

Off The Fringe

NEWS WITH A HOOK

Business briefs

PACE touts use of GPS, GIS

Global positioning systems (GPS) and geographic information systems (GIS) can and should be used in conjunction with sensors that monitor soil moisture and turf quality, Dr. Larry Stowell said in San Diego at the PACE Turfgrass Research Institute's 10th annual Turfgrass Research Seminar held in April.

Used together, those precision tools move turf management programs beyond IPM and beyond best management practices, according to Stowell, a PACE research director. They have proved effective in helping resolve problems that include irrigation distribution, soil moisture variability and white grub infestations, he told 145 turf managers.

A camera is an often forgotten but invaluable precision tool for documenting problems, techniques and progress toward turf management goals, Stowell said. In addition, the rise of digital photography makes it possible for turf managers to communicate easily with one another via photographic images.

Rain Bird's McWhirter retires

Rod McWhirter, Rain Bird Golf's national specification manager, retired April 30 after nearly 33 years with the company. McWhirter joined Rain Bird in 1973 as a golf course irrigation specialist. He helped develop the company's golf irrigation division into one of the world's top manufacturers of products and systems.

Stack, Bell Labs founder, dies

Malcolm G. Stack, 70, the founder of Bell Laboratories, died April 16 following a brief battle with cancer. Born May 9, 1935, in Manchester, England, Stack began Bell in 1974 and grew the business, which employs more than 300 people, into a leader in the pest control industry.

Region Crawling With Six-Legged Creatures

INSECTS THE TALK AT COASTAL RESEARCH SEMINAR

By Tom Skernivitz, Managing Editor

These are rich times for self-proclaimed bug lover Rick Brandenburg. The professor of entomology from North Carolina State University is surrounded by six-legged critters in his region. "This is bug heaven," he said of the coastal Carolinas and south Georgia.

Better yet, insects are more prevalent than ever because of pesticides that during the last dozen years have become increasingly kinder to the environment, Brandenburg said. While fish, birds, people and pets are safer today, so are many bugs.

"The challenge with the newer products is that most of them have

gotten a little more restrictive in the spectrum they cover," Brandenburg said at the Coastal Research Seminar, sponsored by Bayer Environmental Science and hosted by the Country Club of Charleston (S.C.) in April. "So we have grub insecticides and mole cricket insecticides and not just insecticides. They changed a little bit. And we have to be much more accurate with the timing for them to work well. But if we do all that, these new products that we have today are absolutely excellent."

So, what's bugging superintendents most these days?

■ **Earthworms:** Brandenburg's telephone has been ringing constantly the last decade because of earthworms that have invaded putting greens, tees, home lawns and athletic fields. "We

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(From left) Bruce Martin, Bert McCarty and Rick Brandenburg talk shop in South Carolina.

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didn't used to get those (phone calls)," he said.

Less toxic pesticides and changing irrigation practices have created a more favorable environment for earthworms, which is good and bad, according to Brandenburg. "It's good to know that we've kind of restored the balance in what we're doing ecologically," he says. "But the bad news is that you get a lot of earthworms on the putting green."

■ **Moles:** The plenitude of earthworms has led to an upswing in moles. "For years and years you probably heard the message, 'If you have moles, you have white grubs. You get rid of the white grubs, you get rid of the moles,'" Brandenburg said. "That's not necessarily true. If you catch one of those furry, little fellows and cut it open, you'll find that their stomachs are full of earthworms."

■ **Ants:** Fire ant products work particularly well, Brandenburg says, but they're only available where fire ants are widespread.

The dilemma in trying to eradicate ants is that many superintendents spray their putting greens, which solves the problem on a temporary basis. "The little mounds will go away for a day or two and then come right back on you," Brandenburg says. "That's primarily because most of the ant colonies are outside of the putting surface itself, and they send these scouts out that pop up (on the green)."

■ **Rove beetles:** The good news is that this insect feeds on cutworm eggs. But they still litter the course.

■ **Striped earwigs:** The tropical version of the earwig thrives on greens while feeding on cutworms and other bugs.

Striped earwigs dig a foot-long hole straight into the ground — you could slide a pencil into the opening — and push the soil up. Compounding the problem, birds arrive on the scene to eat the earwigs and wind up tearing up the greens. "I haven't figured out exactly what to do with these yet," Brandenburg says. "We've have tried treating them with everything that's labeled for cutworm control, and it doesn't seem to affect them very much."

✓ In order to combat these insects, superintendents need to know the best time to impact a population. This revolves around knowing the life cycles of pests, Brandenburg says. For instance, he says, once grubs and mole crickets become big, they're difficult to kill.

On the bright side for South Carolina-based superintendents, Clemson University could soon boast its own professor of entomology, Brandenburg said.

Two Clemson University professors, Bruce Martin and Bert McCarty, spoke on transition issues at the Bayer seminar.

Martin, a plant pathologist, said the same diseases that affect bermudagrass in a normal scenario affect the turf variety in the transition

Quotable

"This year has been unbelievable. This has been the best winter that I can remember."

— Jason Biddinger, the manager of Lafayette (Ga.) Municipal Golf Course, after recording 2,200 rounds played the first three months of the year, four times more than the same period in 2005. (*Journal and Courier*)

"If I don't get control of my gambling, it's going to flat-out ruin me."

— John Daly, in his new book, on his big bets.

zones. The conditions include dollar spot, yellow patch, brown patch and fairy ring. Another disease, *Rhizoctonia* leaf and sheath spot, is troublesome because its symptoms closely resemble fairy ring.

The quandary general to all transition-zone diseases is what occurs when fungicide treatment is involved.

"If we're spraying fungicides in the spring on our overseedings, what is that doing to the health of our overseedings as we're trying to transition later on?" Martin says. "Aren't we strengthening our overseedings and making it more competitive when we really want to be weakening and to get the bermudagrass [to take] off?"

McCarty, a professor of horticulture specializing in turfgrass science and management, spoke of the appropriate time to remove ryegrass during the transition process to bermudagrass. The latter requires night-time tempera-

tures of at least the mid- to upper-60s to aggressively grow laterally, he said.

"It can be 80 degrees (Fahrenheit) during the day, but if it drops into the 50s at night, it won't grow," McCarty says. "Bermudagrass will green up, but it's just going to sit there."

Hence, superintendents shouldn't apply herbicides until the temperatures reach this point. Considering bermudagrass needs 90-plus days of competitively free ryegrass-growing days, superintendents should apply their herbicides in May or early June.

"For most people in South Carolina, our bermudagrass basically shuts down the 15th of September because the days get shorter," McCarty said. "If you've still got ryegrass in your fairways June 15, I would highly recommend you pull the trigger and get rid of it chemically. Hopefully you've encouraged it to die off before then." ■