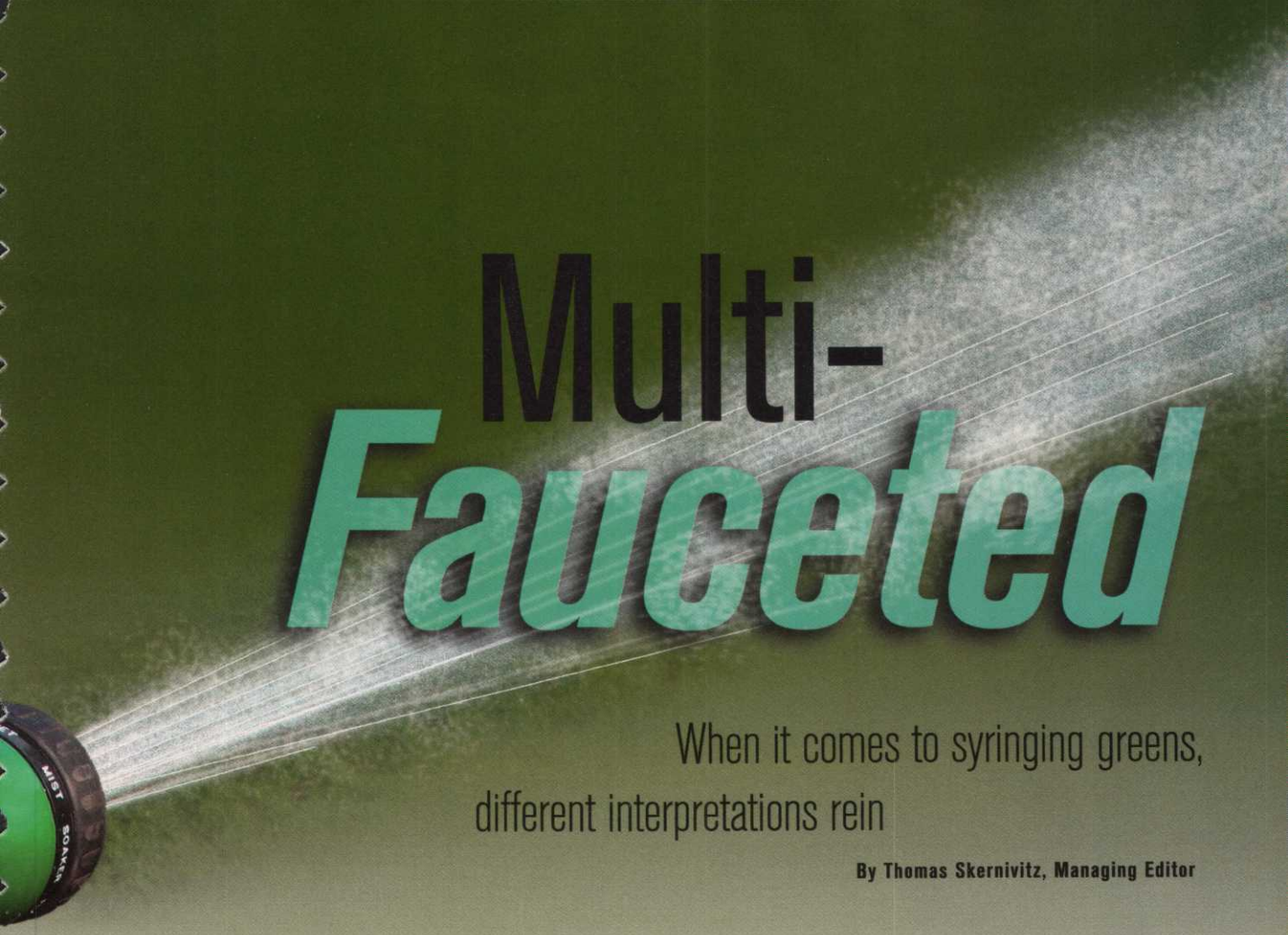



# Multi-Faceted

## When it comes to syringing greens, different interpretations rein

**By Thomas Skernivitz, Managing Editor**

Jerry Broughton thought he had heard every synonym for syringing, if only because his course in Oklahoma runs the terminological gamut when it comes to irrigation techniques. Then the veteran superintendent came across a Canadian colleague who referred to the practice as "boarding."

*Boarding*?

"I said, 'What do you mean 'boarding the green?' " Broughton recalls. "He says, 'Well, I'm putting water where the sprinklers don't put enough water.' I said, 'Oh, OK. We call that syringing.' "

"Different people," Broughton notes, "have different ideas what syringing really is."

Broughton's definitions of syringing are wide-ranging, which, he admits, can lead to confusion throughout the superintendent ranks. At his course, Twin Hills Golf and Country Club, in Edmond, Okla., there's definitely a difference when it comes to the three irrigation methods he most often uses — syringing, cooling and misting.

"Syringing" is what the Twin Hills crew does in the morning, when the high spots along the course haven't received as much water from the irrigation system as the low spots. "With our temperatures here, you can have disease real easy if you get the low spots too wet," Broughton says. "So what we have to do is go out with hoses and water the high spots."

By afternoon, if the temperature has significantly risen, the Twin Hills staff will start "cooling" the course. Water is sprayed on the greens specifically to lower the ground temperature and prevent wilted turf.

Different altogether is "misting" — a technique Broughton, 56, uses when the temperature and humidity are high. Preferably a mist never touches the ground, in order to limit the possibility of disease. "What we're trying to do in that situation is just put enough water in the air to cool the air temperature over the grounds, so the ground temperature will drop without putting any water on it," he says.

