

# Off The Fringe

NEWS WITH A HOOK

## Business briefs

### Arysta N.A. buys Micro Flo, a subsidiary of BASF

Arysta LifeScience North America Corp. acquired the major assets of Micro Flo Co. LLC, a wholly owned subsidiary of BASF Corp.

The acquisition broadens the scope of Arysta LifeScience's North American sales operations and creates a strategic position in the U.S. crop protection segment.

"With this acquisition, Arysta LifeScience gains a solid range of products, a proven U.S. distribution network and a capable and experienced sales force with excellent customer relationships," said Dr. Christopher Richards, Arysta LifeScience president and CEO.

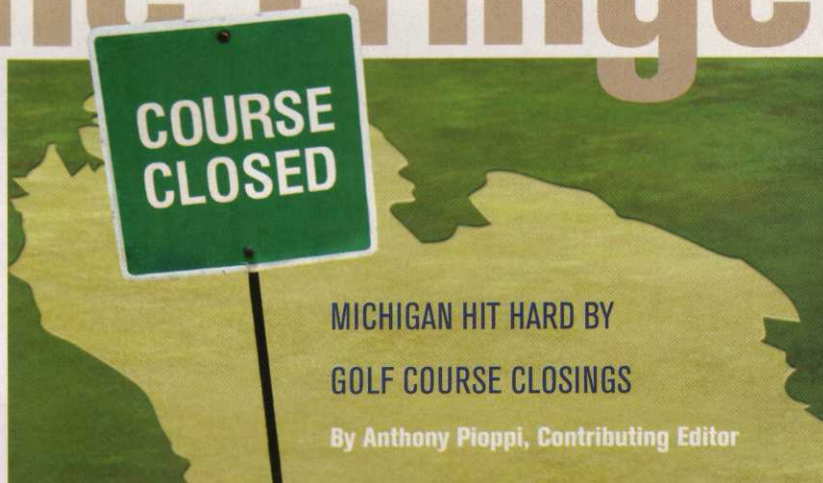
"Micro Flo is highly regarded for its portfolio of products and its customer service focus. Adding Micro Flo's operations to our existing presence in North America will give Arysta LifeScience a substantially stronger platform for future growth in the region."

Closing of the transaction is expected by the end of the first quarter this year, pending customary regulatory approvals. Both companies agreed not to disclose financial details of the transaction.

Micro Flo, with headquarters in Memphis, Tenn., and a formulation site in Sparks, Ga., is a manufacturer and distributor of off-patent crop protection chemicals and offers a variety of manufacturing and distribution services. This includes wholesale distributorships for fungicides, herbicides, insecticides and plant growth-regulating agents. Micro Flo has relationships with the major U.S.-based agricultural distribution networks.

Under the agreement, Arysta LifeScience will acquire the commercial business of Micro Flo, including a portfolio of active ingredients

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### MICHIGAN HIT HARD BY GOLF COURSE CLOSINGS

By Anthony Pioppi, Contributing Editor

## Ceasing Operation

Only a few years ago Michigan was the darling of golf course construction. How times have changed. This year the Wolverine state will see more golf courses bulldozed under than built. There were slightly more than 850 golf courses in Michigan at the beginning of 2006. There will be many less at the end of the year.

Michigan, like the Myrtle Beach area before it, is undergoing a market correction, which means golf course closings. While some are being eradicated and others are on death's door, only one course will be built in 2006.

Golf course openings are down across the country. The National Golf Foundation said 124.5 courses (in 18-hole equivalents) opened in 2005 compared with 150.5 in 2004. In the record year of 2000, 398.5 courses opened.

Jerry Matthews is by far the most prolific architect in Michigan's history, having his hand in more than 100 designs, including some with his father Bruce Matthews, with whom he began designing in 1959. He said he foresaw the golf boom ending in his home state but not like this.

"I felt it would slow down. It ended abruptly," the 72-year-old Matthews said.

