

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

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of The Home Depot Canada and Asia. "We are going above and beyond government regulations by working with our suppliers to develop pesticide alternatives that are environmentally friendly and produce excellent results on lawns and gardens."

Pesticides will be phased out of The Home Depot stores across Canada starting immediately. By the end of June, The Home Depot anticipates that 62 of its stores nationwide will no longer sell pesticides, with all 166 stores offering additional environmentally preferred replacement products by the end of 2008.

Cleary Makes Appointments

Dayton, N.J.-based Cleary Chemical Co. made two key appointments. Pedro Perdoma has been hired as director of research and regulatory affairs, and Bill Cunningham was promoted to director of marketing.

Perdoma is responsible for all aspects of product research as well as federal regulatory affairs concerning the turf and ornamental industry. In his new role, Cunningham will manage all outside marketing efforts including directing all advertising efforts.

Companies Settle Lawsuits of Bayer's Patent

Bayer CropScience LP, Etigra LLC and Nufarm Americas, as successor to the assets of Etigra, and Control Solutions, announced that the companies have settled lawsuits regarding infringement of Bayer's patent for the pesticide imidacloprid on fertilizer. The parties have acknowledged that Bayer's patent is valid and enforceable. Etigra has acknowledged the validity of Bayer's copyrights. Etigra, Control Solutions and Frick Services are endeavoring to recall infringing imidacloprid product.

Bayer filed suit in February 2008 against Control Solutions in the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of North Carolina citing infringement of U.S. Patent No. 5,783,203. Bayer's litigation in regard to Etigra's actions was filed in the same U.S. district court in March 2007. ■

About Your Maintenance Budget

IS IT GOING UP WITH GOLFERS' DEMANDS?

By Larry Aylward, Editor in Chief

Considering that overall golf course conditions are what golfers value most when they shell out their hard-earned cash to play 18 holes, the proof is in the putting greens that superintendents are the most important employees that golf courses and golf clubs employ.

Golf course superintendents should feel proud. Then again, they probably feel pressure, which is understandable. They know their work is being scrutinized.

But in these days of near-flat rounds and stagnant growth, one wonders if superintendents' maintenance budgets are keeping pace with the increased scrutiny of their courses, which might include golfers' demands for faster- and more consistent-playing greens and more forgiving bunkers to provide firm lies. The bottom line is the bottom line, and superintendents might need more money in their maintenance budgets to perform some of the tasks to meet golfers' demand.

We've surveyed superintendents the past several years in regard to their maintenance budgets, which are going up for some and down for others.

In 2003, we asked: **What do you think your maintenance budget will be in 2004?**

Here's how 325 superintendents responded:

■ Up 15 percent or more	5%
■ Up 5 percent or more	37%
■ Same	41%
■ Down 5 percent or more	13%
■ Down 15 percent or more	4%

In 2005, we asked: **What do you think your maintenance budget will be in 2006?**

Here's how 380 superintendents responded:

■ Up 15 percent or more	6%
■ Up 5 percent or more	46%
■ Same	30%
■ Down 5 percent or more	13%
■ Down 15 percent or more	4%

In 2007, we asked: **What do you think your maintenance budget will be in 2008?**

Here's how 637 superintendents responded:

■ Up 15 percent or more	6%
■ Up 5 percent or more	43%
■ Same	40%
■ Down 5 percent or more	9%
■ Down 15 percent or more	3%



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