Off The Fringe

Business briefs

Seminar Touts TifEagle as No-Till

The Georgia Seed Development Commission (GSDC) organized a daylong educational seminar recently to explore both the viability of TifEagle bermudagrass as a no-till variety and the mechanics involved with the no-till (no-dig, minimum-till) renovation process. GSDC is the state agency responsible for the licensing and marketing of TifEagle. The seminar was requested by the TifEagle Growers Association.

University of Georgia professor and TifEagle breeder Wayne Hanna, Ph.D., hosted the seminar. In a press release, Hanna admitted to being an early skeptic of no-till. "I've got to be honest. Six years ago, I stood up right here ... and said that I had serious reservations about no-till," he said. "I was worried that after a year or two you'd start to see a lot of problems on no-tilled greens, especially with off-types and possibly black layer on greens with poor drainage. I was wrong."

Guest panel member Pat O'Brien, the Southeastern director of the United States Golf Association's Green Section, said, "I've examined hundreds of renovated no-till greens over the last six years, and I've yet to come across a failure."

O'Brien provided details comparing the benefits of no-till versus conventional reconstruction. Clubs can expect to reduce their costs downward from about $2 per square foot (and from $4 per square foot for full-scale renovations) to only 45 cents to 50 cents for no-till, he points out. O'Brien said he thinks most bentgrass courses will convert to the ultradwarf bermudagrass varieties in the next several years.

"Low-to-mid-budget courses are already on the ultradwarf bandwagon, and the high-

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From Emerald Ash to Saw Dust?

BORER BLIGHT THREATENS TREE VARIETY, ALTHOUGH IT COULD BE SAVED ON GOLF COURSES

By Anthony Pioppi, Contributing Editor

Sometime in the 1990s, a freighter that sailed from Asia entered the St. Lawrence Seaway carrying a killer. It made its way west past Niagara Falls, Buffalo, N.Y., and Erie, Pa., before turning north near Toledo, Ohio, and docking most likely in Detroit, but possibly in Windsor, Ontario.

The ship's cargo had little impact compared to the stowaway lurking in storage crates. The wood had not been kiln-dried, as required by federal law of the United States and Canada. And the resulting infestation of Emerald Ash Borer (EAB), a half-inch-long metallic green beetle that bores into and lays its eggs in ash trees, has proved to be more than just a nuisance.

The larvae feasts on the wood, ultimately killing the trees in three to five years. When they emerge in the spring, adults leave a D-shaped exit hole in the bark, their malevolent calling card.

In Asia, the species of native ash have developed resistance to the bug, but here in North America there is no such defense. A blight the magnitude of the one that wiped out nearly every chestnut tree in North America is upon us and it could virtually eradicate all 16 varieties of ash that thrive here.

Thus far the beetle has killed 20 million ash trees in the United States, most in southeastern Michigan, Ohio, Indiana and Illinois. There are 800 million surviving ash trees in Michigan alone. Ash makes

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end private clubs are next," he said. "Superintendents who still have Tifdwarf or 328 are also aching to upgrade. Why drive a sedan when you can get behind the wheel of a sports car? With no-till, cost simply isn't a major drawback anymore."

Bob Carrow, researcher and professor of turfgrass science with the University of Georgia, outlined some "common sense" site assessment practices for the group. He stressed how physical, chemical and biological soil conditions affect golf course greens.

"If you find problems in these areas on older greens, unless corrective action is taken those same problems are going to persist and probably get worse," he said. "Minor organic matter buildup can usually be dealt with after you no-till, but no-till is by no means a magic bullet for most problems. Be wary of excessive organic matter buildup, as well as inadequate organic matter content. Look for contouring problems, poor drainage, water-logging, standing water, dry spots, soft spots, layering, diseases, pests (especially nematodes), poor air movement, excessive wear, shade issues and high salt accumulations, especially in the root zone."

Regarding Rounds, Year Begins With a Slow Start Due to Weather

Same-store rounds fell more than 15 percent in April compared to last April, according to the National Golf Foundation. The decline is attributed primarily to poor weather that blanketed much of the country with snow, sleet and rain. Rounds in the Northeast fell 38 percent, and the Midwest experienced a 24-percent plunk compared to last April.

April declines pile on the already slow start in 2007; the 9-percent fall in 2007 rounds is the worst start in three years, according to NGF. Again, the Northeast and Midwest have been hit the hardest. And rounds in the mid-Atlantic are down almost 18 percent.

On the upside, rounds in the Northwest and Southwest are up for the year 2 percent and 5 percent, respectively. Premium courses (above $70) are down just 7.5 percent for the year compared to standard and value golf courses, which are down about 15 percent. ■

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up 5 percent of all trees in the United States and 7 percent of the hardwood population.

EAB was identified in the summer of 2002, but not as early as it might have been, according to David Shetlar, extension entomologist for Ohio State University, who said many scientists assumed prevalent diseases were killing trees.

"Ashes die for other reasons. There are a couple of common diseases," he said.

Eventually, the public raised the alarm, much the same way the public alerted New York City authorities to Asian Longhorn Beetle infestation.

The majority of Ash trees in the wild likely will succumb to the invasion.

"It took enough people to say, 'Why are all these ash trees dying all at once,' " Shetlar said.

Unlike Dutch Elm Disease, which waits for trees to reach a certain size before infesting it, EAB has no such consideration.

"It will take out an inch in caliber to a full-grown tree," Shetlar said.

In 2003, a quarantine in the Detroit area was thought to have stopped the spread, but that proved false. EAB made its way south of Detroit and into Ohio and Illinois. It has also been detected in Windsor, Ontario, and it continues to spread.

It made its way into Maryland thanks to an unscrupulous Tennessee nursery. EAB was found in August 2003 by a Maryland Department of Agriculture inspector at a Prince George's County nursery.

According to the Maryland Department of Agriculture, unbeknownst to the Maryland nursery, instead of filling the order, the trees were ordered by the Tennessee nursery and direct-shipped from Michigan to Maryland. Adult beetles emerged on site at the nursery and these beetles subsequently infested other ash trees at the nursery. Subsequently, EAB has been found in Virginia. The Tennessee nursery was fined almost $13,000.

Researchers also believe the beetles have spread via firewood. As a result, states where EAB has been found have forbidden the importation of firewood into parks and campgrounds.

In areas of heavy devastation, some ash trees appeared to avoid the blight only to succumb later on.

The irony of this potential catastrophe is that the EAB can be thwarted with common systemic insecticides. Sadly, these insecticides cannot be applied over vast areas, so the majority of trees in the wild will most likely succumb to the invasion.

In the future, it is possible that the only living ash trees will be found on golf courses, in parks or at private residences, surviving much like an endangered animal in a zoo.

Imidacloprid found in Merit products as well as Bayer Tee and Shrub Insect Control can stave off EAB with applications no more than twice a year. Safari insecticide, with a different active ingredient, is also labeled for EAB. The process, however, must take place every year or the beetles will gain a foothold and kill the tree.

Quest Products surfactant Pentra-Bark has also shown to be effective when used with insecticides against Sudden Oak Death and can also be a weapon against EAB. Safari or any of the imidacloprid products can be used in conjunction with Pentra-Bark with the mix sprayed onto the trees. The process does not require atomiza-