Included in the growing list of courses that no longer exist is the Wolverine Golf Course, the first layout Matthews designed with his father. He said he was stunned and saddened when he drove up expecting to see golf holes and instead found homes.

"You have a lot of memories tied up in what you do," Matthews said.

He and partner Gary Chapman have no new courses on the drawing board, although they are in talks that could lead to designs. Their work is coming from renovations.

Matthews said he and Chapman have come up with six reasons for the dire conditions of the golf market:

- The state, especially in the southeast region, is overbuilt.
- The economy is down, more than that of other

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# 'I Absolutely Fell in Love with the Business'

By Larry Aylward, Editor in Chief

**T**he best thing about being a woman in a male-dominated field, Brigit Braun jokes, is that the women's rooms are never crowded at the Golf Industry Show.

Braun laughs. She's been a woman in the golf course maintenance industry for about 25 years. Braun began as a greenkeeper and worked her way up to a certified superintendent. She's now a turf district sales manager for Precision Laboratories. She loves the field as much as any man does.

Braun attended the University of Wisconsin and studied journalism. When she graduated from college in 1980, she headed to Hilton Head, S.C.

"I went down there on a lark," she says. "I didn't know what I was going to do."

Instead of landing a job as a journalist for the local newspaper, Braun ended up working on the golf course maintenance crew at Seabrook Island Resort.

"I absolutely fell in love with the business," she says.

She took the job partly because of her love for golf. Braun once qualified for the U.S. Amateur and now plays to about an 8 handicap.

"I grew up playing golf, but I never saw women working on the golf course," Braun says. "So I never equated that that was an option."

Braun learned golf course maintenance on the job.

"I put my nose to the grindstone," she says. "I took advantage of continuing education and short courses. I just dove into it."

In nine months on the job at Seabrook, Braun worked for three dif-

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ferent superintendents. With such turnover, she figured she had a good chance to move up the career ladder quickly.

Braun landed her first superintendent's job in 1984 at the now-defunct University Club of Jacksonville, Fla., which was operated by a management company. She took a job with ValleyCrest Golf Course Maintenance in 1995 and the next year moved to California, where she managed the city of Modesto's golf courses. She returned to

Florida under ValleyCrest in 1998 and worked as a regional superintendent. She left the company in 2003.

In April 2004 she learned that Precision was looking for a new sales rep in Florida. As a superintendent, Braun had used Cascade, Precision's wetting agent product, and was impressed with it. "If I could sell anything, it would be Cascade because I know that it works," she says.

She contacted Precision and got the job a few months later. She's the only woman sales person on the turf side at Precision.

"But there are no gender issues in this company," she says. "I couldn't ask for a more supportive group to work for."

Braun says she likes being on the other side of the fence, so to speak. She likes speaking with superintendents about their challenges and getting the opportunity to help them.

"I know how they feel," Braun says. "I bring a lot of credibility because I've been there and done that."

What does Braun, who was "called on" often during her days as a superintendent, think of salespeople?

"There are salespeople that don't deserve any business, and there are sales people who really bring value," she says. "It's all about, 'What can I do to make your job easier?'"

Many times, Braun says she goes on sales calls and doesn't even talk about Precision's products. She'll just speak with superintendents about the things they're battling that day and try to offer some advice. "When you do that — just bring information to them — it's huge," she says.

Back to that journalism degree, which wasn't all for naught, Braun says, adding that classes she took in the field taught her to become a better communicator. But the biggest thing she's learned in her life is that you have to do what you really want to do for a living.

"When you find something you love, you just go do it," Braun says.



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states because of its reliance on the battered automotive industry.

- Skyrocketing land prices have led many owners to sell courses to real estate developers.

- Many courses were built without good marketing strategies and in poor locations.

- The burgeoning casino industry has hurt the golf industry.

- The changes in people's recreation habits.

According to Matthews, the last factor is often overlooked. He said individuals and families have more options than in past years for recreation. Now people participate in activities that weren't available when many of the public courses were built.

