

Off The Fringe

NEWS WITH A HOOK

Business briefs

NGCOA's final meeting

The final meeting of the National Golf Course Owners Association (NGCOA) — as we know it — is set for Jan. 10-14 in Tampa. In 2005, the NGCOA will combine its annual show with the GCSAA annual conference. That maiden convention will take place in February 2005 in Orlando.

The NGCOA is billing its show as the "2004 Solutions Summit." Between 600 and 700 golf course owners and operators are expected at the show, which will offer educational sessions on how to maximize profit centers and control expenses in every aspect of golf course operations.

Bayer restructures sales team

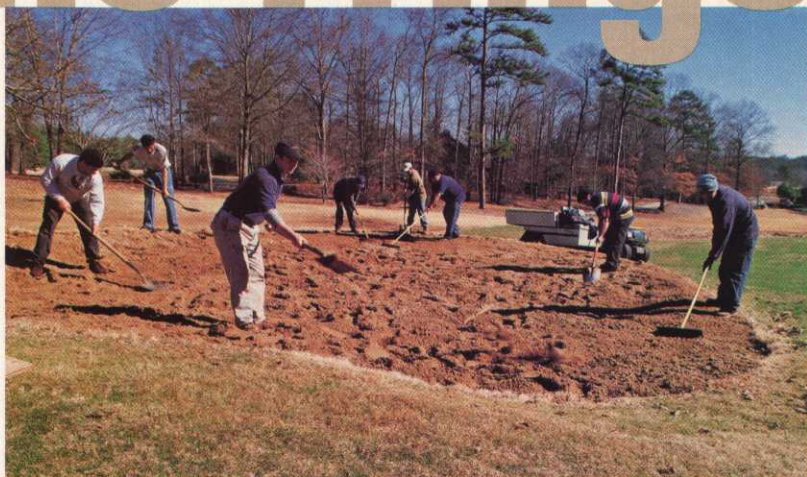
To better serve the differing needs of Green Industry customers, Bayer Environmental Science said it will expand and reposition existing sales and marketing resources within Chipco Professional Products.

The recent creation of a national lawn care/landscape and grounds maintenance region with a dedicated sales manager and sales representatives will enable the three current sales regions to specialize on golf course customers in their geographies. An expanded number of sales representatives will concentrate on either golf course or lawn and landscape/grounds maintenance customers.

Irrigation industry nearing \$1 billion

The irrigation industry is approaching the \$1 billion level, according to Jim Barrett, president of the American Society of Irrigation Consultants. The amount being spent on construction of irrigation systems produced by the professional members of ASIC exceeds more than \$712 million, up more than 30 percent from five years ago.

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ROB BELKNAP

Renovations Rebound

INTEREST RATES, IMPROVED ECONOMY HELP FUEL TURNAROUND

By Mark Leslie

Golf clubs around the country have overcome the fear factors that followed 9-11 — a sour economy and a world in turmoil — and are fast-forwarding planned renovation projects, according to industry experts.

A record-setting comeback from an economic recession, coupled with low interest rates, a desire to regenerate aging courses and heightened competition are fueling the turnaround.

"Our indications are that capital expenditures are up considerably," said Jim Singerling, executive vice president of the Club Managers Association of America. "Master plans are calling for pushing projects ahead, not just because of the economy as a whole, but because interest rates are where they are. All the managers I'm talking to are saying they're pushing projects that were scheduled for late 2004 and 2005 and trying to get them done this winter and next spring."

Senior designer Jim Nagle of Forse Design in Hopwood, Pa., said his office is being inundated with requests for master plans.

Architect Steve Smyers of Lakeland, Fla., said clubs realize they need to keep up with modern standards to attract the next generation of players. "Members are proud of their clubs and want the latest and greatest turfgrasses — both for themselves, their children and grandchildren," he added.

Architect Michael Hurdzan of Hurdzan/Fry in Columbus, Ohio, said: "It is a very good time to bid a project now because contractors are not as busy as they've been in the past, and we're seeing really good pricing and values."

Secondly, clubs that are doing this are struggling to fill membership rolls and are being compared to upscale public courses that provide better playing conditions. It's difficult for a country club to think that there are

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four golf courses in the city that have better greens than it does."

Larry Hirsch, president of Golf Property Analysts in Harrisburg, Pa., said there seems to be a lot of interest in renovations, mostly from private clubs.

"We don't see as much renovation at public clubs, but that's what private clubs use to sell themselves," Hirsch said.

In 2000, some 86 percent of private clubs did some sort of major capital improvement project, and that figure dipped to 79 percent in the year following the Sept. 11, 2001, attack on America, Singerling said. "But the post-9-11 fear has abated," he added. "My sense is that the number for the 2002-03 cycle will be around 90 percent."

Leslie is a free-lance writer from Monmouth, Maine.

Quotable

"You'd like to think you could be somewhere forever in this business, but I think it's almost next to impossible."

—Mark Kubns, certified superintendent of Baltusrol Golf Club, on staying at one club for an extended period.

"The hardest thing about being a superintendent is being a good role model."

—Mark Wilson, certified superintendent of Valhalla Golf Club, on leadership.

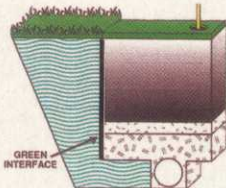


"The golf courses people enjoy most are those that look hard — but play easy."

—Steve Johnson, partner and national director of KPMG Consulting's Golf Practices, on building "difficult" golf courses.

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