

Off The Fringe

Business briefs

Name Change Ushers in New Era

FMC Specialty Products Business is now known as FMC Professional Solutions. FMC's Dan Rosenbaum said the name change heralds the beginning of a new era of "customer-driven innovation" for the organization, which is a part of the global FMC Corp.

"We chose to rename our organization as a way of demonstrating our dedication to providing creative solutions that answer a direct need in the marketplace," Rosenbaum said. "This organization is wholly focused on and driven by our customers' needs."

FMC first entered the pest control industry in 1987 and has since expanded its portfolio to address market needs in the golf, nursery, turf, ornamental, aquatics and other segments.

"We continue as FMC, seeking new and better ways to actively involve the customer at the beginning of the innovation process," Rosenbaum said. "Our new Innova Solutions initiative is one way in which we seek to do this."

Innova Solutions, launched in 2005, was created to help answer two key strategic needs — expansion of FMC's product line and aggressive innovation.

Ariens Buys National Mower

Brillion, Wis.-based Ariens Co. acquired St. Paul, Minn.-based National Mower Co. to gain access to the golf market. Mike Thuecks, an Ariens vice president, said in a report that the company, which began in 1933, hadn't been able to break into the golf market because it didn't have the distribution link.

Metsker, Meyer Honored

Stanley E. Metsker, retired golf course superintendent from Colorado Springs, Colo., and
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A Sad State of Affairs

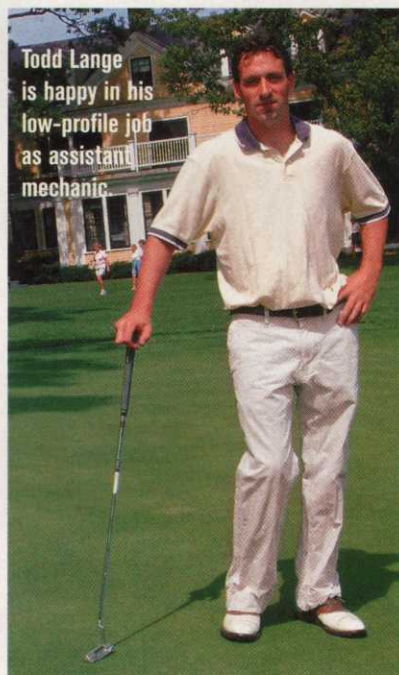
THE INDUSTRY SUFFERS
WHEN YOUNG, ASPIRING
SUPERINTENDENTS
DUMP THEIR DREAM JOBS

By Anthony Pioppi, Contributing Editor

At 24, Todd Lange was a rising star in the golf course maintenance profession, but he didn't like what he saw or heard. Fickle and downright rude members prompted Lange to let go of his dream of being a superintendent just four years later. Although he hasn't totally extracted himself from the business, his story is an apt illustration of what can come when member expectations are out of control and the industry as a whole fails to confront the problem.

Now 28, Lange is enthusiastic about his job as assistant mechanic at The Country Club in Brookline, Mass., and the game of golf. The day I met Lange, who holds a 1 handicap, he reveled in the fact that he was playing a game he loved with others who enjoyed it as much as he did. And he was tickled to be the tour guide on our group's jaunt into the back nine of the heralded course.

It would appear that Lange is the perfect person to maintain a golf



course, for he loves the game, architecture and turf. But Lange turned his back on the profession he had been involved with since his high school days.

Lange began his career at a small private course in western Massachusetts and then moved on to a bigger course after graduating in 1998 from Stockbridge School of Agriculture with an associate's degree in turfgrass management. By that point, he was already getting a taste of the side of the business that would eventually drive him away.

Lange tells the story of forgetting to fill water coolers one weekend

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morning at the course where he worked. That Monday he was grilled like a criminal about the error that he readily admitted he made.

"They wanted me to go talk with the green chairman," Lange said, shaking his head.

The topper came later in the week when Lange went out to play a few holes and walked past a couple of the members, one who said loudly enough so Lange would hear, "I'll bet the water coolers are filled today."

He swallowed that insult among others, thinking the business would only get better. He was sure it would when he went to work at Pine Valley Golf Club in New Jersey, working his way up to assistant superintendent. He said his life outside of the course did not exist; 90-hour workweeks made sure of that.

After 18 months, Lange quit Pine Valley and kicked around in Florida for a few years, including working on the crew at The Loxahatchee Club as the spray technician. After deciding to give his career in golf course maintenance another chance, Lange moved to eastern Massachusetts to work as assistant superintendent for a good friend at an exclusive private course. But it wasn't long before he encountered trouble.

He tells the story of a member charging up to the general manager of the club in front of Lange and the superintendent to complain about fairway damage incurred during aeration. Lange stood stunned as the member bellowed, "Did you see what that idiot did to the fairway? Somebody has to be held accountable."

Making the criticism even more ludicrous, the member was talking about a 5-foot-square patch of turf on one fairway.

"They just give you the bad," he said of the majority of golfers. "It's not that I can't deal with it, but what's the point? I don't know, maybe I'm just a baby, maybe I'm just a whiner."

He is neither. He is someone who had his fill of abuse and disrespect that would hardly be tolerated anywhere else but a country club setting.

The longer I'm around the golf course business, the more I become amazed by the abuse handed out on a near-daily basis to superintendents, course workers, pros and others. I'm not sitting behind a desk making these observations. I've worked at golf courses sporadically since 1998.

Somewhere along the line in the golf business, putting up and shutting up has been confused with toughness; as if tolerating an impugning of one's integrity is a badge of courage. It's not. It's a subservience that can only lead to stress and unhappiness.

Maybe in the classes on communication that the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America hosts at the Golf Industry Show, there should be time taken on how to confront and stop the growing problem of demeaning and unnecessary treatment heaved on superintendents.

Quotable

"Someone once said the nicest part of this industry is all the people in it. I'll second that. It's been a great 40 years for me."

— *Certified superintendent George Thompson on being inducted into the Carolinas Golf Hall of Fame.*

"You can look at superintendents a lot of ways. One of the ways is as the makeup man in the movies. They rarely get fired for going over budget. But they get fired a lot when the stars have warts on camera."

— *Bill Middleton, senior technical advisor for Miliken Turf Products and founder of Emerald Isle True Foliars, on the pressures superintendents face to deliver a perfect-looking product.*

"When we got to No. 17, I joked that I'd just hit the ball into that huge sand trap so I could lie there for a while and get a suntan."

— *Mitchell Glod, superintendent of Fort Cherry Golf Club in McDonald, Pa., who ended up getting a hole-in-one on No. 17 at FarmLinks Golf Club using a six iron.*

Everyone has his or her breaking point. You see it all the time. Many superintendents leave the business to sell chemicals or hawk mowers because they've reached their breaking points.

It's an unfortunate comment on the state of the industry, but their choices are understandable. But what's even worse than experienced superintendents leaving the business is young, aspiring superintendents leaving the business.

It is a sad state of affairs when Todd Lange and people like him walk away from their dreams. ■

Pioppi is a contributing editor for Golfdom.