

Off The Fringe

Business briefs

Deere Acquires LESCO

Last month's Golf Industry Show began with some big news — Deere & Co. announced its plans to buy LESCO for \$135 million or \$14.50 per common share, which is \$4 per share higher than its closing price Feb. 16 before the deal was announced. LESCO's share price jumped more than 36 percent to 14.25 early Feb. 20 on the news of the buyout.

Cleveland-based LESCO, a distributor of fertilizers, seed and chemicals for lawncare professionals and golf course superintendents, will become part of John Deere Landscapes, which will more than double its locations with the addition of 332 LESCO stores.

"This plan is consistent with Deere's growth aspirations," said Nate Jones, president of its Commercial & Consumer Division. "We seek business opportunities that bring new customers to John Deere and that offer new products and services to our existing customers. We have a strong commitment to serve professional landscaping and golf course customers."

Wall Street analysts expect Deere, based in Moline, Ill., to post about \$22 billion in 2006 sales.

"We believe it enables shareholders to receive the benefit of our efforts to increase shareholder value," LESCO president Jeffrey Rutherford said in a prepared statement. "In addition, customers of both LESCO and John Deere benefit because of this decision."

The deal is expected to close in June pending approval by LESCO shareholders and regulatory agencies.

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Show Your Stripes

IS THERE ARTISTRY
IN THOSE LINES IN THE
TURF? OR DO THEY JUST
CAUSE AGGRAVATION?

By Jim Black, Contributing Editor

What is it about a golf course that can be so pleasing to the eye?

For some, maybe it's the lay of the land, the soft feel of the slope and the gently rolling hills. For others, maybe it's the color of soothing greenery, towering hardwoods and pines that loom over the lush green grass.

One of the things for me is the artistry of the stripes. I like the subtle play of light and dark that draws my eye across the vista of the golf course to that most elusive four-and-a-quarter-inch target in the distance. Stripes take on different views. Stripes that run directly tee to green almost mock and challenge me to hit the ball straight. The classic cross-hatch pattern at least gives me a reference for my occasional hook or slice.

I'll never forget how I felt the first time I striped the surrounds of the first green at Old South Country Club in Lothian, Md. The bluegrass-ryegrass rough was lush, the reels were sharp

and the belts tight on the Toro 216. As I familiarized myself with the operation of my machine, I couldn't believe what I was seeing unfold around and beneath me. The sun must have been in its optimum position in the sky to make the stripes stand out so stark and vivid. This is where my love for stripes in the turf originated.

Since then, I've held on to a fascination with striping patterns on golf courses. I trained dozens of people on various mowers. If there's any one most-important rule that always stands out in these training sessions, it has to be: NO DOUBLE WIDES!

What is a double-wide? This is when an operator mows the fairway (or tee, or green) starting in the middle — up, back, up, back — until one side is done. Then the operator comes back and mows "up" next to the first "up" pass, thus creating a pattern that is light/dark/light/dark/light-light/dark, etc. Can you see the light-light double-wide stripe? Sorry, unacceptable.

Another important rule for me is this: Greens, tees and fairways are mowed straight, and rough and surrounds are always contoured. There's

something about straight, rough stripes against the straight fairway or green stripes that makes everything too stark and rigid. I've always felt that surrounding the straight ones with the contoured ones somehow softens things.

I've come to discover that I'm not the only one who has specific striping preferences. Mark Merrick, a 20-year veteran superintendent in the mid-Atlantic region, has his own theory on burning in stripes.

"You have to mow in the same direction, on the same stripe, two times in a row," Merrick says. "So if you mow left to right on Monday, then it's left to right again on Wednesday, on the exact same stripe. The next two mowings are then right to left, etc."

"To the untrained eye, stripes look like magic," says Elizabeth Black, the author's spouse. "I look out across the golf course, and my first thought is *that* is so cool! How do they do that? It's all the same grass, but it's light and dark at the same time."

It was explained to her that it was all smoke and mirrors, used to trick the eye into seeing the perfection of the stripes versus any slight imperfections that may exist in the turf. She didn't fall for that, however, and had to settle for the shadow/reflection explanation.

But not everyone sees the magic in the stripes. Jack Mackenzie, certified superintendent of North Oaks (Minn.) Golf Course, has his own thoughts about stripes. In an e-mail, he wrote, "Here is an odd angle for you, pardon the pun: I hate stripes! In fact, I loathe them. Why can't the meandering architectural integrity of a course hold its own without the contrived appearance imposed by burned-in striping? Why all the harsh geometric lines when a flowing design is so much more natural? Isn't the final target round? To me a striped course is distracting to the eye."