Matthews is not optimistic, but his attitude is countered by another Michigan architect, Ray Hearn, who estimates that 75 percent of all closings are actually because of sales to developers. He said he is in talks with two separate owners who, if they sell their courses to homebuilders, intend to immediately find land and build new courses. Both current layouts could sell in the \$20 million range.

Hearn does concede that courses built without adequate research are shutting down as well; some have been in business less than 15 years. He said owners often built on a whim, sometimes just for the novelty of owning a course. Many of those owners are finding themselves in tough times.

"Those days are gone. Now it's a very business-savvy industry," Hearn said.

There are those who say government is to blame for the downturn, including Kate Moore, the executive director of the Michigan Golf Course Owners Association (MGCOA). She said municipalities have built courses with unfair advantages and forced out owners in the process.

"Government-owned golf courses have impacted private-sector-owned golf courses," she said.

In Michigan, as one example, because municipal courses do not have to pay sales tax on equipment purchases, they have fewer operating expenses than the competition.

She does concede that Michigan is overbuilt. Between 1998 and 2003 about 150 public courses were opened. "The fact is there are too many golf courses in Michigan," she said.

Moore said many golf course owners think some municipalities have gone too far in their attempts to attract more customers who would be taken from privately owned facilities since golf participation in the state is stagnant. For instance, the city of Lansing granted a liquor license to one of its courses so it could entice outings.

"Municipal golf is a place for young people to learn the game," she said. "Its purpose is not to make money."

Mike LaFaive, director of fiscal policy for the Mackinac

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Center for Public Policy, a conservative research institute, sided with the MGCOA. He said many municipalities are forcing taxpayers to carry the burden of courses losing money.

A July 31, 2005, article in the Lansing State Journal newspaper said the four courses owned by the city of Lansing lost an average of \$641,500 from 2000 to 2004, with a projected deficit of \$475,000 in 2005.

LaFaive said golf is not the only area from which governments should stop playing a role. He does not understand why municipalities should build and maintain parks or tennis courts.

To many superintendents, it doesn't matter whether a government is in the business of providing recreation. They have more important concerns, such as finding jobs.

At Traverse City Golf and Country Club, superintendent Steve Hammon said he realized the state of affairs when he posted an opening for an assistant superintendent and six of the first 20 applicants had head superintendent experience.

Hammon said another sign of the tough times for the industry occurred when his course decided to purchase a new irrigation system. More than one irrigation installer he spoke with told him that it was the only course they had bid on in 2005.

Hammon said his private club is doing well, but others are not. He said some private courses have waived initiation fees in an attempt to attract new members.

## Quotable

**"We're going to lose our ash."**

— Dave Shetlar, professor of entomology at The Ohio State University, on the threat posed by the Emerald Ash Borer, an exotic beetle that's killing ash trees in Michigan, Indiana and Ohio.

**"America is the only country in which the average amateur game cannot be played in four hours or less, but no one wants to address this unspoken gripe."**

— W. Eric Laing, author of *"America! What Have You Done to the Auld Game?"* and self-proclaimed grumpy old Scotsman.



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and registrations, the Micro Flo trademark, patents and the development laboratory located in Sparks.

### Pair of veteran employees take reins at Floratine

Brian Goodwin and Peter Stromberg, a pair of veteran employees of the Floratine Products Group, are the new co-owners of the company. In addition, Goodwin was named CEO while Stromberg was named executive vice president, with international responsibilities.

Floratine co-founders Bill Byrnes and Travis Jones will continue to serve in senior executive roles.

"Both Peter and I are anxious to continue building on positive company growth and increasing brand awareness," Goodwin said. "As long-term employees and now as owners, we have a vested interest in the company, including its mission, employees, and products and services. Our goal is to improve upon what is already in place."

"It is a very exciting time at Floratine," Byrnes added. "Not only do we have new very capable, highly regarded individuals leading the company, but our reputation for providing technical competence and assistance is gaining increased awareness and respect within the golf maintenance industry."

