

Off The Fringe

NEWS WITH A HOOK

Business briefs

Audubon campaign gets a boost

Audubon International's ambitious "Fifty in Five" campaign — to have 50 percent of all golf courses in the United States enrolled and active in one of its environmental programs by 2007 — got a boost from two pesticide manufacturers, Syngenta Professional Products and Bayer Environmental Science. Superintendents can now use their Syngenta GreenPartners rewards points or their Bayer Environmental Science Accolades points to purchase one-year memberships or renewals in the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program for Golf Courses.

"Making membership in our program an option will go a long way to support our efforts to promote environmental stewardship throughout the entire golf industry," says Kevin Fletcher, director of programs and administration for Audubon International. "It's this type of industrywide support and leadership from both Syngenta and Bayer that we need, and will continue to ask for to help make good environmental performance the norm in the golf industry."

For more information about these respective programs or to apply your reward points towards Audubon International program membership or donation, visit the Syngenta Green Partner Web site or the Bayer Environmental Science Accolades Web site.

ProLink, ParView merge

ProLink and ParView, players in the global position satellite golf course management industry with more than 500 combined course installations, merged in January. The new entity, ProLink/ParView LLC, announced its management team, featuring the appointments of William Fugazy Jr. (chairman of the board of directors),

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Growing Up

NGCOA TURNS 25, BUT "WE'RE STILL IN OUR INFANCY," EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR DECLARES

By Larry Aylward, Editor

The National Golf Course Owners Association (NGCOA) turns 25 years old this year. But in the eyes of Mike Hughes, the association's executive director, the NGCOA is still a babe.

"We're still in our infancy," Hughes told members of the association during a speech at the NGCOA's annual Conference & Trade Show in Tampa in January.

Under the watch of Hughes, who has been with the NGCOA for 14 years, membership has grown from about 250 members in 1990 to more than 6,000 members now. But there are still plenty of seats for new members, Hughes says.

"The progress over the next 10 years is going to be as substantial as the last 10 years," Hughes predicted. "In my view, we can't even see the midpoint of the association. We're really just getting started."

Progress, of course, goes hand in hand with the economy. During the speech, Hughes acknowledged that it's been a difficult past three years in the golf industry. Rounds have been



down because of economics and the weather, and owners' wallets have been left thin.

It wasn't just a glut of golf courses that contributed to the downturn, Hughes said. It was also the fact that corporate spending had fallen to substantial lows. There were fewer corporate outings, and there were fewer corporate players because many of them had lost their jobs. The ones that remained were working longer hours and didn't want to be seen playing golf during such dire economic times.

But Hughes, not known as one to spin, predicts that more money will flow this year. "I'm absolutely certain that 2004 will be a better year," he affirms.

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Going Gaga Over Golf

LEBANONTURF SALESMAN EXPERIENCES CHINA'S LATEST CRAZE

By John Farrell

"You wanna go to China?" That's what my sales manager, Tim Layman, asked me last September. I answered, "Sure."

Tim told me that LebanonTurf needed its most expendable employee to go to China to give a talk to about 100 general managers at the Chinese Golf Course General Managers Association Conference.

I figured it was a great opportunity to visit a part of the world not many people get to see. I left Philadelphia, flew to Chicago and boarded a flight to Hong Kong — 19.5 hours and 8,000 miles from my home in New Jersey.

After a couple of days in Hong Kong, accompanied by my host, Rob Glucksmen of Witgang Far East Ltd., we took a 45-minute commuter train to the border checkpoint at Lo Wai. We crossed over into mainland China.

The Chinese love golf. With a population of 1 billion people, there's quite a scramble by Western companies for a piece of the pie. China has become the land of opportunity to companies struggling with a golf market on the decline at home.

The conference, which is the Chinese equivalent of the GCSAA show, is held at different golf resorts in China each year. This year's conference was held at the Sand River Golf Club in Shenzhen, China. Shenzhen was the first Special Economic Zone in China. It was created out of farmland and mangrove swamps. From a population of less than 20,000 in the 1970s, it has grown into a thriving metropolis of 2.5 million, home to China's highest-grossing industries. It's no wonder that golf has become such an important leisure activity for wealthy Chinese.

The event is put on by general managers who represent the roughly



John Farrell (third from left) says golf in China focuses on providing excellent customer service.

COURTESY OF JOHN FARRELL

180 courses throughout China. Most of the general managers bring along their superintendents.

General managers are the decision makers when it comes to club operations and agronomics in China. This is changing slowly and surely with influence from the West. Superintendents are becoming much more important to club operations. Chinese course operators are beginning to see the correlation between good turf and profits.

My boss told me I would speak to a group of about 100 general managers. The group was actually somewhere between 350 and 400. He also neglected to tell me that nine television stations and 17 magazines were covering the conference.

The seminars at the conference were similar to the ones here in the United States, where general managers and superintendents talk about management practices at their clubs. Someone from Phillips Lighting did a talk on lighting a golf course for night play (many of the resort courses throughout China have nine-hole, fully illuminated courses). My talk was on basic agronomics and nitrogen sources. This may be basic material for American superintendents, but not for many of the Chi-

nese turf professionals in the audience. Most courses throughout China either use all-mineral farm-grade fertilizers or the most primitive of fertilizers, manure.