Whatever your opinion on stripes, your palette awaits your decision on it every morning. ■

Eye of the Tiger

IF HE WANTS TO BE A
SUCCESSFUL ARCHITECT,
WOODS NEEDS TO SEE HOW
THE DESIGNING GREATS DID IT

By Anthony Pioppi

Tiger Woods recently announced his plans to become a golf course architect. Although his management company touted the decision as earth shattering, it merely produced chuckles inside the design industry.

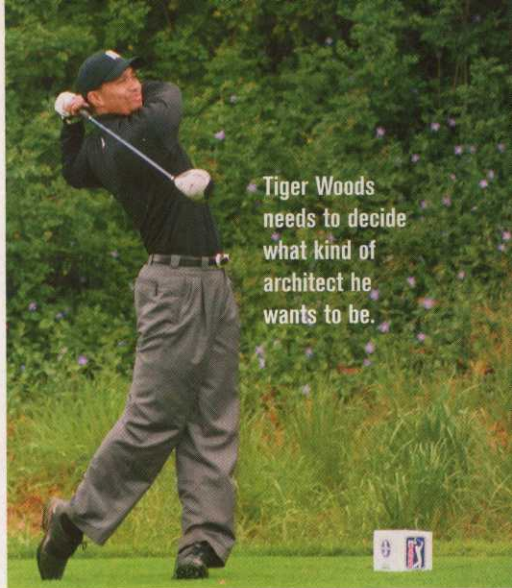
If Tiger happened to seek my advice, I'd happily tell him some ways to avoid the pitfalls encountered by his predecessors, many of whom have made the mistake of thinking that great golf swings translate into great architecture, too.

First, I would tell Tiger he can't judge the worth of a golf course by how he plays it. As Jack Nicklaus now admits, he designed with too much arrogance and not enough listening in his early days. As a result, an inordinate amount of his greens favored a high fade approach shot — the exact ball flight he happens to play. Alas, very few recreational golfers hit a high fade.

Second, Woods must decide what kind of architect he wants to be. If it's about building great golf courses, he should follow in the footsteps of Ben Crenshaw and surround himself with a team that works on only a few courses a year, ensuring the proper amount of attention is paid to each.

If he decides it's all about the money, or that knowing the going rate for a house lot on one of his courses is more important than knowing the yardage from the forward tees, there are plenty of templates for him to follow.

But there are consequences to having



Tiger Woods needs to decide what kind of architect he wants to be.

a hands-off approach. Take the courses that are visited by a cadre of construction companies that must "improve" them — again. One three-year-old course is undergoing its third major renovation since it opened in 2003; this round is costing somewhere in the neighborhood of \$2 million. Conservative estimates put the total cost of renovations, thus far, at about \$5 million.

ANALYSIS

Just being involved, however, is not enough. Woods needs to realize that those who design and build courses for a living have much more knowledge on the subject than he. Woods should take the time to learn from them.

Woods also needs to leave his ego on the practice range and realize that everything he designs is not going to be universally praised. Ben Hogan was involved with just one design in his life, and, as legend has it, he was so concerned about its design he hand-raked every green. When the press gave the layout mediocre reviews, Hogan took it so personally he never designed again. A thin skin does not last long in the architecture business.

If he has not already done so, Woods should read up on the subject of golf course design. He should start with Alister Mackenzie's book, "The Spirit of St. Andrews," then move on to George Thomas' "Golf Architecture in America." He also should study the National Golf Club of America in George Bahto's "The Evangelist of Golf." And, of course, he

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Off The Fringe

Charting a Course for Growth



HAMLIN AIMS TO 'SERVE' MEMBERS AS LEADER

OF IRRIGATION ASSOCIATION

BY DAVID FRABOTTA, SENIOR EDITOR

She persevered over a field of 80 candidates to capture the executive director post of the Irrigation Association. But it won't be the biggest challenge for Deborah Hamlin as she leads a "fragmented" and growing Irrigation Association, which bid farewell to long-time executive director Thomas Kimmell in November.

Hamlin addressed her association's members for the first time at the International Irrigation Show in November in San Antonio.

"You can't effect change unless the entire industry is behind it," she told the crowd.

Golfdom spoke with Hamlin recently about her goals and vision for the association, based in Falls Church, Va. She's a certified association executive and the former executive director for the International Association of Plastics Distributors, which she operated for 10 years. During her tenure, she developed a comprehensive educational program, grew membership, reorganized the volunteer structure to streamline projects and bolstered participation at association meetings.

Why was IA a good fit for you?

I worked for an industry association that was basically manufacturers and distributors for the past 10 years, so that certainly helps my understanding of the business and the way things are manufactured and distributed. What I'm trying to learn more about are some of the technical issues and some of the political issues.

I spent the last 10 years in Kansas City, so I'm very familiar with the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America (located in Lawrence, Kan.) — and I know we've had a long-term relationship with them — but I'm hoping that my connections there and my existing relationships will help build a stronger relationship.

