

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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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.

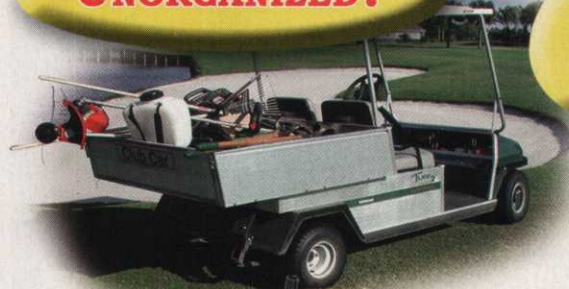
"In many areas of our budget, we've been fairly self-sufficient," Hamilton said. "Members of country clubs pay a part of their dues to the center. We also sponsor conferences and trade shows around the state where corporations buy booth space. From all that, plus tours of the center, we take in \$200,000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

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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.