

# 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

**W**hat 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

**T**iger 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.

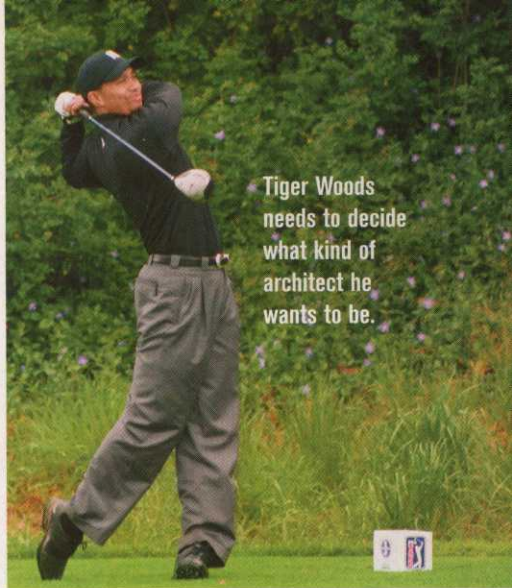
If Tiger happened to seek my advice, I'd happily tell him some ways to avoid the pitfalls encountered by his predecessors, many of whom have made the mistake of thinking that great golf swings translate into great architecture, too.

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



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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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