What is top of mind for you now eight weeks into the position?

One of the biggest things is the fact that we're partnering with Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and its WaterSense program. The first rollout of this WaterSense program is individual certifications. Next year, it will roll out product certifications, where you would label a product like you would an Energy Star product, except for water conservation.

Within the next couple of months, we're hoping that all of our landscape and golf exams will be EPA-endorsed. So if a person passed an IA program that has been approved, then the EPA will allow him or her to put a label on his or her business cards and brochures to prove they are using water-saving techniques in their day-to-day business. That's pretty cool.

(Editor's note: The EPA announced Feb. 22 that the Irrigation Association Certified Irrigation Contractor and Certified Irrigation Designer programs were the first professional certifications to earn the WaterSense label. That is pretty cool.)

What are the most important issues that require continuity in transition?

Specifically, I'm using Tom (Kimmell) in continuity in governmental

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Business briefs

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Jake Appoints Cunningham

Jacobsen's new vice president of marketing, Joe Cunningham, brings extensive experience to the job, according to the company.

"Joe is a proven marketing leader and will strengthen our focus on the customer in all our marketing efforts," Jacobsen President Dan Wilkinson said in a statement. "He brings a great deal of energy and experience."

Hurdzan to be Honored

Michael Hurdzan, a principal of Hurdzan/Fry Golf Course Design and a champion of affordable golf, is the recipient of the 2007 Donald Ross Award from the American Society of Golf Course Architects (ASGCA).

Hurdzan, a former past president of the association, will receive the award during the ASGCA's annual meeting in April. ■

Looks Are Everything

A COURSE'S CONDITION IS VITAL TO SELLING HOME SITES, DELOZIER SAYS

By Larry Aylward, Editor in Chief

Henry DeLozier knows a thing or two about building houses. After all, he's the vice president of Pulte Homes in Scottsdale, Ariz., one of the nation's largest home builders. DeLozier also knows a thing or two about the golf course business. After all, many of his companies' homes are built around golf courses.

DeLozier, immediate past president of the National Golf Course Owners Association, spoke last November at the Carolinas Golf Course Superintendents' annual conference



and show in Myrtle Beach, S.C. He was part of a panel discussion named, "Where Golf Is Going."

One thing DeLozier made clear to attendees of the discussion is that he knows how important superintendents are to a residential area that features a golf course. That said, DeLozier believes in empowering superintendents.

"The superintendent controls the franchise in our business," he said.

DeLozier realizes a golf course can provide an immediate first impression to a residential community. If a potential customer drives through the gates of a Pulte Homes community, DeLozier wants the golf course to

Quotable

"There is definitely a downturn in the development of high-end daily-fee facilities, so it looks, in some ways, like golf is returning to its elitist past with super high-end courses catering to a wealthy clientele."

—Jeff Shelley, the editorial director for *Cybergolf & golfconstructionnews.com*, a company that tracks golf course building.

"Overseeding ... the time of year that makes or breaks the entire golfing season."

—D. Phil Shoemaker Jr., superintendent of *Desert Highlands Golf Club* and president of the *Arizona Golf Course Superintendents Association*, in the first line of his *President's Message* column in a recent addition of *Cactus Clippings*.

provide the "wow" factor, as in, "Wow, we should live here," he says.

"My nightmare is someone drives in our gate and looks at our golf course and says, 'This is awful. If they can't take care of the golf course, how in the world can they build me a good house?'" he says.

The best home builders view golf as an amenity that helps them sell homes, DeLozier stressed. Hence, the best home builders are committed to golf and invest in it.

"We want to invest in [golf] and we want it to be well done," DeLozier said. "The better done the golf course is ... the better we drive home sales." ■

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must scrutinize the drawings of the Old Course, for within those 18 holes are all the secrets of great architecture.

Like others before him, Woods would be wise to partner with a known architect for his first few designs. Nicklaus had Pete Dye, and Tom Weiskopf had Jay Morrish. For Tiger, I would suggest, in no particular order, Steve Smyers, Brian Silva or Gil Hanse. They adhere to the school of design that C.D. Macdonald and Mackenzie used, which starts by genuflecting at the altar of the Old Course.

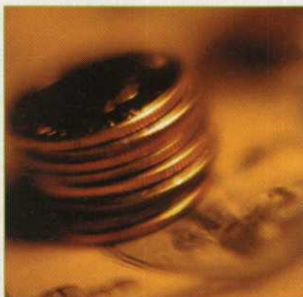
I know Woods thinks he already knows course design, but his words betray him. When he says Warwick Hills Golf & Country Club in Grand Blanc, Mich. — which opened in 1958 — is a great example of Classic Era architecture, he reveals his ignorance and immediately loses credibility. Woods might as well say a Double Whopper is a great cut of beef.

