

Off The Fringe

Business briefs

Water wars means water audits

Drought conditions throughout the country and an increasing focus on visible water users to conserve more water are leading many golf courses to retain irrigation consultants who can audit their systems and provide recommendations for improved water efficiency, according to the American Society of Irrigation Consultants (ASIC).

"Water wars are breaking out in many parts of the country, pitting state and local officials and even neighbors against one another," said Jim Barrett, president of ASIC. "This, in turn, is putting the microscope on any visible entity that uses a significant amount of water."

That means golf courses, Barrett adds. Hence, courses are conducting water audits to use water more efficiently. Water audits help courses assess the amount of water they need and how well the courses' systems currently meet those needs. Audits also identify areas of inefficiency in the design or operation of systems.

Deere can pursue lawsuit

A U.S. appeals court has ruled that Deere & Co. can pursue its lawsuit against Toro Co. over a patent for a machine that aerates soil on golf courses, according to a report by *Bloomberg News*.

Deere accused Toro of using its patent for a wheeled machine. The U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit said a federal judge in Peoria, Ill., improperly defined the swinging motion covered by the patent in an earlier ruling in favor of Toro.

Gotham may seek Chapter 11

Gotham Golf Partners may file for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection as a result of a

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Clipped

TURF RESEARCH HURT
BY BUDGET CUTS

By Rebecca Larsen



LISA LEHMAN

Turfgrass programs and researchers at public universities are being pinched by budget cuts made by state governments around the country.

The research centers that study grasses used on golf courses and athletic fields and help train superintendents and county extension agents are not necessarily laying off staff. But in several cases, professors and researchers aren't being replaced if they leave their jobs. To cope with some cuts, some professors are doing their own "busy" work, such as typing reports, and taking fewer consulting or training trips. Also, a search is on for new grants to pay the bills.

At the Karsten Turfgrass Research Center at the University of Arizona in Tucson, Ariz., for example, one of two professors there left for another job and was not replaced. Instead, one researcher from the center now teaches part-time and does research part-time. Clerical help and the travel budget were also cut.

Although the Arizona cuts may not seem major, Lynn Cannon, executive director of the Cactus and Pine GCSA in Arizona, regards them as

"really huge" because the center did not grow to handle Arizona's huge golf course boom during the 1990s. "Our dry, hot summers and clay-like soil require specific research that experts from other state universities have not been able to deal with," she said.

"The center has been here for 10 years and has never reached its full potential, even though golf is so important to the state's economy," said David Kopec, head of Karsten Turfgrass Research Center.

Meanwhile, the state's more than 300 golf courses have struggled with a severe drought for about four years. As a result, many courses have turned to secondary, low-quality irrigation sources. So the center's work has included developing grasses that thrive on poor quality, high-saline water, Kopec said. Karsten has also worked on ideas for preparing bermudagrass for overseeding, has evaluated water-use patterns and tailored weed-control programs to the desert. "Research on Arizona turf has to be done here," Kopec said.

Cuts at the University of Florida began because of a tourism slowdown that started even before Sept. 11,

2001, according to J. Bryan Unruh, extension turfgrass specialist at the University of Florida in the West Florida Research and Education Center in Pensacola. His turfgrass center, with a staff of seven, opened seven years ago and is one of the largest in the Southeast. Some 3,000 to 4,000 visitors, including county extension agents and superintendents, tour the center or attend classes there every year.

One professor who worked with Unruh retired and was not replaced. Unruh has absorbed travel costs into grant accounts because his travel budget, used mainly to speak at conferences and do training, was cut by 75 percent. His center has statewide responsibilities in a state with more than 1,300 golf courses. "If I go somewhere, I have to line up several things to do in the same place and have done some cost-sharing with industry," he said.

At the University of Florida in



State budget cuts are putting the financial clamps on several university turf programs.

Gainesville, professor Grady Miller said the university cut one staff position at its Gainesville turfgrass research facility. Another faculty member who retired will not be replaced for the time being. But so far, the turf center has gotten by "doubling up," Miller said. Things could deteriorate as time goes on, he added.

"If our off-campus turf faculty is moved, it will likely be to another region in the state," he says. "Therefore, the availability of that resource for golf courses in our area would shift. I think our faculty number will be reduced so

that may effectively limit research."

George Hamilton, coordinator of turfgrass research at Penn State who also trains superintendents, said his center has not suffered big cuts yet.

"But we're getting fearful now about the retirement of faculty in this reduced budget situation," he said. "They may collapse the positions if someone leaves." Penn State as a whole has been laying off staff for two years.

