

Off The Fringe

Business briefs

Welcome to PDI

The GCSAA's new membership standards — known as the Professional Development Initiative — officially took effect July 1. GCSAA members approved the new criteria at the association's annual meeting in Dallas in February 2001.

For grandfathered members of the GCSAA, the date signals the beginning of the renewal cycle. However, new members must now attain certain levels of education and experience to achieve Class A status.

Jeff Bollig, director of communications for the GCSAA, said the association has spent most of the past two years testing various processes and procedures to ensure effective and efficient data management.

RISE wants to prove point

Responsible Industry for a Sound Environment (RISE) wants to identify the sources of nutrients that may be contributing to surface water pollution.

So the national trade organization that represents producers and suppliers of specialty pesticides and fertilizers is teaming with its member companies to sponsor two university studies on the effects of specialty fertilizer to urban water quality. The total cost of the studies, each taking three years, will be about \$310,000.

To determine the levels of phosphorus and nitrogen from natural sources vs. turf fertilizer, the University of Minnesota and Cornell University will conduct separate experiments in accordance with proper scientific methods.

RISE's Jim Skillen, manager of formulators' issues, said the group knows that turf fertilizers are not generally responsible for excess nutrients (phosphorus and nitrogen)

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Extreme Drought Leads to Extreme Measures

VEGAS COURSE RIPS OUT
IRRIGATED TURF TO COMPLY
WITH WATER RESTRICTIONS

By Shane Sharp

That the southwestern U.S. is mired in one of the worst droughts in history is no longer front-page news. The extreme measures some golf courses are taking to cope with the worsening conditions and tighter water restrictions are worth noting, however.

Steve Swanson, superintendent at the Sienna GC in the golf-rich Las Vegas suburb of Summerlin, has removed 14.1 acres of irrigated turf from the upscale daily-fee course to comply with local water restrictions.

For its conservation efforts, Siena received a \$300,000 rebate from the Southern Nevada Water Authority (SNWA). But the rebate may do little to offset the hard times that could remain ahead. If the drought continues at its current clip, Siena could remove a total of 60 acres of turf and spend close to a \$1 million tearing apart a perfectly good golf course.

The question circulating among local superintendents is whether or not golf courses should be the primary target of heavy-handed water restrictions that have essentially left them no choice but to tear out signif-



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icant portions of grass. To the voting public, the area's more than 50 golf courses appear to devour more than their share of water. In reality, the golf course industry is responsible for a mere 8 percent of regional water consumption, according to the SNWA. Water use by the metro area's 1.6 million residents, by comparison, accounts for about 65 percent. Swanson says the politics of the situation are inevitable.

"Let's see, you can go after 50 golf courses or 1.6 million people," Swanson says. "It is not rocket science which one you go after. Let's be honest, a lot of this boils down to politics."

Clark County's two main water sources don't discriminate between homes and golf courses, however. Lake Mead, the source of 85 percent of Las Vegas' water, has dropped 74 feet in the past two years and is at 63 percent of its capacity, according to the SNWA. Lake Powell, further up the Colorado River, is down 95 feet and is at 50-percent capacity.

"Things could and probably will

get worse before they get better," Swanson says. "Right now we're restricted to about 8 acre feet of water per acre, per year. That could change to 6 feet in a few weeks."

Swanson says most Siena residents have been tolerant of the course's situation. "We sent out letters informing them of the drought situation and that we were removing turf."

While only 3 years old, Siena was permitted in the mid-1990s shortly before the existing restriction that limits new courses to 5 acres of turf per hole. The Brian Curley/Lee Schmidt-designed course originally contained 150 acres of turf and was conceived as a "parkland-style course" in the desert. By this month, it could be down to 136 acres of turf. By late fall or early winter, it could be down to 90 acres.

The long-term prognosis for Siena is good, according to Swanson, despite the imminent transition from park-

land- to desert-style course. Siena has solid financial backing from its owners, a supportive residential base and a generous maintenance budget. Swanson is also convinced the integrity of the course's design can be retained during the entire process.

"Most of the turf that will be removed will be in areas that aren't in play," he says. "It will change the look and feel of the course, but I don't think it will be more difficult to play."

At least one local water official is convinced that Las Vegas-area courses will come out of the drought fine.

"We have some of the best superintendents in the world, and they will reinvent the way golf is played here," says Doug Bennett, conservation manager for the SNWA.

Swanson appreciates the vote of confidence, but feels it's optimistic.

"I'm worried about some courses," he says. "They will not be able to afford to

do this. When it's all said and done, we will spend \$900,000 of our own money. That and the cost of water going up will force some clubs out of business."

Courses that survive the first few years of tighter water restrictions should eventually be able to recoup their upfront turf removal costs through savings on water. Swanson says he currently pays \$2.27 per thousand gallons. Come Oct. 1, the rate will rise to \$3.

"We are looking at about a four-year payback for the turf removal when you factor in water savings," Swanson says.

Siena is not the only course making a pre-emptive strike on tighter water restrictions. Red Rock CC, a private course in Summerlin, is replacing 14 acres of rough with drought-tolerant plants and xeriscape. South of town, the Boulder City GC is ripping out close to 30 acres of grass.

Sharp is a free-lance writer from Charlotte.

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