

Off The Fringe

Big News From the Big Three

DEERE, TORO AND JACOBSEN ALL HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY AT THE GOLF INDUSTRY SHOW

With news to share, the Big Three — John Deere & Co., The Toro Co. and Jacobsen — all called press conferences at the Golf Industry Show in February.

Deere had some of the show's biggest news to share: details of its acquisition of LESCO that had been announced before the press conference. But Toro and Jacobsen also made important announcements regarding their respective businesses.

Deere's press conference, held at the GIS media center, was a standing-room only event. Several attendees were from LESCO, who came to hear Gregg Breningmeyer, director of sales and marketing for John Deere Golf & Turf One Source, expand on Deere's acquisition of their company for \$135 million or \$14.50 per common share. Cleveland-based LESCO, a distributor of fertilizers, seed and chemicals, will become part of John Deere Landscapes, which will more than double its locations with 332 LESCO stores.



Gregg Breningmeyer

"This is, on a revenue basis, the largest acquisition in the history of Deere & Co.," Breningmeyer said, noting that the company has been around for 170 years.

For Deere's customers, the buyout means "an expanded portfolio of goods and services that will allow [them] to leverage their budgets more efficiently than they've been able to do in the past." Breningmeyer said.

Breningmeyer noted he couldn't answer all of the questions from those at the press conference because Deere doesn't have all the answers yet. Later, in an interview with *Golfdom*, Breningmeyer said Deere didn't buy LESCO to disman-

tle the company. "We didn't buy a racehorse to shoot it," he added. "We brought it to grow the business. We're not going to throw out the LESCO brand name."

The deal is expected to close in June.

Deere also announced at the press conference that it had an agreement of principle to become the "exclusive golf course irrigation supplier" to the PGA Tour and TPC Network. This agreement is in addition to John Deere's current status as both the "official equipment supplier" and the "official One Source supplier" to the Tour.

Breningmeyer said John Deere will supply golf irrigation systems and ongoing maintenance and support for all PGA Tour and PGA-owned properties. The initial installation of John Deere Golf Irrigation will begin with the Tour's new championship-length course in Scottsdale, Ariz., slated to open in November. The PGA TOUR's agreement with John Deere is in effect until 2014.

Toro held its press conference at its massive trade-show booth. Toro also had plenty of news, led by its announcement that all of its diesel-powered golf course and sports fields and grounds equipment will be "Biodiesel Ready" by 2008. This includes the Toro Reelmaster, Groundsmaster, Greensmaster, Workman and MultiPro product families.

Beyond these specific product families, Toro will continue to expand the use of biodiesel fuels in other diesel-powered equipment lines. The company is also creating upgrade kits for the above-mentioned product families to convert diesel models already in production or in the field to be compatible with biodiesel fuel. The kits should be available by June.

"Our biodiesel readiness initiative is part of a commitment to developing innovative solutions that meet the evolving needs of our customers and help to better the environment," said Mike Hoffman, Toro's chairman and CEO, in a press release.

Keeping with the energy theme,

Toro also announced a partnership with the state of New York to provide the next generation of turf maintenance equipment powered by hydrogen fuel cells. Toro will provide Niagara Falls State Park with three hydrogen-powered utility vehicles based on the Toro Workman chassis.

Toro also announced its new Synergy Series golf irrigation products, a collection of products to help superintendents improve their irrigation practices as well as cut labor, water and energy costs.

"We want to help golf courses that currently do not have a central control system, and Synergy Series ... will help alleviate issues and limitations associated with a facility's aging or manual irrigation system," said David Angier, golf marketing manager at Toro Irrigation.

The Synergy Series components include Toro's new Dual Trajectory sprinklers (DT30/DT50), SitePro Synergy Series (a new version of the SitePro central control software), the Network GDC (Golf Decoder Control) system, the Network LTC Plus Satellite Controller, and the OSMAC RDR Satellite Controller.

Toro also introduced its ProCore Processor at the show. Designed for large turf areas, the ProCore Processor sweeps, processes and disperses aeration cores in one, quick operation. Toro also debuted



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its ASAP and ASAP+ parts delivery, an enhanced combination of services to better meet the needs of customers for urgent parts delivery at an affordable price.

Charlotte-based Jacobsen also had several announcements, including the introduction of the Eclipse 122 F, which the company calls “the dawning of a new age in the evolution of walking greens mowers.” The new mower, available this summer, features a cutting head capable of 50 percent more float than other greens mowers, Jacobsen says. The new floating-head design and other performance options virtually eliminate the possibility of scalping, the company says.

Jacobsen also announced it was opening a new facility to bring together its corporate headquarters, global distribution center for whole goods and parts, and a state-of-the-art training center. The facility is located about 4 miles from its manufacturing plant in Charlotte.

“Customer satisfaction is our highest priority,” said Dan Wilkinson, president of Jacobsen. “Bringing all of our training, customer service and administrative activities under one roof helps us respond more quickly to the turf professionals who buy our equipment.”



Dan Wilkinson

The Jacobsen University training center will be used to host turf professionals, students, dealers and new employees for sales and technical training. One lab will be reserved to demonstrate efficient reel maintenance and grinding techniques, one for electrical systems training and the other for teaching the ins and outs of hydraulic systems.

Jacobsen also announced improvements to its all-electric walking greens mower, the E-Walk. A redesigned electronic control unit simplifies the functional options on the E-Walk. A new D-handle design specific to the Jacobsen In-Command control system has also been added. ■

Try a Prevent Defense for Control

Pesticides can be applied in three different ways. But course operators and superintendents looking for the surest and most economical method to keep disease at bay should consider a preventive program first.

The three most common ways to treat greens are:

- Preventive applications at low rates to try to prevent diseases from occurring.
- Curative applications at higher rates to cure plants with minimal damage once disease symptoms show themselves.
- Eradicating applications at still higher rates and frequencies that aim to rid plants of the disease once many have already died.

Because disease organisms can be active for two weeks, three weeks or more before symptoms show, many superintendents make preventive applications before any disease organisms have infested the plant. A truly preventive application starts weeks before disease symptoms appear.

Material builds up in the plant over time, meaning it can be applied at lower rates per application thus making it less expensive per application. So it's a misconception to think that more pesticide is used and more money is spent on preventive programs than curative programs.

It is also possible to make more preventive applications over the course of the year since Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) labeling limits the amount of material that can be applied to a given area on an annual basis.

Dollar spot is a good candidate for preventive applications, because it's a disease that superintendents don't want their golf courses' greens to contract since it's difficult to control once it has started. Hence, dollar spot populations should be kept below the critical mass by preventive applications.

Preventive applications also require less application rates. For example, a preventive rate could be 2 ounces per 1,000 square feet compared to 4 ounces for a curative rate. Preventive applications can also be stretched out because they're not made to cure a disease — they're made to control the pathogen and keep it from breaking out.

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