Turf-Seed Rolls Out Green Carpet in Rolesville

MINUS ITS SIDELINED FOUNDER, BILL ROSE, THE TURFGRASS COMPANY FLAUNTS ITS WORK DURING ANNUAL FIELD DAY

By Thomas Skernivitz, Managing Editor

Sister companies Turf-Seed Inc. and Pure-Seed Testing Inc. finally got some wonderful weather June 17 for their annual field day. Unfortunately, their founder, Bill Rose, couldn't be in Rolesville, N.C., to enjoy it.

Rose, who started Turf-Seed in 1970 and its research arm, Pure-Seed Testing, four years later, suffered neck fractures June 11 at his farm in Oregon. While attempting to separate a cow and its calf, Rose was flipped into the air by the cow. He landed on his head and was knocked out of commission for four to six weeks.

"He's going to be fine. There's no paralysis," Turf-Seed CEO Gordon Zielinski said. "He seems in very good spirits, and he was anxious that he wasn't here."

Typifying Rose's demeanor, he's been telling everyone that the cow "didn't mean it."

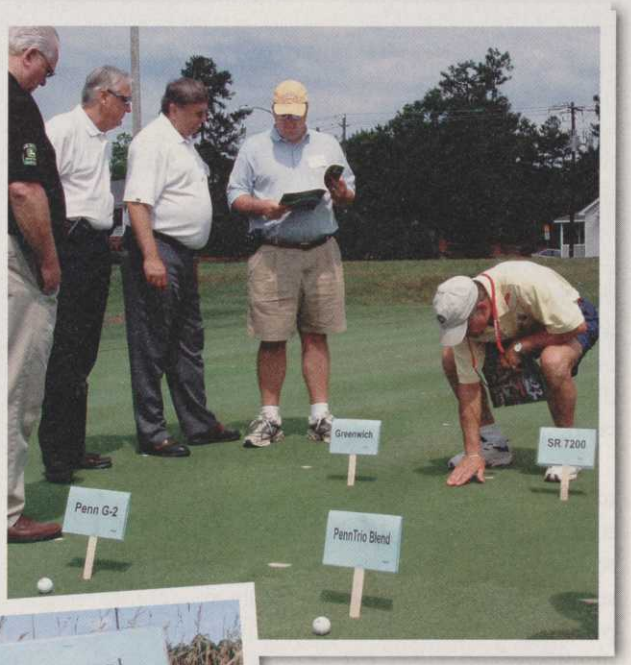
In Rose's absence, his colleagues and a guest speaker, Maria Tomaso-Peterson, representing Mississippi State University, carried the show, which alternates every year between Hubbard, Ore., and Rolesville. They covered the gamut of turfgrasses and respective issues that are affecting courses throughout the country:

2005 turfgrass crop — Oregon experienced an unusually dry fall and early winter. Some February days even hit 80 degrees. But the rains finally came — "they always do," Zielinski said — and April and May saw a large amount of precipitation.

"We thought there were going to be production issues on the tall fescue and perennial ryegrass," Zielinski said. "Right now the crops have recovered, and it looks like we'll have a good harvest. Overall, the year will have good supply, but we may see shortages by specific varieties."

Perennial ryegrass —Tomaso-Peterson, an assistant professor of turfgrass pathology, addressed host resistance. And while noting that North Carolina is susceptible to diseases that aren't prevalent in Oregon, she focused on gray leaf spot and its effect on perennial ryegrass. The condition has plagued the Carolinas and surrounding states for more than 15 years, and in August 2004 — nine months after seeding — it "just hammered" one of Turf-Seed's ryegrass trials in Rolesville.

"Over time (gray leaf spot) has spread all the way into the St. Louis area and has gone as far east as the Maryland and New York areas along the eastern seaboard," Tomaso-Peterson said. "It's gotten to the point where golf courses have lost so many fairways that they are converting to bentgrass."



▲ **Attendees of Turf-Seed's annual field day in Rolesville, N.C., bow down to Greenwich velvet bentgrass, one of the company's most impressive varieties of turf, thanks to its heat tolerance, low fertility and disease resistance.**

◀ **Native grass mixes are becoming more popular on courses, especially on outer rough areas and steep banks. The grasses appear intimidating from the tee, but don't prohibit the player from retrieving the ball. They also provide a food source to wildlife.**

Pure-Seed Testing's research director, Melodee Fraser, said the company is making "great progress" in gray leaf spot resistance in perennial ryegrass. She singled out an experimental variety, PST-2BL, as the most successful.

"This (trial) is one of the most exciting things you'll see on the research farm," Fraser said. "I get a lot questions from superintendents, particularly about collar areas. They overseed their bermudagrass collars and they'd really like to hold that year round. They ask if we have varieties that can do it. This (trial) might help us be more confident in areas like that around the green that are highly maintained and receive irrigation when it needs it."

Bentgrass —Tee-2-Green Corp., another division of the Rose enterprise, is quick to point out that its creeping bentgrasses are represented at three of this season's four major

Continued on page 16

PHOTOGRAPHS BY: THOMAS SKERNIVITZ

Off The Fringe

Continued from page 12
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.

Continued from page 15
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.