

Off The Fringe

Business briefs

Werning to Lead Deere C&CE

John Deere Commercial & Consumer Equipment (C&CE) division recently announced the realignment of three business units that provide products and services to professional landscape and irrigation contractors, turf managers and golf and sports turf professionals.

John Deere Landscapes, John Deere Golf & Turf One Source and the company's professional mowing segment will now come under the direction of David Werning, president of John Deere Landscapes and now also senior vice president of the John Deere C&CE commercial segment. Gregg Breningmeyer, director of sales and marketing for One Source and commercial segment marketing, will continue in his position and report directly to Werning.

NGCOA Recognizes Courses

The National Golf Course Owners Association recognized three golf courses for their success in growing the game by naming them the winners of the NGCOA's 2006 Player Development Awards.

One winner, the Cyprian Keyes Golf Course in Boylston, Mass., turns into a dinner party Friday nights during its Nine and Dine league, in which participants enjoy nine holes with golf car, prizes and dinner for \$30.

The Carson Valley Golf Course at Gardnerville, Nev., another winner, overhauled its scorecard for juniors so they can circle simply a smiley face or frown. "It's a simple thing to move the emphasis away from scoring and put it on having fun," says owner Tom Brooks.

At the Los Lagos Golf Course in San Jose, Calif., the third winner, maintenance staff and golf shop personnel host nature walks for local students.

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Academic Evolution

PROGRAMS INCORPORATE MORE
BUSINESS, COMMUNICATIONS
INTO CORE REQUIREMENTS

By Anthony Pioppi, Contributing Editor

A couple of college classes probably won't get you an interview for a superintendent position anymore.

Four-year degrees are expected, and some business and communications skills might not hurt, either.

Dominic J. Morales, professor and dean of Applied Sciences and Recreation Division at the State University of New York-Delhi, says he remembers the 1970s when advertisements for a superintendent often asked preferred applicants to have some college. Later an associate's degree was the benchmark, and then four-year degrees became the standard. But that might not be enough considering superintendents control the largest budget and manage the largest work force at nearly every golf course.

That's why schools like SUNY-Delhi and Kansas State University have augmented their programs in recent years to include more nonagriculture courses, including business and communications. The SUNY-Delhi program made changes in 1997, two

years after a series of focus groups composed of superintendents concluded that business and personnel management training would better prepare them to hit the ground running.

"From this template, we found that the job is 30 percent to 40 percent agronomy, and the rest is really management," Morales said.

Seventy percent of the superintendents surveyed said their greatest challenges involve personnel issues. The result was the creation of the Golf and Plant Sciences Department in 1999 with two concentrations: superintendent or golf professional. The superintendent track requires students to spend the first two years focusing on agronomics and the second two on business management.

Students also are required to go on an internship every summer as well as a 15-week internship during the end of the second semester of their senior year culminating in a presentation in front of their peers.

Students also elect their nonagronomy classes, such as the 300-level courses: Argumentation and Debate or Organization Communication. There

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are also restaurant and hospitality requirements for the program.

At Kansas State, students take 12 credits in hospitality along with two internships. First, students do a field internship at Colbert Hills Golf Course on the Kansas State campus. The second is done at another facility with the students working in the clubhouse “so it’s not a black hole to them,” says Jack Fry, a professor in Division of Horticulture.

Turf students graduate with a minor in business from Kansas State and can take such electives as food-production management and principles of lodging.

According to Fry, the reason for changing the department was an answer to an important question: “We asked what could we do to make ours a cutting-edge program?”

For Kansas State, that meant consulting with the PGA of America and the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America about what turf students require to be better superintendents out of the gate. The program was launched in 1998 with the goal that graduates would have more diverse career options.

There have been 150 who have earned degrees from Kansas State since the change, with about 50 incoming freshman yearly. Most graduates have gone into turf, but some have become assistant pros, and others have chosen the general manager route.

At SUNY-Delhi, which has graduated about 110 students and has about 30 incoming a year, students have used the degrees to become salespeople for turf equipment manufacturers or chemical and fertilizer distributors, as well as superintendents.

Although Kansas and Delhi are pleased with the results, Fry said he does not see the programs as templates for other schools. In their cases, the idea for change was either initiated from the administration (Kansas State) or embraced by the administration (Delhi). Fry says other schools would have a hard time altering the

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Trusting Relationships Are Vital

A positive working relationship between a golf superintendent and his club manager can bolster the operational success of a facility. So if you’re a superintendent, why not enhance your work in unison with your facility’s club manager — or owner or pro for that matter — for the betterment of your operation and your career?