The same is true when he says he wants to build difficult golf courses. He should realize the average player isn't looking to get his butt kicked, but rather to be challenged and have fun. Saying he's going to make a course difficult is like a cook saying he's going to make the chili really hot. In both cases, it's easy to do but is usually unsatisfying to the customer.

And one last bit of advice: He should try to have some fun. Everything about the building of a golf course (other than the permitting process, which he should subject himself to just once so as to understand that special brand of hell) is a joy. Learn to read a topographical map; listen as design associates and contractors talk; watch a bulldozer operator carve out a bunker from start to finish.

Unlike competitive golf, architecture is not about winning and losing. It is about creating something that will bring pleasure to others. In the end, it will be the golfers — not a scorecard or bank book — who decide how well Woods has done. ■

Becoming Certified Makes Sense — And Cents



It pays to become a certified golf course superintendent — literally. On average, certified superintendents earn much more than superintendents who aren't certified. The annual increase in salary of certified superintendents is also much higher.

The average salary of a certified superintendent rose from \$62,948 in 1998 to \$80,489 in 2005, according to the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America (GCSAA). Incidentally, the salary increase for non-certified superintendents for the same period was from \$58,091 in 2003 to \$63,126 in 2005.

But becoming a certified superintendent takes time and dedication. The fact that there are only about 1,965 certified superintendents — a small percentage among the universe of golf courses — might be a reflection of the magnitude of the achievement. To achieve Certified Golf Course Superintendent status, candidates will have successfully completed a rigorous program of study and professional experience over and above that required of Class A, Superintendent Member or Class C members, according to the GCSAA.

Becoming certified doesn't just mean a potential upgrade in salary; it also provides superintendents a boost in the way they are viewed professionally by their peers. Certification goes hand in hand in with professionalism. Did you know that all of the GCSAA board members are certified?

Today's superintendent shouldn't just rely on his or her agronomic knowledge to do his job, the GCSAA states. The superintendent who better understands the business of golf and who works well with other department heads to help the golf facility succeed will be in high demand.

Preparing for certification takes considerable time, the GCSAA says. The association, however, offers many resources to help superintendents. For more information on becoming certified, visit the Web site at www.gcsaa.org/mc/certification/default.asp.

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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Off The Fringe



Hazard, Indeed

Joe Hubbard, certified superintendent of Broken Sound Golf Course in Boca Raton, Fla., has a new digital camera. And the alligator pictured here on Hubbard's golf course, known affectionately as Norman, has become a popular subject of the man behind the lens.

Hubbard says he's not worried about getting too close to Norman, who's about 5-feet long. "He poses no danger at this time," Hubbard says. "His dad, a 10-to-11 footer, is another question."



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relations. He can talk easier to these congressmen because I don't have the industry background right now.

What are your main goals in the short term of your tenure?

One of my personal goals is to grow our relationships with our affiliate organizations.

We have a staff person that currently is traveling around and meeting with those people, so it's been an emphasis for about a year now. But I'd like to formalize the relationship and benefits for those members.

What will be your biggest challenges?

Serving our diverse members. I was drawn to the industry association because you can do much more with more people and because you have the voice of everyone, but when you have everyone, each segment wants to be different. So we're in the process of coming up with programs and services to cater to each of them. We can no longer just give the same information to everybody. But electronically, we can individualize our approach. It's one-to-

one marketing; we can figure out what one person gets out of the organization and then market that to them.

Will you expand the IA's staff to do it?

I don't have permission yet for that, but over the next year, it's definitely something I want to pursue.

How will you ensure that IA's certification program is a premium credential?

I envision a certification board for the industry where it is an umbrella, and we acknowledge all of the certifications out there under one body.

In conjunction, there needs to be some sort of training and assessment at the lower level, and I think we are missing that. The certification board is looking at that to determine whether it is their role, and if so, is there a market for that, or should that be something that stays on the education side of things?

What got you on the association executive track?

My dad had an association management company. I went to Europe for one year

of college, and I came back and had no money and no options but to work for the family business. And I thought there would be no way that I would do it for very long. So I went to get my MBA so I could make the jump to the for-profit world. But I've been able to move forward in this career and am satisfied with the positions and challenges I've had, so I haven't had to crossover yet. But it still could happen someday.

What are some ways you strive to hit a work/life balance?

They key to balance is building an excellent staff that you can trust that does the things the way you know you are comfortable with so you don't have to be managing them. So in order to balance your life, you've got to spend the time in the beginning to build the culture in your office environment that allows you to balance your life so you're not worried and can let go.

I asked a mentor years ago how she balanced her life. She responded: "I got a cleaning lady." She was right. I've found that I spend money on things I never thought I'd spend money on so that I have my weekends to myself when I am home. ■