

Off The Fringe

Business briefs

Core golfers on the rise

A new National Golf Foundation (NGF) study shows a 5 percent increase in the number of "core golfers," defined as golfers more than 18 years old who play at least eight rounds of golf per year.

The organization's *Golf Participation in the U.S., 2004* report indicates that the number of core golfers grew from 12.6 million in 2002 to 13.2 million in 2003.

The news was also positive for overall golf participation, which rose 3.3 percent to 37.9 million golf participants in 2003, the NGF reports. Women and children comprise the two groups showing the largest increases in participation in recent years, and the NGF says both groups still have room to expand.

But the core golfer numbers are the most important ones to look at to gauge the health of the industry, says Joe Beditz, president and CEO of the NGF.

"We track all golf participation segments, but it's the core golfers that we keep the closest eye on," Beditz says. "Core golfers are the bedrock of golf demand."

Fake course shelved

Remember the story out of Colorado last year about the golf course that was to be the nation's first artificial-surface, 18-hole championship course? Depending on your view, the course either sounded real cool or real dumb.

Well, it's neither right now. That's because the brakes have been put on the Echo Basin Golf Club because of a lack of money, according to a news report. The planned housing subdivision, needed for construction for the course, has not been approved. Therefore, the first phase of the subdivision can't proceed as planned, the *Cortez Journal* recently reported.

TourTurf, the popular cryogenic fiber turf,

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The Fictitious Life of a Superintendent

SCOTT SIMPSON SAYS HIS BOOK, *BEHIND THE #\$\$%& GREEN*, IS A REFLECTION ON HIM AND OTHERS IN THE INDUSTRY

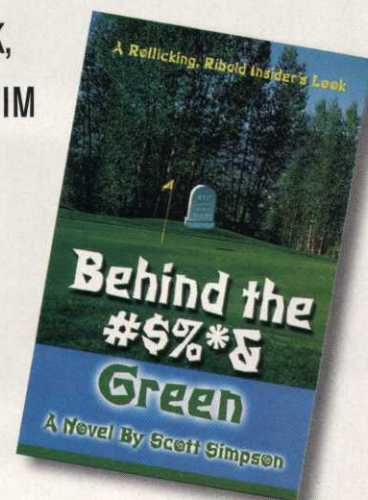
By Robin Suttell

Steve Hunter's story is one of life, loss and love and the affect the profession known as golf course management has on all of the above.

Jaded and battled-scarred, thrice married and divorced, this veteran superintendent knows the ropes and isn't afraid to tell it like it is. Or rather, Hunter's creator, first-time author and golf course industry consultant Scott Simpson, isn't bashful about baring the naked truth about life behind the greens.

Simpson, founder of Sunlinx, a Colorado Springs-based golf course management and consulting firm, realized that most golf lovers, who typically believe they would find a personal Nirvana by working at a golf course and playing free golf, have no clue what life in the golf industry is really like.

"Over the years, I have been inundated with questions from folks interested in getting into the business," Simpson says, adding that he wanted to provide folks with a genuine, behind-the-scenes view of life in the golf course management industry



without sounding like a text book. "Outsiders not in the industry don't have the feel for the pitfalls. It's a noble profession, but it isn't for everyone. The prevailing number of golfers and their spouses think, 'What a great environment. What a great career.'"

Simpson, who has managed golf courses since 1987, embarked upon educating the golf-loving public about the hazards of working in the industry. In doing so, he strived to address some basic underlying truths in a humorous manner. His novel, *Behind the #\$\$%& Green*, and its protagonist, Steve Hunter, were born.

"Golf is an awful lot of fun, but being in the business side isn't always fun. It's work, and work isn't fun," Simpson says. "That's why they call it work."

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was to be used for the course. Reportedly, the course was to cost between \$9 million and \$14 million.

NGCOA, AAGMC merge

The American Association of Golf Course Management Companies (AAGMC) and the National Golf Course Owners Association (NGCOA) have merged to establish a single program of products and services for owners and operators of multiple golf courses.

"We both realize that by consolidating our resources, we can better serve the interests of our members," says Mike Hughes, NGCOA executive director. "The AAGMC represents some of the most progressive management companies in our business, and we look forward to working with them to make the golf industry stronger."

Jacobsen awarded for safety

Jacobsen earned another Textron Award of Merit for safety at its Charlotte, N.C., plant, which recently exceeded 1 million hours of operation without a lost-time accident.

"Manufacturing high-speed turf-cutting aeration equipment and accessories parts can be very dangerous," said Jon Carlson, Jacobsen's president and CEO. "The [award] recognizes that our employees are dedicated to their co-workers and their own safety."

Merion gets Walker Cup

The USGA announced that the East Course at Merion Golf Club in Ardmore, Pa., was selected to host the 2009 Walker Cup Match, a biennial international amateur team competition. The club, maintained by superintendent Matt Shaffer and his crew, will also host the U.S. Amateur Championship in 2005.

The Walker Cup pits two 10-man teams from the United States and a combined team from Great Britain and Ireland.