Perhaps this year’s Golf Industry Show is a good place to begin improving your relationship with your club manager. With the Club Managers Association of America (CMAA) joining the show this year, it’s an opportune time for superintendents to connect with their managers and spend quality time with them to build trust and respect for each other. Superintendents can show their managers around the tradeshow floor and introduce them to personnel from the maintenance facility’s key suppliers. Also, superintendents can take their managers to a few educational seminars. The bottom line: The Golf Industry Show provides superintendents a perfect opportunity to let managers understand the nuances of their profession.

On a side note, the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America, the National Golf Course Owners Association and the CMAA have designated Friday, Feb. 23, as “team day.” It begins in the morning with a general session for attendees from the three associations. Educational sessions focusing on the team concept will follow. Then, superintendents, club managers and owners from the same golf course are encouraged to walk the tradeshow floor together.

The “Tip of the Month” is provided by Syngenta to support superintendents in their agronomic, business and professional development. To comment on this column, submit a lesson from your own experience, or suggest a topic to be covered in a future issue, please visit www.golfbusinesstips.com.

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Visit the Syngenta clubhouse, booth 5705 at the Golf Industry Show. It’s a unique gathering of superintendents, where the only dues are hard work, determination, and a devotion to pristine conditions.

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Off The Fringe



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curriculum because inter-program cooperation might mire the initial administration. "Our initiative came from the top. Everyone wanted to make the change," he said.

To make room for the new curriculum, students are now only required to take one class each in plant physiology and woody ornamentals instead of two. They can take a second class if they choose.

Prospective students are told of the program demands at the outset. "Students come in knowing it is a long haul to be successful," Fry said. "This business is not playing golf. It's a calling."

He says the new curriculum gives students more versatility in the workplace. "Graduates will be familiar with responsibilities and goals of managers involved in business, hospitality and food service operations at 18-hole golf facilities. They will also be highly employable at nine-hole facilities, where retaining a specialist in each area of course operation is not practical or affordable," he said via e-mail.

One of the goals is employability down the road, not just after graduation, something both Morales and Fry said was a reason for the change.

"As a superintendent trained in this program, you will have the credentials to compete for a position as general manager later in your career," Fry said.

Davis Gourlay is the general manager at Colbert Hills and an adjunct professor at Kansas State. Although he did not attend the school, Fry calls him "the prototype of what many of our students want to be." Gourlay has a bachelor's of science in agronomy but has been a general manager for many years. He's ecstatic about the KSU program.

"The kids coming out have a grasp on finances. They understand it's a business," he said. "They understand the value of a thousand rounds and how that reflects on the revenues and the whole operation." ■

Viva Vargas

MICHIGAN STATE PROFESSOR
(AND ELVIS IMITATOR) WINS
TOP AWARD FROM USGA

Joe Vargas Jr. does a great Elvis Presley impersonation. But he doesn't need to pretend to be a king when it comes to turfgrass science.

Vargas, a renowned turfgrass scientist and professor at Michigan State University in the department of plant pathology for the past 38 years, is the winner of the 2007 Green Section Award by the United States Golf Association (USGA).

The award is given for contributions to golf through work with turfgrass and is determined annually by a distinguished panel of experts in the field of turfgrass research. Vargas will receive the award Feb. 23 at the USGA Green Section Education Conference in Anaheim, Calif., during the Golf Industry Show.

"It was a great surprise when I was told I was going to receive this award," Vargas said in a statement. "No, I actually was shocked. I have gotten a lot of awards, but this one is very special."

Vargas is known to challenge normal turfgrass management practices, such as fungicide rotation for resistance management. "But, everything I've ever introduced has been based on solid research," he said.

Professor Karl Danneberger of Ohio State University, *Golfdom's* science editor and columnist, called Vargas one of the five most widely known turfgrass scientists in the world.

"He is at the forefront of turfgrass diagnosis," Danneberger said. "I do not know of anyone who is better than him in identifying a golf course superintendent's problem on site."



Dr. Joe Vargas (pictured here earlier in his career), winner of the 2007 Green Section Award, has been known for his independent stance on turf issues. "My whole life has been as a maverick," he told *Golfdom* in 2002.

Vargas has published more than 300 articles on turfgrass diseases and related subjects. He's the author of the popular "Management of Turfgrass Diseases" (1993). More recently, he authored "The Turf Problem Solver: Case Studies and Solutions for Environmental, Cultural and Pest Problems" (2005) in collaboration with Dr. Al Turgeon.

A native of Fall River, Mass., Vargas found his career path while a teenager working on the maintenance staff at the Fall River Country Club. He has a bachelor's degree from the University of Rhode Island, a master's degree from Oklahoma State and a doctorate from the University of Minnesota.

The 64-year-old also has no plans to retire.

"Why would I ever retire," he asks. "This is what I enjoy doing. And there is so much more to do. We have to find better ways of managing grasses." ■