Off The Fringe

Business briefs

Crompton becomes Chemtura

Middlebury, Conn.-based Crompton Corp. and Great Lakes Chemical Corp. have merged. The new company is called Chemtura Corp. and will be the fourth-largest publicly traded U.S. specialty chemicals company.

"Our new name reinforces the fact that we are Chemtura, a unique new company with a portfolio of global businesses that have achieved leading positions in high-value market niches," said Chemtura chairman, President and CEO Robert L. Wood.

Tribe's suit targets Shinnecock, National Golf

Shinnecock Indian tribal leaders have filed a suit that claims ownership of 3,600 acres of expensive real estate on eastern Long Island, N.Y., including Shinnecock Hills Golf Club and the National Golf Links of America. The tribe claims the land was stolen in the 19th century. The tribe hopes the suit, which also seeks compensation, will make it possible to build a casino near the Hamptons, according to the report.

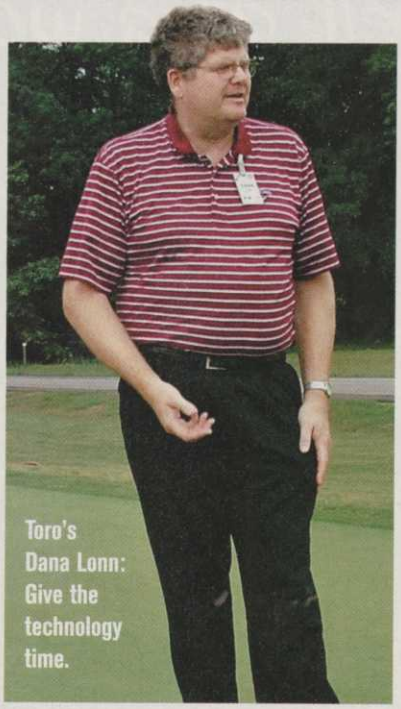
Carlson leaves Jacobsen

Charlotte, N.C.-based Jacobsen announced in July that President Jon R. Carlson had left the Textron company to pursue other interests. Barclay Olson, president of Textron's Industrial segment, will run the business until a replacement is named.

"Jacobsen's strategic direction remains unchanged," Olson said. "We will continue to focus intensely on dealer and customer satisfaction, product innovation and reliability, and ultimately superior business performance."

To Go Where No Superintendent Has Gone Before?

GPS HAS BEEN SLOW GETTING TO THE GOLF MAINTENANCE INDUSTRY. BUT EXPERTS VOW THAT IT IS COMING



Toro's Dana Lonn: Give the technology time.

By Anthony Pioppi, Contributing Editor

If you believed the hype five years ago, by now the golf course maintenance industry should be seeped in Global Positioning System (GPS) and its myriad of uses. But that is not the reality.

In fact, widespread use of GPS is still years from coming to fruition. Although there is no doubt that GPS technology is on the way, it's no more evident on the golf course today than it was in 2000. The predictions of fleet management tools and unmanned mowers have yet to be realized. Mark Schmidt, senior project manager and senior agronomist for John Deere & Co., said the buildup was overstated. He said GPS became the umbrella term for all new technology.

Although GPS in its most basic definition is nothing more than a locating device that tracks where something is and where something was, manufacturers insist there is a place for GPS in the golf maintenance field.

"With any technology, you have to find value for the customer," Schmidt said. "People want to know what's the payback for them."

One way is equipment tracking, not in the Big Brother sense of keeping an eye on where everybody is all the time, but to better monitor usage through extremely accurate records, according to Dana Lonn, director of the Center for Advanced Turf Technology at The Toro Co. "That is one way to better track cost," Lonn said.

Another way is to monitor, for instance, why it takes one worker twice the amount of time to perform the same task as another. In that way GPS could be used as a teaching tool.

When GPS was first touted, one of

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PHOTOGRAPH BY: LARRY AYLWARD

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its more glamorous applications was for turf diagnosis. Lonn said that will still become a reality. The process will combine technology that monitors light absorption of the turf along with GPS to track the readings. The sensors won't be able to determine what's wrong with the grass, only if it is stressed or healthy, giving superintendents an advantage in preventing disease outbreak.