The Penn State turfgrass program, one of the oldest and largest in the country, has 10 faculty and 40 to 50 county staff members.

"In many areas of our budget, we've been fairly self-sufficient," Hamilton said. "Members of country clubs pay a part of their dues to the center. We also sponsor conferences and trade shows around the state where corporations buy booth space. From all that, plus tours of the center, we take in \$200,000 a year. With-

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Off The Fringe

Business briefs

Briefs continued from page 14

New York court's injunction that blocks its plans to merge with First Union Real Estate Equity and Mortgage, a national investment company, according to reports.

Gotham owns 26 golf courses. Reportedly, Gotham and First Union Real Estate Equity and Mortgage Investments agreed to merge nearly one year ago, but their plans were halted last year when a court issued an injunction after a shareholder objected.

Gotham Golf Partners is a full-service golf course acquisition, ownership and management company based in Hershey, Pa.

Briggs to lead BASF Specialty Products

Stephen Briggs is the new director of BASF's Specialty Products Department, which incorporates the company's professional turf and ornamental, vegetation management/forestry, pest control and turf fungicide businesses.

Briggs is responsible for all aspects of the department's current operations, in addition to orchestrating the merger of TopPro Specialties group into the department. Briggs is the former vice president of TopPro Specialties, a unit of the Micro Flo Co. and a wholly owned subsidiary of BASF Corp.

At TopPro, Briggs was in charge of the Specialty Group, with generic product responsibilities.

The GCSAA Foundation changes name, focus

The GCSAA Foundation's Board of Trustees approved a revision of the entity's direction and name. It's now known as the Environmental Institute for Golf and will concentrate on addressing environmental issues surrounding the game of golf. The changes come as a result of a year and a half study that analyzed the needs of golf and the strategic focus of The Foundation.

Qualitative research was gathered through interviews of individuals representing all aspects of the golf industry. The feedback revealed that golf's relationship with the environment is gaining a positive stature, but the momentum must not be allowed to dissipate because of a lack of a long-term vision.

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out that money, we would not be able to function."

For the 700 golf courses in Pennsylvania, he said: "We provide a full-service program with pest management and soil amendments. But if we lost a breeding position (in research), we couldn't develop new grasses that do well at lower mowing heights and that make better putting surfaces for players."

Some other universities, like Rutgers in New Jersey, reported no immediate problems. And Cale A. Bigelow at Purdue University in West Lafayette, Ind., said his turfgrass research center has added a position recently. Still, he said, "We are trying our best to meet the needs of golf courses in Indiana, but with the



Dave Kopec is trying new approaches to stretch the budget at the University of Arizona.

recent construction boom, it is difficult to serve everyone."

At the University of Arizona, Kopec is trying new approaches to stretch his budget. Superintendents recently held a fund-raising golf tournament in Scottsdale to raise \$40,000 for Karsten. Kopec also would like to see a small tax on each round played and donated to research.

"If the average price of a round of golf in Arizona is \$60 or \$70, then why wouldn't golfers be willing to pay another 10 cents to go into research?" he asks. "But Arizona has balked at it, even though not a single thing in golf costs 10 cents."

Larsen is a free-lance writer from Scottsdale, Ariz.

Quotable

"Ping 13, full set. Irons & woods. I'm done. Some minor damage from throwing clubs. Your cost equals my last score! \$98."

—A new ex-golfer selling his clubs in the classifieds of the Sarasota Herald Tribune.

"If you are using a contact fungicide, think of it like paint. Would you paint a house that was wet from rain?"

—Joe Rimelpach, extension plant pathologist from The Ohio State University, on the importance of dragging the dew off fairways before applying a contact fungicide.

"I like my turfgrass to look good. Bruce likes to kill his grass."

—James J. Camberato, professor of turfgrass management at Clemson University, on his colleague Bruce Clarke's tendency to induce diseases on test plots to study their progression. Clarke is director of Rutgers University's Center for Turf Science.

Off The Fringe

A Week in the Life

MARCH MADNESS MEANS IT'S TIME TO PREPARE FOR ANOTHER SEASON – IF MOTHER NATURE ALLOWS YOU

By Jim Black

As usual in the transition zone, a soft 3-inch blanket of snow arrives in between days of promising warmth. I come to work on a Sunday morning and hook up the plow to my truck. I do this mainly for the fun of it because I'm sure that within a couple hours I will have missed the opportunity. Temperatures are supposed to climb back into the low 50s.

A quick and chilly ride around the course reveals that the greens are the last place the snow will melt, much to the dismay of the pro and the members. I, of course, welcome the respite

for the sake of the turf. This old course has seen so many years of 50,000 rounds that even it deserves a few days off.