### Combs no longer just on the 'interim' at Torrey Pines

Candice Combs could be the first female superintendent to host a U.S. Open after she and assistant Bill Sinclair were permanently hired by the City of San Diego to tend the courses at Torrey Pines.

The South Course at Torrey Pines is slated to host the 2008 Open.

According to the *San Diego Union-Tribune*, City Manager Mark Woodward praised Combs and Sinclair for their preparation for the Buick Invitational and noted their positive agronomic reviews in the tournament's wake. Woodward had moved the pair from Balboa Park in July for a tryout.

## New Bayer Boss Takes Humble Approach

CLEVELAND: I DON'T KNOW EVERYTHING

By Larry Aylward, Editor in Chief

**N**eil Cleveland is the new chief in charge of the U.S. Green Business for Bayer Environmental Science, but he'll be the first to tell you he doesn't know everything.

"I'm smart enough to know that I'm stupid about some things," said Cleveland, whose first day at his new post was April 3.

But Cleveland stressed that he's not concerned that he doesn't know it all because he has a solid support staff, including several former superintendents. "We can take advantage of the total brain power we have available and do some good things for the industry."

Cleveland returns home to the United States, specifically Raleigh, N.C., from France to assume his post. For the last two years, Cleveland had been Bayer's global portfolio manager of Green Business at the company's global headquarters in Lyon, France.

"It's been a wonderful experience," said Cleveland, who was promoted to his previous title from regional sales manager of Bayer's U.S. Lawn Care & Landscape in Kansas

City, Mo. Why did Bayer's top brass pick Cleveland to succeed Dan Carrothers, who resigned at the end of 2005?

"That's a fair question," said Cleveland, who has held various titles with Bayer since 1993. Cleveland said he "grew up" on the golf course side of the business as a senior sales representative from 1993 through 1996.

**"We can take advantage of the total brain power we have available and do some good things for the industry."**

"I think I bring a good understanding of the day-to-day things that an assistant superintendent and a golf course superintendent must go through," he said.

One thing is for certain, Cleveland says, and that is he will not take Bayer's business for granted.

"One of the things we need to make sure we do is remain humble," Cleveland said. "We need to earn this business on a day-in-and-day-out basis."

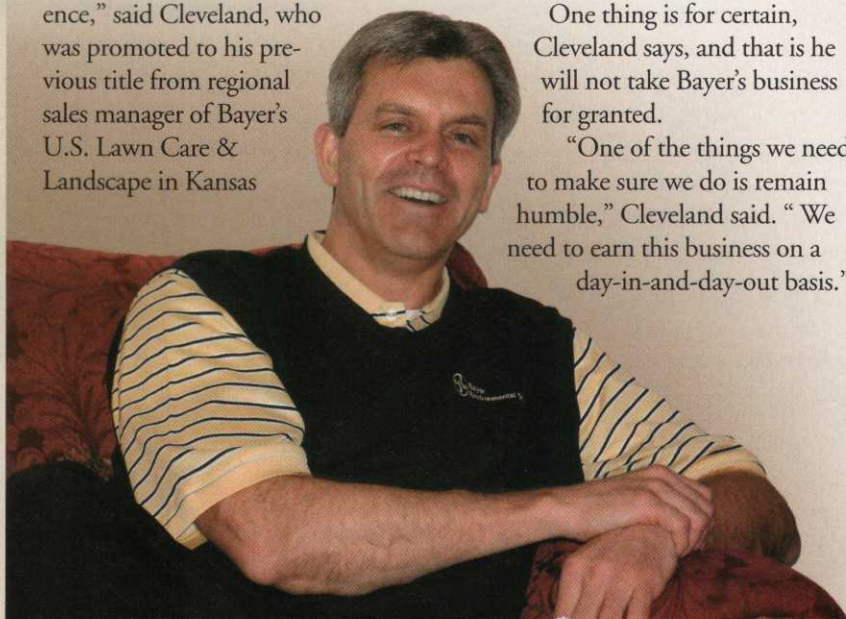


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