

Off The Fringe

NEWS WITH A HOOK

Business briefs

H-2B Cap Nearing Capacity

The Federation of Employers and Workers of America (FEWA) is advising its members utilizing the H-2B seasonal guest worker program that their access to this legal source of temporary workers may be severely limited for the first half of fiscal year 2006.

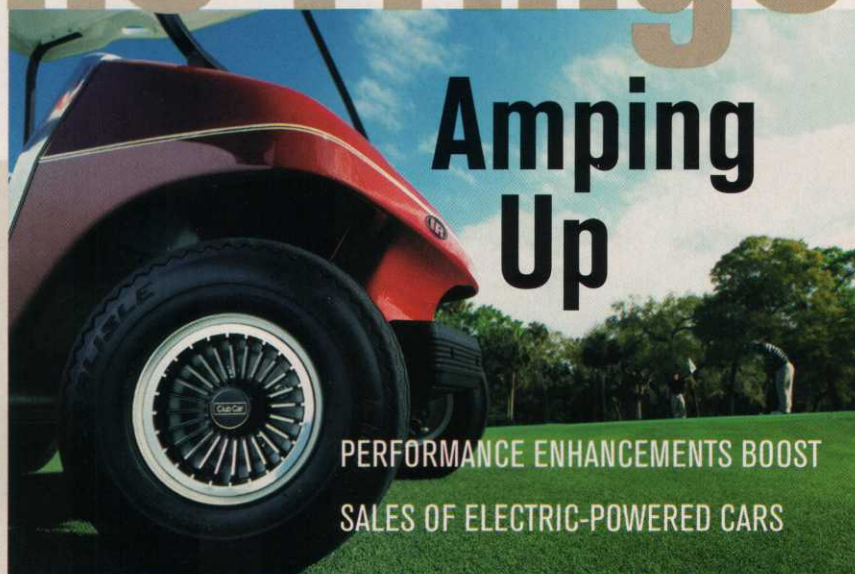
Program statistics released by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) indicate that 28,015 of the 33,000 H-2B worker visas available in the first half of fiscal year 2006 were approved or were pending approval as of Oct. 23. The remaining 33,000 visas will not be available to employers until April 1.

However, thanks to the efforts of the H-2B Workforce Coalition, which FEWA co-chairs, employers will still be able to bring in qualified workers even after the cap is reached, said John Meredith, FEWA vice president of government relations. Meredith's reference is to a provision in the Save Our Small and Seasonal Businesses Act of 2005 enacted earlier this year. The new law provides workers who participated in the H-2B program in any one of the last three fiscal years an exemption from the statutory cap. These returning workers, designated H-2R, will be allowed to enter the country and work in temporary jobs that American workers do not take at anytime in fiscal year 2006.

Carolina GCSA founder dies

Grant Bennett, one of two men responsible for forming the Carolinas Golf Course Superintendents Association, died at the age of 85 in October in Columbia, S.C.

Described as a "local giant" in the *The State* newspaper, Bennett was a superintendent, club professional and teacher.



By Thomas Skernivitz
Managing Editor

Golf cars that run on gas may never follow in the tracks of the Edsel, but they are close to being lapped in popularity by their ever-improving electric counterparts.

At least one car manufacturer, Club Car, currently has a sales split of 60/40 in favor of electric-powered cars over the once-dominant gas models. The change in ride is far from dramatic, as the trend began five to 10 years ago, the company says.

"I don't foresee a day that we will not produce gas cars, but I do think that you're finding more and more factors that will contribute to increased electric vehicle demand," says Mike Read, Club Car's director of marketing.

The primary reason behind going electric is improved performance. Gone are the days of reaching the bottom of a hill in a battery-operated car and having to recite a Hail Mary

or two in hope of getting back up.

"It used to be that everyone had 36-volt cars," says Robert Kirby, the marketing coordinator for Yamaha Golf Car. "But now the technology of 48-volt cars and the power of the batteries is so good that there is not a benefit of one over the other as far as hill climbing or terrain goes."