Monday comes and even with bright sun and temperatures in the upper 40s you learn that even a leafless tree provides enough shade to keep snow from melting. And even though it's comfortable outside, some of the cart paths are still impassable because of the same treeless shade.

So it's back to the shop. Clean, sweep, straighten, grind. Organize and put away. Six trips to the dumpster. Then, after four hours of bumping into

each other, you send half the crew home at lunch because there's only so much you can do this time of year. My afternoon is spent in the office, planning and plotting for whatever surprises Mother Nature may decide to throw my way this year.

Tuesday. Snow still lingers on six of my putting surfaces. The owner and the pro are starting to drop hints of opening soon for the sake of off-season revenue. I decide it's time to take a much-needed 18-hole winter walk. Rose, my trusty Airedale/German Shepherd pound puppy and I head out.

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First, it's down to the lakes to spook up the geese and encourage them to find a new place for their swimming and pooping. Rose is a goose-herding natural, and after 10 minutes or so the flock takes the hint and noisily lifts off and heads out.

Our hike around the front nine reveals that, indeed, four greens guarded by southern trees are still covered and icy. Even with a warm sun, air temperatures in the mid-40s keep the greens unplayable and off-limits. We can, however, use the front-end loader to remove the slush from the path to make it passable.

On the back nine, one green is still covered and one is questionable. There's a length of path down the hill on number 15 that could be salted to make it driveable enough for a golf car, but the rest of the back is clear sailing. Decision time.

The busy work is plentiful right now, and once the weather breaks a little we can get outside and tend to the trees.

Wednesday morning the phone rings. It's the club owner. "Well? What does it look like out there?" My mind switches from turf to business, the business of revenue at our public course.

"With a little creativity," I say, "we could probably choose nine holes today after the frost."

"Will that be OK for the greens? I don't want to rush things if we don't have to."

Setting my ego aside, I agree saying, "If we keep on the paths, the frost should go away and it'll be OK."

I don't know if she's seen the forecast yet, but the weatherman has promised another 2 inches tonight. What can one day hurt?

I call the pro and nine holes are agreed upon. I stay in my office the rest of the day to avoid all the questions, such as, "Will you open more later?"

On the business side, the cash register rings to life again, if only for a little while. It's better than nothing.

Thursday morning I wake up and peek out the window. The forecast was incorrect. There are 4 inches of new snow instead of the predicted 2. I silently rejoice, thankful that rest again will come for this old course.

Rose and I carefully make our way to work. Two of my trusted and faithful employees are already there. Gary has made his way in thanks to his Jeep, and James is the ever-present resident. The three of us work to clear and salt the as-

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phalt — a path in from the main road, and two driveways for the only two houses on the course. After three hours we call it a day. We deserve the rest just like the course. Tomorrow we'll be busy once again.

The turf management part of me is starting to feel impatient, but at the same time a wiser part of me knows that 14-hour days are again only a few short weeks away.

Friday greets the mid-Atlantic with an expected high temperature of 37 degrees. I'll have a two-thirds crew today to help with the grinding, oil changing, ball-washer painting and shop reorganizing. Luckily, there is enough of that right now to keep them all busy for an eight-hour day.

The busy work is plentiful right now, and once the weather breaks a little we can get outside and attend to the trees.

In the transition zone, we could have almost any kind of weather pattern, and we are at the mercy of whatever Mother Nature throws our way. One thing I do know is that on this particular Saturday morning, I am able to enjoy the luxury of sleeping in.

The opportunity to recharge your batteries is a rare gift for a greenkeeper. Accept that gift when you can.

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

Un-Bear-Able

CANADIAN SUPERINTENDENT BATTLES BRUINS

By James E. Guyette

A situation at the Sparwood GC in Sparwood, B.C., is creating a "grizzly" situation for superintendent Rod Uhl. During the spring and fall, ursine invaders make almost nightly forays onto the nine-hole course.

Weighing up to 1,000 pounds, the marauding grizzlies are particularly partial to the pins — frequently snapping them in two like toothpicks.

"They pick up the scents of everyone who grabs the flagsticks, and the bears are rubbing up against them to leave their own scents," Uhl says.

The bears make the rounds of other course features, too, targeting distance markers and anything else they can get their huge paws on.

"They dig the cups right out, and they also dig-up our irrigation heads," Uhl says. Recently, "the majority of the practice course mats were flipped over, and one of them was shredded." The mat mayhem is especially puzzling because they're made of synthetic materials.

