

Think Water

RAIN BIRD TOUTS INTELLIGENT IRRIGATION AT ARIZONA EVENT

By Larry Aylward, Editor in Chief

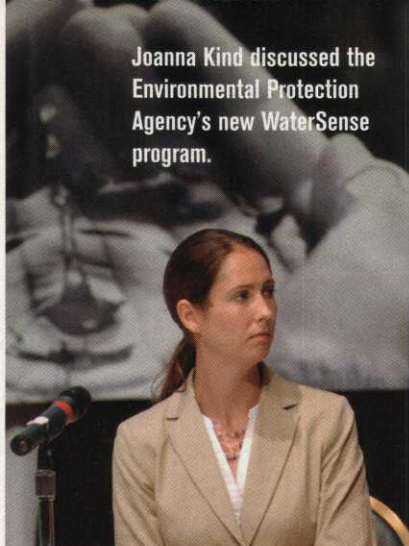
Rain Bird and an assortment of “students” went back to school recently at the University of Arizona (UA). Glendora, Calif.-based Rain Bird held its third Intelligent Use of Water Summit Aug. 31 on the UA campus in Tucson. The two-hour event, which featured several speakers including golf course architect John Fought, attracted more than 100 attendees. Rain Bird’s fourth summit is set for Dec. 31 in Pasadena, Calif.

Why has Rain Bird decided to get in the education business? The answer is simple, said Barbara Booth, director of Rain Bird’s Golf Division. “While products are near and dear to our hearts, products alone will not enable people to make intelligent choices when it comes to water uses and irrigation systems.”

It’s easy to assume that Rain Bird wants everyone — from golf course superintendents to landscapers to homeowners — to water away. After all, irrigation is the company’s business. But Rain Bird realizes the world is facing a severe freshwater crisis. So it’s staging symposiums focused on the relationship between water conservation and landscape water use, water conservation policies and legislation, and potential programs and initiatives to bring greater awareness to the need for water conservation.

Arizona golf course superintendent Shawn Emerson, who attended the event, said he welcomes the educational events. “What is telling in this is how good golf course superintendents and the industry are in the conservation of water,” said Emerson, director of agronomy for the Golf Club at Desert Mountain.

At the outset of the program, Dave



Joanna Kind discussed the Environmental Protection Agency’s new WaterSense program.

Johnson, Rain Bird’s corporate marketing director, said the need to conserve water has never been greater.

“With global water experts predicting the conflicts of the future will be fought over water, it’s essential that world leaders, environmental experts and the public be aware of the need to conserve water,” Johnson said.

Fought, a member of the American Society of Golf Course Architects, said environmental awareness is at the top of his agenda as an architect, and that includes proper water use. He said he’s designing a new golf course in St. George, Utah, that will be seeded with a more drought-tolerant fescue/bentgrass mix that will require half the water used by a course seeded with Kentucky bluegrass and bentgrass. Fought said the U.S. golf industry needs more courses like it.

“It’s really critical that we get a handle on this,” Fought said of water use. “It’s probably the most important issue we need to be involved with today.”

At the program’s conclusion, moderator Robert Glennon, professor at the University of Arizona’s Rogers College of Law, advocated raising water rates to prompt the public to conserve. Glennon, the author of “Water Follies: Groundwater Pumping And The Fate Of America’s Fresh Waters,” noted that 36 U.S. states will suffer water shortages soon.

“It’s evident that conservation programs fraught with complexity, thereby requiring elaborate monitoring programs, may prove to achieve neither cost-effectiveness nor meaningful water savings,” he said. “Appropriate water

Quotable

“You have slow play because golfers play slow. They don’t abide by any of the sensible practices that have been recommended for years on how to encourage fast play.”

— Dave Catalano, director of golf at Bethpage State Park in Farmingdale, N.Y.

“I don’t know that McDonald’s and Burger King are having less turnover problems. But it’s a lot easier for them to train a new person to flip burgers than it is to train someone to take good care of a golf course.”

— Lyne Tumlinson, director of career services for the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America.

“We don’t think it’s the sexiest topic in the world, but we think it’s pretty darn important.”

— Chad Ritterbusch, executive director of the American Society of Golf Course Architects, on growing the game.

rates offer an opportunity to augment various conservation programs as a way of encouraging water conservation.”

Emerson disagreed with Glennon’s proposition and said raising water prices is not the answer for conservation. “It sounds and feels good, but is it reality?” Emerson asked. “We need more science behind everything we talk about.” ■