Potential buyers, Read says, are usually caught off guard while testing today's electric-powered cars. Club Car's electric vehicles run on four custom-designed 12-volt batteries in place of the outdated and heavier six 8-volt batteries. Fewer terminal connections reduce system resistance by 33 percent. And an onboard computer system works in tandem with a battery charger to replace the exact amount of energy needed to replenish the batteries without overcharging.

Yamaha's top electric car features a regenerative braking system that feeds energy back into the batteries and moderates the car's speed on downhill inclines. Its battery charger and bat-

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GCSAA Full Steam Ahead in Promoting PDI

By Thomas Skernivitz

Thirty months after being ratified, the Professional Development Initiative (PDI) is still an evolving issue between the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America (GCSAA) and its members.

Steve Mona, the CEO of the GCSAA, updated a few hundred of his constituents on the topic in December at the annual meeting of the Ohio Turfgrass Foundation in Columbus.

Foremost, Mona said the intent of the PDI is not to disenfranchise superintendent members. However, the GCSAA will not hold back in its promotion of the initiative, which requires certain competencies of a superintendent in order to attain or maintain class A status.

"We have people that we know will choose not to do class A for whatever reason, and that's their choice. They will still be a member and still have all the rights and privileges, with this exception," Mona said. "What we're going to say is (that) the GCSAA member is better than a nonmember. We're not going to really put it that way, but we are going to promote GCSAA membership as being valuable to your superintendent at your facility."

The promotional efforts will be directed at three groups: employers of superintendents; influential golfers or non-employers who have some influence at a club; and avid golfers, those who play more than 25 rounds per year.

Identifying those groups is essential, Mona said. And accomplishing that is possible only with the help of GCSAA members. "We have to know who they are. We have to know their addresses," Mona said. "We're asking our members to help us with that because we're not going to communicate with their employees or their influencers or their avid golfers unless they give us permission."

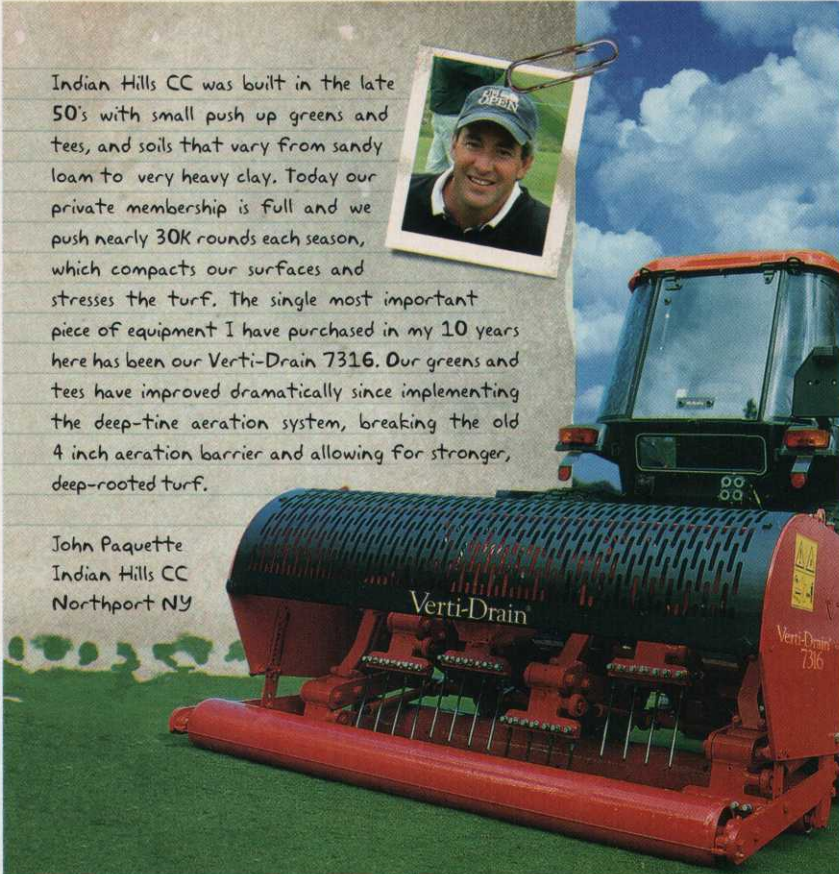
Once granted that "permission," the

GCSAA will emphasize that the efforts of the superintendent benefit the economic success of the facility and the enjoyment of the game.