Golf in China is a unique experience. The philosophy under which courses are run is based on service. As a guest of one of these resort courses in China, your every need is attended to. The clubhouse at Sand River was as ornate as any you will find anywhere in the world. Jobs at clubs like Sand River are highly sought after by locals, and they work hard to keep them.

Each player in the foursome has his own caddie who handles every detail of his or her round. To tell you the truth, it's a little disconcerting at times. Things you always do on your own, like marking your ball on the putting green, are attended to by the caddies.

Sand River Golf Club is wall-to-wall seashore paspalum. You won't find too many native areas at golf courses in China. Every inch of turf that could be mowed was mowed. Native plants and grasses were actually removed from Sand River and replaced by ornamental plants and grasses that did not fit. I was told course architect Gary Player was not happy with that. But I was also told that this was common practice at golf courses because the Chinese like the "Augusta National look."

The courses I visited were in remarkably good condition considering some of the maintenance practices used. The Chinese are eager to learn how we do things and are gradually changing the way their courses are maintained. The introduction of golf to China has created many opportunities for turf students or assistant superintendents from the United States. The Chinese respect our knowledge and are starting to hire American turf professionals.

My trip was a wonderful experience. It's great to see golf grow in a country like China where it was once thought of as a useless activity for rich Westerners.

John Farrell is a territory manager for LebanonTurf.

Say What?

AS A MANAGER OF PEOPLE, I'VE FOUND THAT WHAT SOMEONE IS THINKING DIRECTLY AFFECTS HOW WELL HE HEARS

By Jim Black

There is a phenomenon going on in the workplace that may need to be investigated by the medical community. You see, I have a theory that could be the cause of many a breakdown in functional communication.

My theory is this: The more someone is harboring a preconceived notion, the less likely his ability to correctly understand what it is you are telling him. Put another way, what someone is thinking directly affects how well he hears.

Those of you in managerial, supervisory and superintendent positions can maybe back me up on this.

I can count on my fingers, toes and trusty abacus how many times I have answered the question, "What do you want me to do next?"

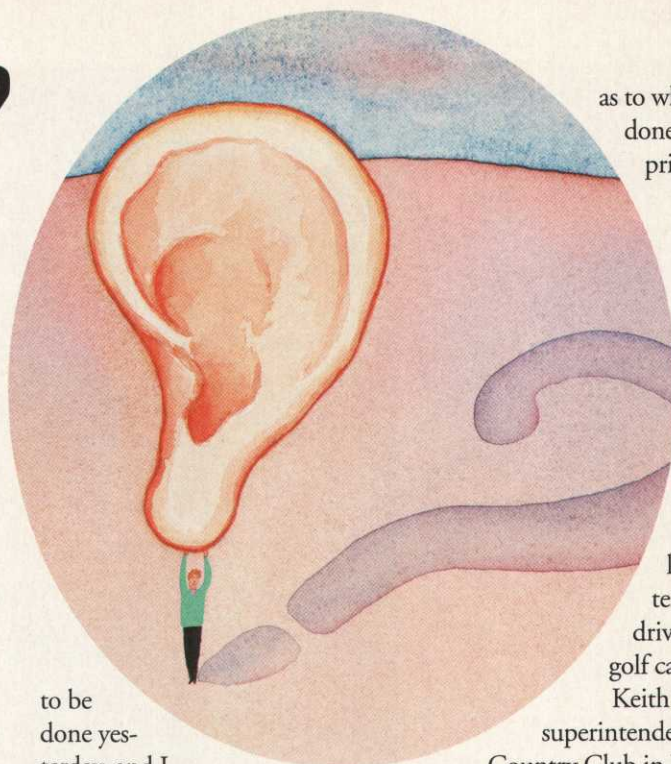
I will have thought about this question before any given employee has radioed it in and will have formulated what I thought was a very specific, detailed answer. When the question comes, I give this answer with all the confidence in the world that my directions will be completely understood.

Much to my dismay, however, I will go by this particular employee a few minutes later and find that he won't be accomplishing anything related to what I asked him to do.

"What!?" I ask myself. "Was I speaking Greek or something? Why is he doing Z when I told him to go and do X and Y?"

So I drive up in my golf car and confront him. "What are you doing?"

The answer. "I saw that this needed



to be done yesterday, and I thought you wanted me to take care of it."

My reply. "But is this what I asked you to do *today*?"

The answer. "No, but ..."

I reply. "Exactly. No buts. What was a priority yesterday is not necessarily a priority today. Please go do what I asked you to do *today*."

They reply. "OK. What did you say you wanted me to do again ...?"

By this time, whatever hair remaining on my head has turned gray. You know, I really do want my crew members to be able to think for themselves and make some of their own decisions, but not to the point where it undermines my daily agenda.