In cases of low humidity — 20 percent to 30 percent — and an escalating evapotranspiration rate, Broughton forgoes misting and instead syringes in the afternoon "because we're losing so much moisture that your grass will dehydrate and burn."

Superintendents in Oklahoma, Texas and Arkansas would probably recognize Broughton's semantics, he says. But someone in Arizona, maybe even his own brother, James, a certified superintendent in Scottsdale, might be perplexed.

"Their humidity is so low all the time (in Arizona), they're actually syringing every day … and you hardly ever hear them saying 'cooling' or 'misting' out there," Broughton says.

Although Broughton can live with the varied terminology, he worries that some superintendents, especially younger

*Continued on page 52*

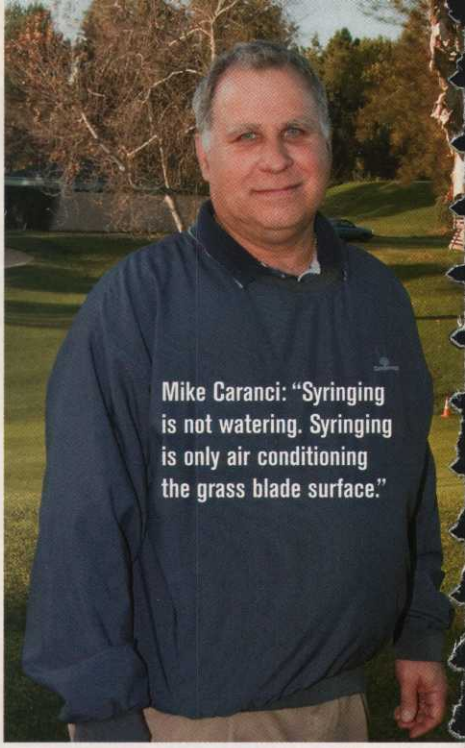
*Continued from page 51*

ones, don't know how to properly syringe or realize why they're doing it.

"The superintendent these days gets tied up in so many facets of his job that he doesn't get to stay in touch with his golf course and his greens particularly," Broughton says. "Even on my days off, I try to go by my greens and adjust the water so I know every day that those things are OK. And I do that from the first of March until October."

At Candlewood Country Club in Whittier, Calif., superintendent Mike Caranci's definition of syringing is a little more exact and also clears up what he believes is a popular misconception.

"Golfers must understand that syringing is not watering," he says. "Syringing is only air conditioning the grass blade surface."



Mike Caranci: "Syringing is not watering. Syringing is only air conditioning the grass blade surface."

PHOTO COURTESY MIKE CARANCI

Candlewood's 100 percent *Poa annua* greens are mowed at 0.07 inches throughout the summer months. When the air temperature reaches above 85 degrees Fahrenheit, Caranci applies two minutes of water on the greens in the early afternoon.

"Our surface temperature is 15 to 16 degrees higher than our atmospheric temperature," he says. "So if our temperature at 1 p.m. is 93, the surface temperature is 108 to 109, which means we will syringe the greens at 1 p.m. and possibly again two hours later, depending on the temperature."

In addition to the confusing terminology, syringing isn't the most rewarding job, and some superintendents might know it by names that aren't printable.

"I don't like syringing because it is a thankless job that the golfers haven't a clue about," says Scott Walsh, an employee of Four Seasons Equipment in Tupelo, Miss., and former superintendent at Natchez Trace Golf Course in Saltillo, Miss. "You work your butt off to keep a green alive and still have people hitting 7 irons at you."

Jason Blacka can relate to the difficulties of syringing. The superintendent at Cimarron Hills Golf and Country Club in Georgetown, Texas, learned about the technique from professors and fellow

*Continued on page 54*

*Continued from page 52*

superintendents as well as "some rather nauseating first-hand experience." But it's a necessary evil, he adds, considering Cimarron Hills is one of the few courses growing bentgrass as far south as mid-Texas.

Once the humidity drops below 50 percent, Blacka and his crew start to closely watch the greens. When syringing becomes necessary, they lightly mist the green using a hose, only applying as much water as it would take to totally dry in a minute or two.

"We aim not to keep the surface wet for prolonged periods," Blacka says. "This fits our philosophy of deep, infrequent watering to promote both hardier roots and allow the surface to stay drier for longer periods. It is not unusual for us to apply less water to our bentgrass greens than our bermuda tees, fairways and roughs in the summer."

To ensure that syringing doesn't result in prolonged dampness, Blacka carts out fans to aid in circulation.

***Syringing can be a "nauseating" experience, Jason Blacka says, but it's a "necessary evil."***

"Textbooks will tell you that elevating the rate of transpiration in the plant will in turn help cool the plant and allow for nutrient uptake, which is very important in stressful times," Blacka says. "While this is a great theory, we only have three fans in place at the present time. (Fortunately), there are around a half dozen holes where the air circulation is excellent, and there is rarely a calm day in Texas."

Doug Witcraft, the superintendent at Musket Ridge Golf Club in Myersville, Md., is another believer in close inspection. He monitors the air temperature and soil moisture of several of his greens.

"If the top quarter- to half-inch is drying out, I will run my irrigation system for a 3- to 5-minute cycle on all heads, just enough to cool the leaf surface and dampen the thatch," Witcraft says. "Then I let it dry out again before I do another 3- to 5-minute cycle. This seems to carry us through the peak heat of the day."

Meanwhile, isolated dry spots are hand-watered "when time and labor allows," Witcraft says. Wetting agents are also beneficial, he adds, as they "greatly reduce the amount of water we use and the amount of times we have to syringe."

At Amery (Wis.) Golf Club, superintendent Jeff Gajdostik says common sense is the best approach. "I don't have any secrets," he says. "Syringing is critical in the heat of the summer. If it's dry and hot, get the turf some water." ■