ASIC elects president

The American Society of Irrigation Consultants (ASIC) elected Daniel Brenner as its new president at its recent conference. Brenner, who is also president of Hydro Environmental, has designed or been involved with 2,650 irrigation projects.

The Weather Will Get Wacky, But Not That Wacky

And you thought the weather has been wild the past few years, what with buckets of rain, the driest of droughts, and stifling heat and humidity. Last month, thanks to the release of *The Day After Tomorrow*, the latest disaster movie (speaking of which, it didn't get very good reviews) that depicts giant storms and plummeting temperatures on earth, people started talking about the weather more than they already do. They wanted to know if the wild weather that happened in the film could happen on earth.

The good news is the National Center for Atmospheric Research (NCAR) says it's impossible for an ice age to strike within days, as happens in the movie. The bad news is NCAR warns that climate change may have significant consequences for society in coming decades. Here's why:

- Humans affect global climate through emissions of carbon dioxide, methane and other gases that trap sunlight in the atmosphere and warm the planet.
- Many greenhouse gases emitted from the burning of fossil fuels and other sources remain in the atmosphere for decades or even centuries.
- Researchers at NCAR and other institutions have found that global temperatures are likely to rise by 3.1 to 8.9 degrees Fahrenheit between 1990 and 2100. Such an increase in temperatures may spur droughts, extreme storms and related events, including wildfires, vegetation changes and a rise in sea levels.

However, as dramatic as real-world climate change is likely to be, it would differ from the climate change depicted in *The Day After Tomorrow* in several important ways. For example, temperatures in New York City plummet from sweltering to freezing in a matter of hours in the film. (Think the green committee would blame that on you?) In reality, scientists say that temperatures in parts of the world could drop, but not nearly as rapidly or dramatically as portrayed in the movie. — **Newswise and Larry Aylward**



PHOTODISC

Quotable

"I think there's a lot of internal strife in the USGA. One person wants one thing, another person wants another. They duck and hide until they go on TV, when they say everything is fine."

— *Frank Hannigan, former USGA executive director, on the controversy surrounding the course setup at last month's U.S. Open, held at Shinnecock Hills Golf Club (Newsday).*

"Unless you live the business for a time, I don't think you really understand it."

— *John Burns, certified superintendent of The Gauntlet at Curtis Park in Fredricksburg, Va., on comprehending the nuances of the profession.*

Off The Fringe

So Much More Than a Maintenance Facility

GEORGIA SUPERINTENDENT KNOWS HOW TO THROW A GOOD PARTY

By Anthony Pioppi, Contributing Editor

A maintenance facility can be so much more than just a place to store equipment and have lunch. At the Oaks Course in Covington, Ga., the building took on the role of reception hall.

When the course's one banquet room was double-booked for two December events last year, an idea was floated about using superintendent Curtis Singleton's building for one of the events. Singleton said OK, and the result was a hit at the semiprivate layout.

"It was a heck of a job and effort by him and his crew," said course owner Dick Schultz.

According to Schultz, a wedding reception was scheduled the same day as a popular year-end golf tournament that featured a post-round meal. The problem came to light during a staff meeting, and after a short discussion Covington's maintenance facility was chosen as the area to be used by the golfers.

Covington, who had only been on the job since October, went to work. He and his crew even fashioned two large wreaths out of black drainage tile and large pine branches. For the occasion the building was renamed, "The North Pole."

When the big day came, machines were moved outside or lined tightly in the back of the building so there was plenty of room for about 130 golfers.

"It was a good situation for me," said Covington, who stayed at the course the entire day to make sure the event went smoothly. "They were asking me questions, and I told them about our facility and the equipment. A lot of them had never seen the equipment. We try to get our work done early so golfers don't even know we've been there."

Schultz said the day enlightened many people to how their green fees are spent. "They saw the things we need to keep the course in shape," he said.

What's Mona's Handicap?

One might think that Steve Mona, as CEO of the GCSAA, plays golf about four times a week. One might also think that Mona, because he plays such frequent golf, could hold his own with the pros.

But that's not exactly the way things are. Mona doesn't play that much golf. In fact, he's lucky to play once a week. Mona says he plays 15 rounds to 20 rounds a year.

"In the golf business, the saying is, 'The closer you are to the game, the less you play.' As I continued to advance in my career, I played less golf," Mona says.

The golf he does play is business golf, Mona adds, although he's starting to play more golf with his children.

Because Mona doesn't play as much golf as one might think, his handicap has gone up over the years. But make no mistake: Mona is a good golfer with a handicap around 12. He doesn't find himself in the drink and the woods as much as the average golfer.

"My lowest handicap was a round a 6," he says. "I was in the single digits for a lot of years."

Here's betting that one day Mona will be back in the single digits — when he retires from his career and has more time on his hands. — **Larry Aylward, Editor**



Bayer Backs Assistant Education

COMPANY PLANS MORE EVENTS AROUND THE COUNTRY

By Frank H. Andorka Jr., Managing Editor

With all of the educational opportunities available to superintendents around the country, who had time to put on an educational program targeted at assistants? Well, Bayer Environmental Science did.

