

# Off The Fringe

NEWS WITH A HOOK

## Business briefs

### H-2B Cap Nearing Capacity

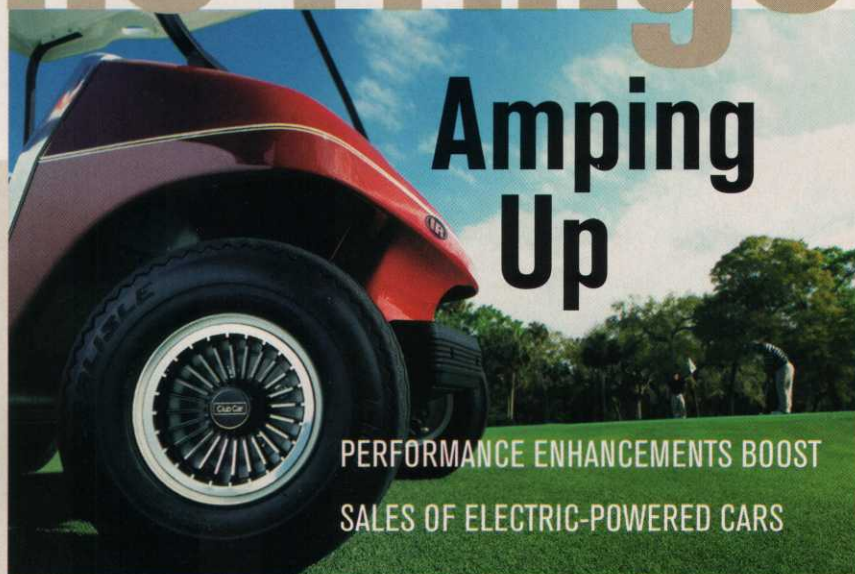
The Federation of Employers and Workers of America (FEWA) is advising its members utilizing the H-2B seasonal guest worker program that their access to this legal source of temporary workers may be severely limited for the first half of fiscal year 2006. Program statistics released by the U.S. Citizenship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

**G**olf 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-

*Continued on page 16*



# Off The Fringe

*Continued from page 12*

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."

**EWING**  
Irrigation & Golf & Industrial

**Turf and Irrigation Experts**  
*for all your needs.*

Featuring:

- Erosion Control
- Seed / Fertilizer / Pesticides
- Fountains
- Drainage Pipe and Fittings
- **Hunter**
- Irrigation Supplies

800.343.9464 | [www.ewing1.com](http://www.ewing1.com)

Over 150 Locations  
est. 1922