Off The Fringe

NEWS WITH A HOOK

Business briefs

Deere profits up

Moline, Ill.-based Deere & Co. reported a better-than-expected profit of $68 million for the first quarter. That's compared to a $38 million loss in the period a year ago. It's the third consecutive quarter the company has posted a profit.

In other company news, Deere & Co. announced it has extended two agreements with the PGA Tour, guaranteeing the company will continue its sponsorship of the John Deere Classic and its exclusive partnership to provide equipment to the Tour.

The agreements extend the Deere's sponsorship of the Classic through 2010, and its status as the official equipment supplier to the PGA Tour through 2014. "Our company's relationship with professional golf has resulted in many positive benefits since our first agreement with the PGA Tour in 1997," said Robert W. Lane, Deere's chairman and CEO.

Toro off to good start

The Toro Co. reported net earnings of $7 million on net sales of $296 million for its fiscal 2003 first quarter ended Jan. 31. Compared to the same fiscal period in 2002, the Bloomington, Minn.-based company reported a net loss of $29.7 million. Toro's professional segment sales increased 10.1 percent to $193.4 million. The increase resulted from higher volume in golf, grounds and landscape contractor equipment and residential/commercial irrigation products.

The Andersons plans new products

The Andersons Golf Products expects to register and sell a new product by the second half of this year, though company officials wouldn't discuss specifics until the registration is complete. Mike Bandy, manager

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Baseball Manager or Superintendent?

LACK OF JOB SECURITY IN THE PROFESSION IS A BIG PROBLEM

By Dave Fearis

What's the common trait between a baseball manager and superintendent? The answer is that both lack job security.

Take the case of Mike Hargrove, manager of the Cleveland Indians from 1991-1999. In his last five years with the Indians, he led them to two American League pennants and five straight American League Central Division titles. His record in those five years was 491 wins and 319 losses. Sounds impressive, doesn't it? However, he was fired after the 1999 season, presumably for not winning a World Series.

It's a similar situation with some superintendents? I recently began writing down examples of superintendents being fired for what I would consider undue reasons. When I got done, I realized the list was too long to write this article. So I tried to find a common thread with all these firings.

Basically, it got down to personalities and egos — not on the superintendent's part, but on the part of the club president, board members and/or general manager. That's not to say that it certainly could be a two-way street, and the superintendent could also be at fault. But in the majority of the cases I had listed, I knew the superintendent and would say that his ego and/or personality was not the problem.

When personality entered into the picture, it was that example where a superintendent had offended or upset a golfer. The golfer went on to become a board member and eventually president of the facility. Then the golfer made it his personal crusade to get rid of the superintendent.

Ego becomes a factor when a superintendent has tenure at a facility, such as 15 years to 30 years. The superintendent has done a fine job, and in many cases has been involved in rebuilding or renovating the course or installing a new irrigation system. The person also has a strong membership backing.

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But sometimes it all comes undone when the facility hires a new general manager who feels threatened because of the superintendent's long tenure and membership alle-

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of control and combination products in the professional turf products division, said the last two years have been spent integrating the people and products from The Scotts Co.'s professional products division. The Andersons purchased the division in 2000.

During that transition, the company has invested heavily in research and development and focused on creating a national brand name. "The results are finally starting to show themselves this year," Bandy said. "We expect to launch one new product in the second half of 2003 and one before the GCSAA show next year."

LESCO sales up for 2002

Cleveland-based LESCO announced net sales for 2002 were $511.7 million, up 1.5 percent from the $504.3 million reported in 2001. Golf sales were flat ($152.7 million vs. $152.6 million).

Briggs & Stratton unveils division

Briggs & Stratton ramped up its commitment to the commercial market by unveiling a new division devoted solely to engines designed for it. The new division, called the Commercial Power Group, was created because Briggs & Stratton felt a need to create a clear distinction between its consumer products and its products for commercial suppliers.

Maycock is Cebeco's 'Man of Year'

Cebeco International Seeds honored Robert Cameron Maycock as its "Man of the Year." Maycock is the former owner of The Cameron Co. in Palm Springs, Calif., the first supplier of professional turf products to superintendents and landscapers in the area. He sold the company in 1997 to Eco Soil Systems DBA Turf Partners Inc. (now Simplot Partners).

Finlen honored by SRO

Seed Research of Oregon named Pat Finlen as its Superintendent of the Year for his efforts as director of golf course maintenance at The Olympic Club in San Francisco. Seed Research also named the Arnold Palmer Signature Golf Course at Stonewall Resort as its Course of the Year for 2002.

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Dave Fearis

giance. Then, within two to three years, the general manager starts maneuvering to get rid of the superintendent. It's a matter of control — the general manager wants department heads that he or she hires and can control.

Another instance that is somewhat similar to the above happens when a new general manager is hired and soon fires the tenured and higher-paid department heads. He or she then replaces them with lower-paid and less-experienced people.

It looks good on the bottom line, but it doesn't work when the course conditions suffer in the ensuing years. However, that general manager is usually long gone to another job.

The last situation I will present is one where the average age of the membership at a facility changes from older to younger. These younger ones are what I call the "trust fund" group. Either they inherited their wealth or made it in the past five years in the stock market. They believe that money can solve any problem (even those dealing with Mother Nature) and want instant gratification. They rise to the ranks of board members at a golf facility and bring with them this "trust fund" philosophy. One of the first things they seem do is make changes.

I realize that all of the above examples could be construed as whining. Also, I realize there are many golf facilities where the superintendent's relationship with the board and/or general manager is excellent. However, I believe that the situations described in the above paragraphs are realistic and not isolated situations. The lack of job security in golf course maintenance profession is a serious problem.

What's the answer to the problem? I called an attorney who deals with labor relations and asked him what he would recommend. He said every superintendent should have an employment agreement because it helps define his or her position regarding expectations and addresses issues like benefits.

I realize the above explanation of an employment agreement is basic. However, the point I want to make is the importance of having one. According to the last GCSAA Employment & Compensation Survey, only 26 percent of the respondents had an employment agreement. Without an employment agreement, the employee is an "employee at will," which means he or she can be terminated anytime.

I realize that you know some superintendents who were terminated that had employment agreements, which proves there's no insurance policy that guarantees job security. However, another key that the attorney mentioned is communication.

That shouldn't surprise anyone because we all know that you can't communicate enough. Obviously, you have to communicate to the right people. This could be your immediate supervisor — the general manager, green chairman or director of golf. However, don't take it for granted that what you communicate to a person gets passed on.

For example, if you're at a country club, it would behoove you to attend the board meetings and give a brief presentation on what you are doing on the golf course — problems you're having and how you're solving them. Also, communicate with golfers through bulletin boards, newsletters and being accessible at the first tee. Plus, it doesn't hurt to be involved in your community.

Remember, you are constantly selling yourself. It certainly will help people realize that you are an important asset to your golf facility.

In comparison, perhaps it will be like winning a World Series — your own personal World Series.

Fearis was a superintendent for 30 years and is currently the turf and ornamental products specialist at PBI Gordon.