In March, the company hosted a program called the Future Superintendents Academy for North Carolina assistants at its research facility in Clayton, N.C. Forty assistants attended, inspiring the company to try and do

other such events around the country. Bayer and Toro distributor Smith Turf and Irrigation Co co-hosted the two-day seminar.

"We look at these people as the future of the industry," said Trey Warnock, a Bayer sales representative. "We felt it should be part of our mission to prepare them for the day when they're ready to be superintendents."

The educational program consisted of presentations from USGA Southeast Regional Director Patrick O'Brien on

topdressing, a panel of local professors talking about turf diseases (and solutions), as well as a presentation on the ins and outs of leasing machinery.

As an added bonus, the two hosts surprised the assistants and paid a year's membership for the attendees to the Carolinas GCSA at a cost of \$25 per membership.

"We really believe the Carolinas GCSA is a great organization that does a lot of good for the superintendent profession," Warnock said. "It will help these assistants get involved in the educational programs it offers and may inspire them to get more involved."

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In the book, Hunter is CEO of Col-inx, a small course management company in Colorado Springs. Described by his creator as a “jaded rascal,” he faces the inevitable showdown between his professional and personal lives, failing to strike an amenable balance between the relationships in his life and his passion for the game.

Despite some similarities between him and the often appealingly flawed Hunter, Simpson says his main character isn't necessarily his alter ego, but he admits he did draw upon personal experiences, not to mention those of others involved in the industry, while writing the novel.

“Hunter and other figures in the book are composites of folks I've met along life's path,” Hunter says, noting that he's added certain embellishments to play up the entertaining conflict he portrays.

“Stories are rampant in the industry,” he says. “You go to conferences and hear funny stories about spouses or significant others complaining. The faces of employees change, but the problems and issues don't change industry wise.”

**Is anything sacred in *Behind the #\$\$%*& Green*?
Probably not, Simpson admits.**

With ribald honesty, Simpson educates Hunter about many of life's and the profession's hazards — the love of, or perhaps obsession with, the game some call “Scottish Madness,” golf course design, modern technology, long hours, high turnover rates, entrepreneurship, marriage, and, yes, divorce.

While no concrete statistics reveal that the golf course industry has a staggeringly high divorce rate, many in the industry — Simpson included —

Seed Market Defined by Strengthening Markets, Stable Prices, Expert Says

By Susan H. Samudio

Many of you noticed there was not enough seed of many of the elite cultivars to go around this year. By spring, you were hard pressed to get the varieties you wanted. This problem will continue until harvest of the 2004 crop as more cultivars become sold out.

Last year's market correction was drastic because seed field plow-outs were coupled with a drought situation in most production areas, and yields were off by an average of 5 percent to 25 percent depending on species. By early summer, most species no longer had carryover from past years, which had kept prices down. With the seed shortage, prices of most species increased somewhat but are nowhere near reaching historic highs.

Compared to last year, this summer's production is forecast to be higher, but not

as high as many are calling for. Most seed companies were able to place their desired acres with farmers. There is a lot of competition from crops like wheat and corn in placing acreage with farmers. Estimates are that grass seed acreage increased 10 percent to 20 percent over 2002-2003 levels, so more acres will be available for 2004 harvest.

Acreage for most species is still lower than it was several years ago. Yields this summer are expected to be “average” at most and possibly down 10 percent to 20 percent, especially on fields that did not fare well through the winter. Coupled with virtually no carryover of last year's crop, seed buyers can look to a season of strengthening markets and stable prices.

Samudio is a plant breeder with J.R. Simplot/Jacklin Seed.

believe the profession is a breeding ground for marital woes.

So far, Simpson says, the book has been well-received, and based on the reader comments posted on his publisher's Web site, www.PublishAmerica.com, he's not kidding.

“Every superintendent in America needs to read this book and then send a copy to everyone they know,” writes Jack from Florida.

Despite a definite slant toward the male persuasion, the book even has gained some female fans.

“I couldn't care less about golf,” writes Judy from Arizona. “But after listening to my husband laugh hysterically for two days, several times actually in tears, I took his advice and read the book. The chapter where Hunter visits the urologist's office, along with the one when he takes his children miniature golfing ... might be the funniest pieces I've ever read, until I read the chapter about the wedding reception at one of Steve Hunter's golf courses.”

Is anything sacred in *Behind the #\$\$%*& Green*? Probably not, Simpson admits.

“I was kind of an equal opportunity attacker,” he says, when asked about the broad spectrum of subject matter covered in the novel. “It's a profession that requires a well-developed sense of humor. That was the whole intent behind the book — to make folks in the industry laugh and wake up those outside the industry who think it's the most wonderful job in world. Certainly in some respects it is, but there are negative aspects that just make it a little short of heaven.”

Behind the #\$\$%& Green* (\$19.95) is available either in the stacks or by special order at most major bricks-and-mortar bookstore chains or online at Amazon.com or Barnes and Noble (www.bn.com).

Suttell is a freelance writer from Lakewood, Ohio.