

# Off The Fringe

## Business briefs

### LESCO launches interactive site

LESCO customers will soon be able to purchase products on the company's Web site. Revamping the company's Web site was long overdue, said Michael P. DiMino, president and chief executive officer of Cleveland-based LESCO. The company has introduced LESCO Direct, located at [www.lesco.com](http://www.lesco.com).

"The Web site extends the level of service that we can provide our customers by creating an information-packed, online presence," DiMino said.

Customers will soon be able to order products from LESCO through the site and have them ready for pickup the next morning. "Our new Web site gives our customers secure, password-protected access to their corporate accounts anytime and provides up-to-the-minute details on orders, payments and credit limits," said Brett Barthel, LESCO's vice president of marketing.

In other company news, LESCO announced that net sales for 2003 increased 2.3 percent to \$523.5 million, up from \$511.7 million in 2002. Same-store Service Center sales increased 5.1 percent, or \$16.3 million, to \$336.4 million from \$320.1 million in 2002, while total Service Center sales increased 8.3 percent or \$26.4 million to \$346 million.

Golf gross sales declined 1.8 percent to \$137.8 million from \$140.3 million in 2002.

### Matuza honored as 'Master Greenkeeper'

Town of Oyster Bay Golf Course's Stephen Matuza was awarded the prestigious Master Greenkeeper Certification from the British and International Golf Greenkeepers Association (BIGGA).

Matuza is one of thirty-nine professionals worldwide and 12 nationwide to attain this designation.

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## NTEP Gets a Lot to Chew on

'LISTENING' SESSION SPARKS MUCH TALK  
ABOUT IMPROVING THE PROGRAM

By Ron Hall

**T**hey asked for it in their first-ever "listening session," and they got it—lots of suggestions to improve the

National Turfgrass Evaluation Program (NTEP). The "listeners" seeking feedback on the NTEP program were NTEP Policy Committee members and Executive Director Kevin Morris.

In a classic example of "be careful about what you ask for, you might get it," the audience of 52 people, most of them either seed marketers or turf breeders, came up with a long list of suggestions to either broaden NTEP's scope or improve its rating system.

The question that everyone left the room with was: How many of these suggestions can (or should) NTEP implement? The suggestions offered at the two-hour session held during the GCSAA Conference and Show in February will give NTEP policy members a lot to talk about when they next convene in June, especially since most of the audience seemed pleased with the program in general, and nobody suggested wholesale changes.

The NTEP, of course, is North America's unbiased source for information about turfgrass performance.

This information is compiled from trial sites across the United States and Canada, where species and their many varieties (the tall fescue trials have more than 170 entries) are evaluated and their characteristics compared one against the others. Green industry professionals use the NTEP results to select the most appropriate turfs for the sites they establish and maintain.

The rating process drew its fair share of comment at the meeting. Evaluators at each location rate give each individual trial entry numerical ratings in categories such as color, spring greenup and density, among others. The ratings are based on visual inspection, which is admittedly subjective.

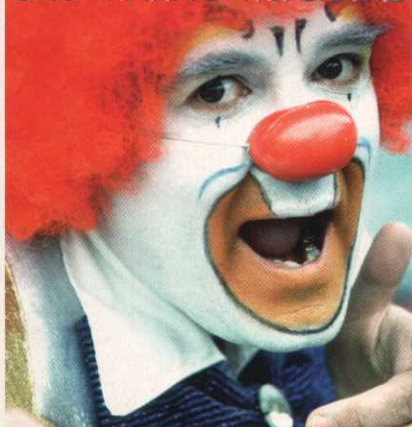
Several in the audience also sug-

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#### United acquires Nu-Gro

United Industries, which operates Spectrum Brands, will acquire the Nu-Gro Corp., based in Brantford, Ontario. The combined companies will have sales of about \$750 million with more than 1,800 employees in the United States and Canada. The transaction should be completed in May.

"I see this acquisition as a strong and positive venture for both Nu-Gro and United," said Mark Barbera, Nu-Gro's vice president and general manager.

#### Noer group approves studies

The O.J. Noer Turfgrass Research Foundation recently approved funding for the following research projects: "Microbial Control of the Black Cutworm in Turfgrass using a Naturally Occurring Baculovirus," "Seasonal Biology and Pro-Active Management of Mound-Building Nuisance Ants on Golf Putting Greens" and "Developing Water-Saving Irrigation Scheduling Indices from Bentgrass Fairways."

#### Coldwell creates golf division

Coldwell Banker Commercial/Nicholson Williams Realty has created a new Golf Course Sales Division. Heading up the division is Charles Smith, and Kathy Bissell. "Coldwell Banker Commercial Nicholson

Williams Realty has identified a growing niche in the commercial real estate market, one that's particularly hot in the South," said George Slusser, president of Coldwell Banker Commercial.

#### Course can use Merit donation

The First Tee of San Diego at Colina Park Golf Course recently received a donation of a year's worth of Merit Insecticide from Bayer Environmental Science. Bayer made the donation in celebration of the ten-year anniversary of Merit.

"We are happy to receive the donation of Merit from Bayer," said Doug Sparks, superintendent at Colina Park. "We have problems with black turfgrass atenius, white grubs, and cutworms in turfgrass, as well as aphids, whitefly, thrips, and mealybugs in ornamental plants."

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gested modifying the five-year testing cycle that all varieties undergo. One proposal was to establish two tiers of testing — a preliminary trial to identify promising experimentals, followed by a lengthier trial that seed/sod suppliers could use for marketing.

Another seed marketer suggested extending testing species such as Kentucky bluegrass and tall fescue to six or seven years to better evaluate and market them. Also suggested was shortening ryegrass trials because many varieties disappear from test plots after several years. The length of the turf trials has not been modified since they were increased from four to five years in the mid 1990s.

The audience's suggestions had a predictable marketing flavor because NTEP is used as much for marketing as it is to evaluate the relative strengths of each species or variety participating in the turfgrass trials.

Other suggestions included:

- Including species such as seashore paspalum, the new hybrid bluegrasses and, perhaps, ornamental grasses in NTEP testing.
- Establishing trials using effluent and saline water for irrigation.
- Expanding and improving testing for traffic tolerance.
- Testing for insect and disease tolerance.
- Installing additional trial sites in the West and Southwest.
- Separate trials for colonial and velvet bentgrasses.

Also, Morris noted that the onsite bentgrass greens and bermudagrass trials have run their course (apparently the end of their five-year trials), and there doesn't seem to be much interest from the seed companies to re-establish them.

*Hall is editor-in-chief of Landscape Management magazine.*