

Off The Fringe

Business briefs

Rounds Down in March, As Is Consumer Confidence

Is it a coincidence that golf rounds played were down nearly 10 percent from the previous year at the same time that consumer confidence has been sinking?

Rounds played in the United States were down 9.9 percent on same-store basis in March 2008 versus March 2007, according to the National Golf Foundation. Even with one extra weekend day in March versus last year, most regions doing relatively high volume in the month were down: Central/South Florida fell 3.1 percent; the Gulf Coast declined 1.8 percent, and South Central showed a 8.5 percent decline.

Consumer confidence has experienced a similar slump. The Conference Board Consumer Confidence Index, which had declined sharply in March, fell further in April. The Index now stands at 62.3, down from 65.9 in March. The Present Situation Index fell to 80.7 from 90.6. The Expectations Index was virtually unchanged, 50.1 versus 49.4 in March.

Home Depot Canada Phases Out Pesticides

Even though it's another country and another segment of the green industry, golf course superintendents should know that Home Depot Canada plans to voluntarily stop selling traditional pesticides and herbicides in its stores across Canada by the end of 2008 and increase its selection of environmentally friendly alternatives.

"Like our customers, we at The Home Depot, are concerned about the environment," said Annette Verschuren, president
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What's That Racket?

OH, IT'S JUST ANOTHER DAY AT TORO – WHERE THEY'RE 'THINKING WAY OUT THERE' *By Larry Aylward, Editor in Chief*

Several media members got to witness a lot of racket going on at The Toro Co. last month. We're talking clatter as in "clang," "boom," "bam" and even "ping."

Actually, it was just another day at Toro, located in Bloomington, Minn., where mowers and blowers and other equipment are tested extensively for durability, performance and safety among other things. And the tests, like placing a solid metal pipe underneath the cutting unit of

a fairway mower, cause some clatter.

The media were given a tour of the Toro facilities as part of the company's media day, titled "Innovation At Its Roots." In addition to seeing the rigor that Toro's equipment is put through before it goes to market, the media also heard from several company speakers, including CEO and Chairman

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Toro's Greg Janey talks to media members about the Reelmaster 5210 during media day.



PHOTO BY: LARRY AYLWARD

“Silcox” — *Continued from page 16*

Silcox: The damage can be very severe. When you’re talking grub control, you’re talking about treating a lot of acres because typically its fairways and roughs — the roughs primarily to prevent animal damage in the fall from skunks, raccoons and crows digging up the turf while looking for grubs. Turf can withstand a lot of grubs if it has adequate moisture. But one of the problems a superintendent also faces is if he’s got a grub population developing, and they’re getting into second and third instars in August and September and all of the sudden the weather dries out and that damage starts to show.

Golfdom: How can superintendents monitor grub populations?

Silcox: In the spring ... if you can dig down 4 or 6 inches and find grubs, you know you had a problem in the past year. So odds are that turf will become infested this year. It also depends if a superintendent has been on his course for a long time. If so, he’s going to understand where his hot spots are and where his problems are and also what species of grub of which he typically deals.

Golfdom: Some of the newer insecticides, including DuPont’s Acelepryn, are classified as reduced-risk insecticides by the Environmental Protection Agency. What constitutes a reduced-risk insecticide?

Silcox: The program was initiated back in the early 1990s by the EPA in a way to give industry incentive to develop new products that have characteristics they think are favorable. There are a number of ways a product can be classified as reduced risk. It can have a lower impact on human health, a lower toxicity on non-target organisms, lower potential groundwater contamination, low use rates, low resistance potential and it’s compatible with integrated pest management programs. ■

“Toro” — *Continued from page 10*

Mike Hoffman, Director of Center for Advanced Turf Technology Dana Lonn, Vice President of Operations Sandy Meurlot and others.

Being a major player in irrigation — more than 20 percent of Toro’s revenues come from it — a big topic of the day was water management. And considering that freshwater supplies are dwindling, Toro’s speakers had a lot to say about the topic.

“The fact is, water is becoming the new oil,” Hoffman said. “It’s no longer considered a commodity. It’s considered a precious resource — and it’s getting more and more expensive. We need to manage water much more carefully.”

Lonn, who has worked at Toro for almost 39 years and is considered a top industry researcher, delved into the many things that Toro is doing to help golf course superintendents irrigate more efficiently. Lonn talked about the company’s aim to develop sprinklers that mimic the distribution uniformity of rainfall. He also talked about climate-based irrigation controls to combat such things as solar evapora-

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DANA LONN

tion and wind, micro-irrigation and soil-sensor technology.

“A lot of what we’re driving at is to get more precise,” Lonn said. “And you get more precise by measuring.”

Lonn also expanded on future technology as it pertains to alternate fuels, such as fuel cells, bio-diesel and electric power. Lonn likes the latter, saying electric energy amounts to



Toro CEO and Chairman Mike Hoffman makes a point during the company’s media day in May.

lower and even zero emissions, fewer wear parts and less noise. But he said electric fuel is not yet feasible because it’s too heavy. For instance, 800 pounds of lead-acid batteries supply as much power as only 1 gallon of gas, which weighs about 8 pounds.

Overall, Lonn said Toro’s customers voice a similar request: They all want improved and more efficient products, but not at an increased price.

“They say, ‘Don’t change them much. Just give them to us better, faster and cheaper,’” Lonn said.

But Hoffman realizes that meeting such challenges abound in this ever-changing world. “

Certainly, change is accelerating,” Hoffman stated. “And a lot of the change we’ve seen over the last 15 years is happening in shorter durations, of which we have to be prepared. We are thinking way out there. So as this change accelerates, we can be in a position to help our customers. There’s a lot more learning that’s going to go on.” ■