

A few months ago I had the opportunity to travel almost 3,000 miles through South Africa visiting golf courses and sod farms. Although a week in Africa does not qualify me as a geopolitical expert, unless I am on cable news, my views of Africa are changing. Prior to leaving, my perception was that most of the developed world has disregarded Africa. The problems that the continent has and continues to face — genocide, AIDS, apartheid, civil war and famine — seem insurmountable.

However, Africa is also home of tremendous natural beauty and ecological diversity. It is a continent that contains abundant natural resources, and it is the cradle of mankind. There are countries, like Botswana, that have stable democracies that are seeing an infusion of foreign capital. Eco-tourism is growing and indirectly has fueled wildlife protection and conservation initiatives.

In South Africa, infrastructure issues, poverty, unemployment, crime, crippling diseases and integration continue to plague it 12 years after the first national election. But as its economy continues to grow, albeit modest, (inflation was more than 10 percent in 2002, but it has ebbed to 5.5 percent; and the GNP is growing faster than 4 percent) an expanding middle class is likely. In conjunction with a growing economy and subsequent disposable incomes, golf is on the rise.

Overall, there are about 450 golf courses in the country, but we would only consider about 100 of those as having a budget with buying power. Currently, there are more than 20 golf course projects with internationally recognized architects in some stage of planning or construction. Almost all are tied to commercial/home development. One course opening soon, Pinnacle Point in Mossel Bay, has a stretch of seven golf holes along the Indian Ocean that is as dramatic as Pebble Beach or Old Head. It is also one of the first courses to establish seashore paspalum in its fairways and rough.

The predominant turfgrass species is kikuyu-grass. It is found throughout the country on golf course fairways, tees and roughs, as well as athletic fields and lawns. The largest sod farm (Evergreen, 750 hectares), located outside of

## Brave New World Economy

BY KARL DANNEBERGER



EMERGING  
MARKETS LIKE  
SOUTH AFRICA CAN  
OFFER VENUES THAT  
SHOWCASE THE  
GREEN INDUSTRY'S  
POSITIVE IMPACT  
ON NATIONAL  
WEALTH

Johannesburg, harvests mostly kikuyugrass. Ironically, Johannesburg is located in the Transvaal region, the home of *Cynodon transvaalensis*, one of the parents of the bermudagrass hybrids. For the most part, the bermudagrass cultivars used in South Africa are locally selected.

Temperatures around Johannesburg are extremely hot during the summer, but they can drop below freezing in winter. Kikuyugrass will go dormant in the winter while remaining green in the southern regions, including Cape Town, where moderate temperatures exist year round. The more moderate temperatures in the coastal areas allow for cool-season turfgrass use. For example, the Links Course at Fancourt, which hosted the 2003 Presidents Cup, has a mix of cool-season fairway turfgrasses composed of mostly perennial ryegrass.

Putting greens are predominantly creeping bentgrass, including many cultivars used in the United States. For example, Penn A1, Penn A4, L93 and Dominant are common, and the latest turfgrass equipment and products are available to superintendents from many of the international vendors.

One last geopolitical observation: 15 years ago, people wondered why anyone would care about turf in China with its litany of problems. In 2008, the Olympic Games, which will be known as the "Green Games," are in Beijing, and the rise in its citizens' quality of life (at least in urban centers) has been well documented. Maybe the golf and green industry, in a small way, can contribute to a better way of life in South Africa, too. The World Cup is coming there in 2010.

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