

# 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

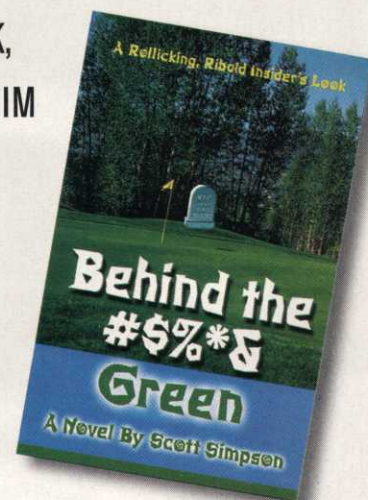
By Robin Suttell

**S**teve 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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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](http://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](http://Amazon.com) or Barnes and Noble ([www.bn.com](http://www.bn.com)).

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