Lonn said Toro is trying to determine whether it makes more sense to sell the sensors to superintendents or sell the technology to third parties that would monitor the information.

In the past few years there has been a realization that GPS could lead to autonomous mowers. Lonn and Schmidt agree the technology is on the way.

"It's not a matter of if, but a matter of when," Lonn said. "We've more or less figured out how to do this. We haven't figured out how to do it commercially."

Schmidt said autonomous mowers, like other GPS applications, come down to the question: "Where's the value in the technology?"

Ed Wagner, president of Massachusetts-based Chaperon Guidance Systems, is baffled by the unwillingness of the industry to move in that direction as a quicker pace. His company created the technology for unmanned or autonomous mowers but the industry turned it away, he said. "The owners very much wanted the technology. The OEMs (original equipment manufacturers) did not," he said.

Prototypes of the machines impressed a number of owners and superintendents in Massachusetts who said they would implement the technology that involved one worker chaperoning a number of mowers.

The first step in utilizing the GPS technology this way would have been to modify machines into unmanned mowers. The logical next step would have been for manufacturers to develop mowers that, because they would not need to accommodate a rider, would be smaller, lighter, use less hydraulics and fuel and thereby cost less to run and to purchase. Ultimately, Wagner said the price points would have gone down and that scared away manufacturers.

Wagner went looking for another customer once the golf equipment manufacturers turned their backs on his technology. He found it in the Department of Homeland Security, which is using autonomous devices to monitor areas such as pipelines and natural gas storage facilities.

Wagner surmised that autonomous mowers would make their way to the golf industry but via a nontraditional route. "What you will see is that the next generation of mowers will come from offshore manufacturers," he said, in part because traditional industry leaders don't want to take a chance. "It's easier to be a fast follower than be first in the market."

Quotable

"We don't talk about hurricanes here anymore. It's like taboo."

— Rob Kloska, superintendent of the Jupiter Island Club in Hobe Sound, Fla.

"There's not a whole lot to do around here. But you manage."

— Jerry Bonner, who interned on the golf course maintenance staff at Pinehurst No. 2 this year, on the nightlife in the quaint town of Pinehurst, which ain't exactly Vegas.

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tournaments. Penn A-1 can be seen at Augusta National (Masters), Penn G-2 at Pinehurst (U.S. Open) and Penn A-4 at Baltusrol (PGA Championship).

Not that Tee-2-Green is resting on its laurels. Among its newer varieties, the creeping bentgrass Seaside II is gaining in popularity because of its high salt tolerance and drought resistance. Then there's the old standby, PennCross, which recently celebrated its 50th anniversary. It's still the No. 1-selling bentgrass in the industry, the company says.

As for velvet bentgrasses, Fraser lauded Greenwich for its heat tolerance, low fertility and disease resistance. "And what we've actually seen over time is that the (Greenwich) velvet actually starts to push into the creeping bents that might be planted next to them," she said.

Bermadagrass —Thanks to hybrids, this variety has come a long way. "It wasn't too long ago when the only seeded bermudagrass you could buy was AZ Commons," Fraser said. "We've come a long way in a relatively short period of time."

New varieties have finer leaves, shorter internodes and improved mowing quality and winter hardiness. "We've mowed them down to a half (-inch) here," Fraser said.

Fraser cited the company's efforts to improve the salt and shade tolerance of bermudagrass.

Seashore paspalum — Sea Spray is the first brand available from seed and can be used anywhere on the course.

"From an agronomic standpoint, it's every exciting to me to see what great turf it makes," Fraser said. "Last year on the (North Carolina) farm during the heat of summer the two very best varieties were Sea Spray and Greenwich velvet bentgrass. Those were the two shiniest varieties, and the way it's looking now (with Sea Spray), we're going to see that again this summer."

Sea Spray's cold tolerance is still being studied, Fraser added.