It's hard to figure out why the



PHOTODISC

bears like the course. Insects aren't prevalent because of the rural region's rugged climate, and "we have a very stringent garbage control program" to eliminate other bear-type treats, Uhl adds.

A barking dog is no solution, as a canine could quickly become a snack. And applying typical bear repellents to the pins won't work because any product that the bears find foul is going to end-up on the hands of members lining up their putts. "I can't have my golfers getting *that* on themselves," Uhl says, noting that the bears' mischievous attraction to the links remains a vexing mystery.

Uhl seeks advice from those who've had bear problems. He can be reached at sparwoodgolf@netscape.net.

Guyette is a free-lance writer from Cleveland.

The Major Challenge Is Back

Good news for you golf fanatics: The Major Challenge is back. If you have a hunch about which Tour players will dominate the Majors this year, here's a chance to play out that hunch and win prizes.

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

The object of the contest is simple, says Mike Scaletta, advertising manager for Deere's golf/turf division. "You pick the six players you think will score best in each of the four Major tournaments and their combined stroke score is your score in the Challenge," he says. "You can change players and tinker with your team any time up to the day before each event. It's fun, and it's free."

The Major Challenge contest events are, of course, the Masters, U.S. Open,

British Open and PGA Championship. An all-expense paid trip to the John-Deere Classic to play in the Pro/Am awaits each winner of those events. The John Deere Classic will be held at the Tournament Players Club at Deere Run in September in Silvis, Ill.

You can register online now by visiting www.majorchallenge.com/golf. Contest information, complete rules, eligibility, standings, stats and player information are also available on the site.

So log on, sign up, have fun and win.

Waiting Is the Hardest Part

MORAN NAMED SUPERINTENDENT OF YALE GC – FINALLY

By Anthony Pioppi

Mike Moran will celebrate his 20th anniversary at Yale University GC in style. He was finally named superintendent of the course after serving in an interim role for nearly two years.

They say good things come to those who wait. Moran waited, waited and waited to be appointed superintendent. He was named the official superintendent of the course in December. It was also a nice 50th birthday present for the superintendent, who turned the half-century mark the same month.

Moran was chosen out of a group of five finalists that were culled from a national search by a committee made up

of Yale alum, members of the school's athletic department and people involved with the course, said Thomas Beckett, Yale's director of athletics.

According to Beckett, part of the reason Moran was chosen for the job was "his knowledge of the Yale GC and his passion for what the golf course is all about."

Moran takes over at a time of positive change at the acclaimed Seth Raynor design, which opened in 1926. It is finally receiving attention from the school after years of neglect. Architect Roger Rulewich is in the midst of a bunker renovation scheduled to be completed by fall, including the reinstatement of a number of bunkers filled in over the years. Plans are underway to improve drainage on at least three holes.

As part of union regulations of which he is a member, Moran will no

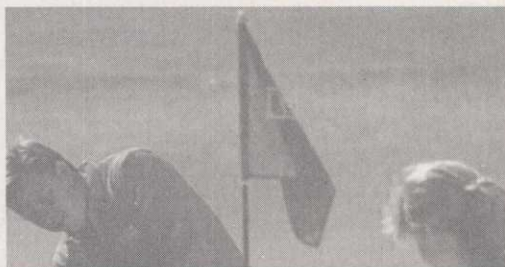
"I'm going to miss the labor stuff, but now I'll have time to train and improve the professionalism of the golf course"

MIKE MORAN
SUPERINTENDENT
YALE UNIVERSITY GC

longer be able to perform jobs of the rank and file — including operating machinery — unless in a teaching or testing capacity.

"I'm going to miss the labor stuff a little bit, but now I'll have time to train and improve the professionalism of the golf course," Moran said.

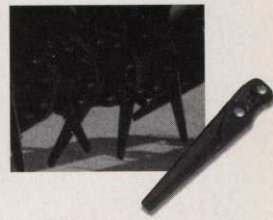
The golf course has nine budgeted positions, four or which are for 12 months and five for nine months. During the summer, help from the school's dining halls augment the crew. The void left by Moran's elevation will also be filled.



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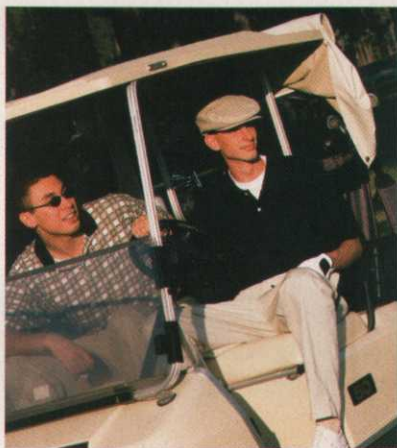
LEARN THE RULES

By Anthony Pioppi

It was an epiphany of sorts. Not really hit by a bolt of lightning, but shocked just slightly, like the time in sixth grade when I accidentally touched the inside of an empty foot-light socket in my junior high school auditorium.