"At the end of the day what we hope to have are our members feeling like there is benefit and value in becoming a

class A member and keeping that class A," Mona said. "And then we as an association proving that by communicating effectively to employers, and employers starting to actually ask for GCSAA class A members."

The PDI took effect July 1, 2003.



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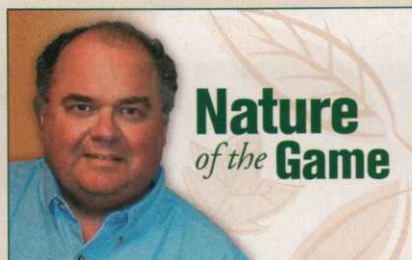
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Here's How to Turn Golfers Into Bird Watchers

BY RON DODSON

Editor's Note: *This column will appear regularly in Golfdom. Dodson, the CEO of Audubon International, can be reached at rdodson@auduboninternational.org.*



It's winter, and it's cold and snowy here in the Northern climes, which is nothing new. In fact, the snow began flying early this winter. Of course, the snow birds have migrated to the warm South with their golf clubs in tow and superintendents there are back to their full-action mode for the next several months.

But with the changing of the seasons comes another opportunity for golf courses — and that is to start or restart a bird-feeding program on the course. In the North, the harsh winter weather puts considerable stress on birds, and a bird-feeding program can help birds' ability to survive the long winter months. Even in the South, supplementing natural occurring food sources can be beneficial to bird conservation.

Birds, just like us, have certain food preferences. Birds such as wrens eat insects. Birds of prey, such as owls and hawks, may prefer rodents. But many birds, such as finches, are seed eaters. So putting out a feeder with various seed products can attract and benefit a range of seed-eating bird species. Seeds provide protein and fat that give birds energy and help them stay warm, which is particularly im-

portant during the winter months in the North.

Bird feeding is basic and simple. A bird-feeding station can not only help birds survive but can also be an enjoyable activity for people who may be using the clubhouse facilities to obtain their own human version of food and drink. It gives golfers and others the opportunity to see all the different types of birds that benefit from the fact that they are on a golf course and are being provided food.

To have a successful bird feeding program you will need to choose the correct types of feeders. There are several different types of feeders including:

Hanging tube feeders are easy to fill and the food is clearly displayed to the birds. The feeders usually have metal reinforced perches to help deter squirrels from taking over the feeders.

House-style feeders are generally large and attractive and will hold larger quantities of seed so they don't have to be re-filled very often. House-style feeders are usually mounted on a pole, and some form of "baffle" should be fitted around the pole to keep squirrels from climbing up and helping themselves!

Ground feeders are simple and will attract birds like cardinals, mourning

doves, sparrows and many other birds that prefer to eat on the ground. A ground feeder can be as simple as just putting out one of those disposable aluminum baking pans and putting seed in it. The squirrels, however, will thank you for this, too.

Suet feeders are especially beneficial to woodpeckers, but nuthatches, chickadees and others will also frequent suet. Suet can be hung in wire cages or even small onion bags. Remember, in warmer climates, suet needs to be changed regularly.

Finally, make certain to choose the right types of seed. If you decide to start a bird-feeding program, don't be tempted to purchase those inexpensive brands often found in grocery stores. About 80 percent to 90 percent of the seeds in those bags are red millet. Birds won't eat red millet and simply scratch the seed off onto the ground. So you will be wasting your time and money. Look for quality seed products that list on the label the following seed types:

- ▶ sunflower seed (the top choice);
- ▶ cracked corn;
- ▶ white proso millet;
- ▶ thistle;
- ▶ safflower; and
- ▶ peanuts

If you haven't started feeding birds on your golf course, now would be a great time to begin. The birds will appreciate it, golfers will see and enjoy it, and you will be demonstrating your efforts to be wildlife friendly.



PHOTO BY: ISTOCK INTERNATIONAL INC.