I think that what happens is this: At the same time I'm formulating my answer to the "what next" question that is yet to come, my crew member has also formulated what he thinks I will say before I say it. As a result, his preconceived notion takes priority over my direction, and his hearing suffers.

It's not a malicious thing; it's a human nature thing. As frustrating as it is, I can usually tell that this crew member is trying to do what he thinks is the right thing to do. He just needs *more* direction, *more* instruction

as to what needs to be done — what *today's* priorities are.

It's funny. I was talking to another local superintendent one day about what it is we do. I'm sure a lot of you have heard a crew member or a member of your club say, "Man, I'd like to be a superintendent. All you do is drive around in your golf car all day."

Keith Hershberger, superintendent from Old South Country Club in Lothian, Md., and I just laugh. We both agreed that sometimes we *have* to laugh.

Here's a little synopsis of what happens. After today's work is done, we think about what it is that needs to be done tomorrow.

Tomorrow then turns into today and over coffee at home before work we think again and prioritize again about what needs to be done. Confident that our plans for the day are set, we head into the office.

Then the crew shows up for the day's work. We give out job assignments and away they go.

The rest of the entire day can easily be spent in the car, riding around the course making sure that what you told everybody to do is what they are actually doing.

If not, chances are pretty good that somebody's preconceived notion got in the way, affected his hearing and what you told him came across as Latin this time instead of Greek.

You can't help but wonder how you learned to speak so many different languages.

Black is the former superintendent of Twin Shields Golf Club in Dunkirk, Md.

Business briefs

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Lawrence Bain (president) and David Rivers (vice chairman of sales and marketing).

Milliken on FORTUNE'S list

Spartanburg-based Milliken & Co. ranked as the 16th best company in FORTUNE Magazine's annual "100 Best Companies to Work For" listing which was announced in January.

"We are pleased that those who have made this company great, our associates, are receiving this public recognition," said Ashley Allen, president and COO of Milliken. "It really is an affirmation of what they have known all along, but it is nice for them to be able to see it in print"

Milliken says it has long been a fierce advocate for preserving American jobs.

Pinehurst CEO resigns

Patrick A. Corso, who was president and CEO of Pinehurst Resort for the past 17 years, resigned Feb. 6.

"I have had the honor and privilege of leading Pinehurst for the past 17 years," Corso said. "We raised our family here and have deep roots in the community. This is an opportunity for me to pursue a new career direction, and for Pinehurst to move into the next chapter of its history."

Corso joined Pinehurst in 1986 and became president in 1987.

Method approved to test fertilizer

The International Association of Official Analytical Chemists says it has approved a new official method for more accurately analyzing the nitrogen content of urea-based liquid fertilizer products, especially those containing slow-release nitrogen (SRN) found in triazone products. The new analytical process, called Determination by Liquid Chromatography of Urea in Liquid Fertilizers, was developed by Tessenderlo Kerley Inc. (TKI).

Michael M. Hojjatie, director of research and development for TKI, said the new method was developed over the last 15 years and has been validated by thousands of tests conducted by TKI and different laboratories. The AOACI is the internationally recognized scientific organization that validates analytical methods used in industry.

Quotable

"I tell people, 'The best thing about this business is the quality of the people.' It's outstanding."

— Terry Bonar, certified superintendent of Canterbury Golf Club in Cleveland, on his peers.

"It's indescribable to win this award. I feel like I could die now since there's nothing in my profession better than this."

— Monroe S. Miller, superintendent at Blackhawk Country Club in Madison, Wis., reacting to receiving the USGA Green Section Award.

"What Mr. Brewer wanted was for the elite player to have to hit driver more often."

— Charles Raudenbush, the pro at Pine Valley, on club president O. Gordon Brewer's decision to lengthen the heralded course. (GolfWorld)

Growing Up

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Hughes makes the prediction because he's already seeing a turnaround. "Several things that were weighing us down are leaving."

Corporate spending is coming back, said Hughes, who also expects memberships to rise at private clubs and guest play to increase. "We definitely hit the bottom, and the curve is going to start sloping up."

But an improving economy doesn't mean that owners can sit back and let more rounds come to them. Hughes stressed that they must create more business as well. Not surprisingly, player development should be high on their lists to trigger more business.

Hughes also noted the importance that owners must place in ser-

vicing the 300 to 500 key customers at their respective golf courses.

"Most of the reduction in the past few years has come from the fact that golfers are playing fewer rounds,"

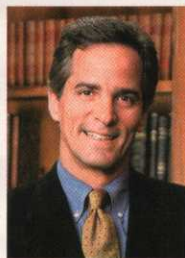
Hughes said. "They're not leaving the game totally, but they're playing less golf. We need to be tuned into them."

If they're playing less golf, owners need to find out why. And then owners need to offer them incentives to come back and play more golf.

"We absolutely have to know what their patterns of play are," Hughes said.

It seems that Hughes, who worked as a lawyer for 10 years before joining the NGCOA, wants owners to apply his "you-can-always-be-better" attitude toward business.

"Like any business, if you think you've arrived, you're on a downhill slope," Hughes said. ■



Mike Hughes