Tzzzzzz... What the...!?

This time the little jolt came while standing on the 17th tee of the local muni. About 30 feet below lies the 10th green and on this fine afternoon, four players were putting out on that very green, their golf carts parked no farther than a couple paces from the putting surface. While this in itself was out of line, the fact they had to negoti-



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ate the vehicles around a veritable obstacle course of yellow rope, stakes and trees to get where they were was no accident. Or was it?

Up until then, I had always assumed 90 percent of the people on golf courses who are doing what they shouldn't just don't give a rats back


porch about the course. My conclusion was reached after a couple of decades playing the game, two years on a golf course grounds crew and more than a few occasions taking the role of ranger on the aforementioned layout.

For some reason, a modicum of patience had worked its way into my demeanor and rather than fire off my usual harsh words of disgust at the four offenders, I took a rather tactful approach.

"Gentlemen," I said in a voice loud enough for them to hear without a hint of anger, "those carts don't belong there. Could you move them back behind those ropes, please?"

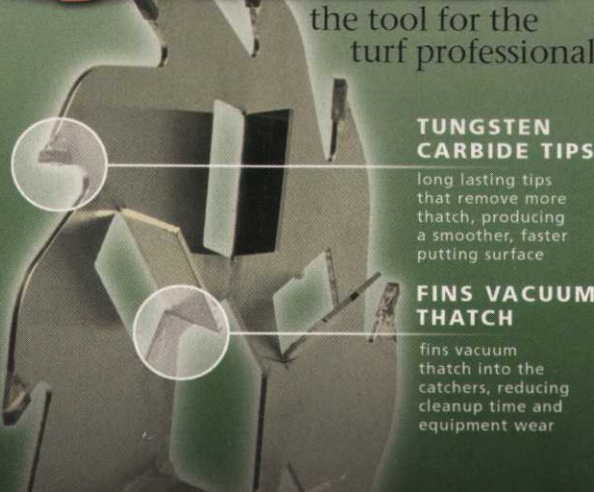
Well, tie me to an anthill and smear me with Ho Hos, the reaction from the four was nothing short of astonishing. Two immediately sprinted to their carts and moved them back to a reasonable parking distance, and they all practically

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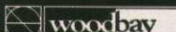
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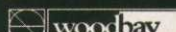
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fell over each other spouting words of genuine, yes, *genuine* apology.

Over the years, more than one of my playing companions have disagreed with my low opinion of golf course miscreants. Those friends have argued eloquently, and not so eloquently, that the players who do not take care of the golf course are, in most cases, guilty of ignorance rather than of malice.

"How can you say that?" I would ask them under cross-examination giving an example. "What about the old-timers around here who were playing the game years before Noah needed to build himself a boat? They never fix a pitch mark."

"They don't know they are doing anything wrong," my friends would tell me. "No one's ever shown them the error in the their ways."

I have a proposal to correct this, which follows along many of the lines of other golfing countries such as Swe-

den. Under this plan, players are not allowed onto courses until they have passed golf's version of a safe driving test. There will be no grandfather clause. If you don't have a license to drive, pitch and putt, you will not play golf. It's as simple as that.

Once golfers learn the etiquette of the game — including such talents as fixing ball marks; when and when not to replace divots; good cart driving techniques; and why it's not an insult to let a faster group play through — they can tee it up anywhere.

I suggest the regional PGA section and the regional superintendent sections coordinate the classes that will be taught by golf pros and superintendents for a fee, of course. Along the way, prospective golfers will gain an appreciation for not just the game and its rules, but also for the people who take care of the courses on which they play. They'll come to understand *why*

it is important to fix a pitch mark or fill and level divots.

The dual teaching program will also foster increased communication and goodwill between pros and superintendents — both of whom will also learn to appreciate a little more what each other does.

Once certified golfers are let loose on the links, rangers will have it easier as well since all players will be well-versed in what and what not to do. Rangers will be able to skip the polite and gentle reminders to move golf carts or speed up play. Instead, BAM! To the moon Alice or Andy or whoever else breaks the law. Three strike law? Nah.

If the educational process works, I can even envision a world where rangers will not be needed one day. Now wouldn't that be something?

Pioppi is a free-lance writer from Middletown, Conn.

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