Off The Fringe

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teries were developed jointly by the respective manufacturers to ensure optimum performance. And an integrated diagnostic system allows service technicians to communicate with each car via a wireless infrared transmission.

"I think we're demonstrating clearly that in many cases electric provides actually better performance than gas," Read says.

Heightened fuel costs apparently have not played a role in the popularity of electric cars. Despite record-high prices, manufacturers experienced no sales anomalies during 2005. "I don't think the price of gas alone has swayed anybody over," Read says.

Four 12-volt batteries help Club Car's electric-powered cars run more efficiently.



Ron Ciancutti, the purchasing manager for the Cleveland MetroParks, which operates six public golf courses, has yet to make the switch to electric. When he finally does, vehicle performance and protecting the environment will be the determining factors more so than fuel prices.

"Are we looking more toward electric? Sure. Is the reason because of a gas crisis? No," Ciancutti says. "The reason is because (electric) is becoming a more reliable product, and it's a cleaner product. A lot of the companies and entities that have golf courses are environmental agencies such as ours, and we have commitments to the environment as well as our constituents."

Battery-powered cars are conducive to tougher emission and noise standards. They eliminate the oil and hydraulic fluid leaks that pester su-

perintendents. "Certainly, environmental concerns are increasing," Read says. "And if the residential market is any indication, certainly that could continue the trend in that direction."

Manufacturers are prepared for increased demand. Most of Club Car's research and development, Read says, has been in the electric arena.

"We'll continue to focus on electric vehicle technology," Read says. "That's not to suggest we're taking our eye off the gas product, but our intention for the future is to offer other items that can either improve the maintenance or continue to deliver superior performance to the controller configuration."

At Yamaha, the move from gas to electric is unique. The company is still the only one within the golf car industry that builds its own gas engine. "Gas is still a big stronghold of ours," Kirby says. "But there's a big emphasis to explore alternative fuel cars as well."

Although the leasing prices of electric and gas cars are "roughly the same," according to Read — "(price) isn't what's swinging many decisions today," he notes — battery-powered cars do require a specially designed cart barn.

"To convert your cart storage facility to electric would require some kind of investment," Read says.

Ciancutti, in anticipation of possibly replacing his gas-powered vehicles, is putting the electric cart barn before the electric horse. In building a new cart facility at one of his courses, the MetroParks decided to pay now rather than later. "We're going to put in all of the electrical posts in preparation for electrical cars," Ciancutti says. "Whether we commit to it or not, the cost is incremental and it's comparatively miniscule if we had to retrofit it later."

On the other hand, some courses stick with gas-powered cars because they "don't want to invest in building a cart barn," Kirby adds. And "certain courses want to be able to put gas in the car and send it on its way."

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More the Merrier

CAROLINAS SHOW GROWS SOME MORE IN 2005

Plenty of Southeast golf course superintendents have Carolina on their minds these days — especially come November when it's time for the Carolinas Golf Course Superintendents Conference and Trade Show. A seventh consecutive year of record numbers at the an-



nual show occurred this November and continue to point to the event's emergence as a focal point for the golf course maintenance industry in the Southeast, the association says. The four-day event in Myrtle Beach, S.C., set new highs in every major category, a trend that continues unbroken since 1998.

Chuck Borman, Carolinas GCSA executive director, says while growth was marginal in 2005 — attendance rose 3

percent — it was strongest and most encouraging in the number of attendees from outside the Carolinas.

"We only have so many members in the Carolinas and our growth has been so strong in recent years that we know we must plateau at some point," Borman says. "But one area where we are seeing things pick up some real steam is in visitors from out of state. I think the word is getting around that we provide high quality and high value."

The number of attendees from Georgia, Virginia and Florida rose more than 30 percent in 2005.

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Quotable

"I can call you farmers, is that correct?"

— *Rulon Gardner, two-time Olympic medalist, addressing the crowd at the outset of his keynote speech at the Ohio Turfgrass Conference and Show.*

"I guess experience means your old. It also means your still alive. I guess that's a good thing."

— *Tom Stine, co-founder of Golf Datatech, a golf market research firm, on his many years of "experience" in the golf business.*