid temperatures that fell to minus 14 degrees Fahrenheit.

Held in Uummanaq, Greenland (pronounced “YUM an ahch”), this island course is carved completely from ice. The links are cut into a jagged sheet of 3-foot-thick ice floating atop a frigid fjord. Instead of bunkers and roughs, the hazards include 1,000-year-old icebergs that have randomly fallen away from seven nearby glaciers. It’s not unusual for the entire course to start moving in the middle of play.

The real architect of this course is the ocean, says tournament director Henrik Bergqvist of Denmark, who also serves as the course’s superintendent. The water and weather carve the icebergs in

January and February to form the basic layout of the course, and Bergqvist adds the finishing touches in March.

Using a large wooden tool similar to a hard-edged giant squeegee, Bergqvist fashions the layout by pushing away the Rhinefrost, a snow-and-ice mixture that sets atop the actual ice layer on the fjord. “We don’t use a machine; it’s all done by hand,” Bergqvist says.

Bergqvist uses a 2.5-foot-wide wooden tool mounted on a pole to define the fairways. The greens, natu-

rally, are called “whites” in this frozen wonderland.

“The routing is done between the icebergs like doglegs,” Bergqvist explains. “We actually shave the whites just like real greens.”

Precision putting is augmented by the shaving process, in which the scraper is used to brush away fresh snow to create a good grain. The holes are lined with standard golf cups.

Thirty-one players from around the globe took part in the fourth annual shotgun-start event, where the course changes — drastically — every year.

“I’ve played on hard and fast greens when it gets cold in Kentucky, but nothing can prepare you for this,” says ice golfer Jack O’Keefe. “The ball bounced and reacted like it was hit on asphalt.”

An American who plays on the Pro Developmental Players Tour, O’Keefe came in second this year to Scotland’s Roger Beames, the first player to ever shoot par on the nine-hole course.

O’Keefe observes that the surroundings reminded him of “the final scene in the Superman movie where Clark Kent flies back to Krypton.”

Uummanaq, off the West Coast of northern Greenland, is accessible by helicopter or dogsled. During the tournament, social activities with the friendly locals dominate much of the time spent off-course. “Golfers are always looking for a great locker-room story, and there’s no greater story than this,” says Tom Ferrell, a tournament participant from Colorado.



(Left) A golfer hits his fluorescent orange ball out of the “rough.” (Right) The winner gets an odd-looking trophy.

Greenkeeping is Different in Japan

Q

Have you ever worked outside the United States? What are some differences and similarities between the United States and other countries?

A

I've had the good fortune to work for somewhat extended periods in the United Kingdom and, most recently, Japan. While there's a lot of golf that occurs in other countries besides the United Kingdom and Japan, the two regions are certainly among the most golf-oriented of all.

Golf in the United Kingdom can almost be summarized as "a good way to take a walk." Lots of people play golf in the United Kingdom, but they aren't in the habit of renting "buggies" or paying much to play public courses. Who would pay a lot of money to take a walk?

Japan is different. Golf there costs a lot of money. Rumor was that the "Joe Sixpack" Japanese golfer could

Japanese superintendents are, not surprisingly, conservative in their maintenance practices.

book a one-week vacation to Guam, pay for premium daily-fee golf every day at the highest-priced courses on the island, and that trip would be cheaper overall, including hotel and food, than one round of golf in Japan at a private club that even allowed outside play.

That may have been true in the past, but the present reality is that most courses in Japan are technically bankrupt, their parent companies are

Been there, seen that

BY MIKE HEACOCK



bankrupt, and the banks that loaned them the money to build are technically bankrupt.

As a result, a lot of courses in Japan are now being bought by American vulture-capital firms (Goldman Sachs and Morgan Stanley are two of the big players there today) and converted to daily-fee operations at U.S. prices from \$80 to \$200, which in Japan is considered reasonable, affordable and even inexpensive.

The Japanese superintendents I've met (called greenkeepers there) are, not surprisingly, conservative in their maintenance practices. Indeed, some of the things they do today in Japan are similar to the way American superintendents did things in the 1950s.

For instance, the customary practice is to use about 200 gallons of water to apply a fungicide to one green. As a result, each course has at least one big diesel truck-mounted spray rig with a long hose and an orchard gun. One guy "paints" the green with the gun, and then they go back to the shop to reload.

One reason for this is that many fungicide labels in Japan require 1:1,000 dilution, if you can believe it. Newer fungicides, like Heritage, are being registered in Japan with U.S.-style carrier requirements, but the older ones still have antique labels. But greenkeepers apply Heritage just like the older fungicides,

with a 1:1,000 dilution because that's the way it's always been done.

Another quirk in Japan is the local governments generally test the water on and around each golf course at least yearly and look for pesticide residues.

Because of budget shortfalls and resulting tight staffing, each particular governmental entity will only test for "X" number of pesticides, usually about 10. So if the greenkeeper wants to, say, add Primo to his list of chemicals used on his course, then he has to drop one of his old standbys and not use it anymore because the government won't test for 11 chemicals.

Why is the government so sensitive about pesticide issues on golf courses? Because, a cynic might say, it's so insensitive to pesticide issues on rice. Japan grows only 2 percent of the world's rice, but buys and uses 55 percent of all the pesticides used on rice in the entire world.

Partly that's due to the extra-intensive form of rice culture the Japanese have to practice because of the scarcity of land. Partly it's due to Japan's "that's the way it's done here" philosophy.

Japanese farmers have immense political clout. If a tree hugger wants to attack pesticide use in Japan, he doesn't attack rice farmers, he attacks golf. So if you want to use Primo on your Penncross greens, you've got to drop Daconil or something else from your program.

Let's hope Japan is not a model, in this regard, for where the United States is gradually going.

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