

Off The Fringe

Farewell to the Fertilizer Business

PURSELL LEAVES INDUSTRY SEGMENT, WHICH WAS RICH IN HIS FAMILY'S HERITAGE

By Larry Aylward, Editor in Chief

David Pursell stopped by the *Golfdom* booth at the Golf Industry Show with some big news: He's getting out of the fertilizer business, which was his family's business for 103 years.

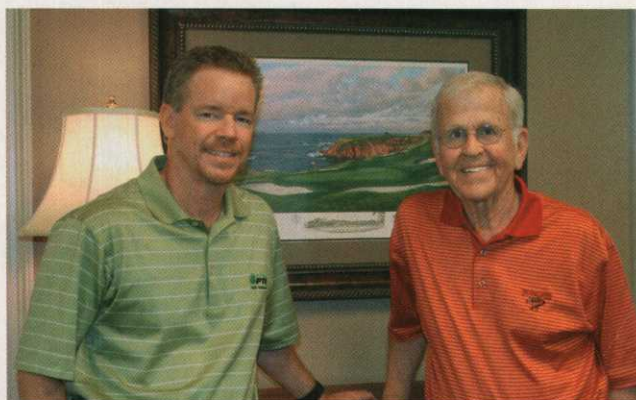
Pursell's last day with Agrium Advanced Technologies (AAT), the company he sold his family's business to in 2006, was March 1. But the 48-year-old Pursell also made it very clear he's not retiring to play more golf. He's leaving the fertilizer business to spend a lot of his time on his other family business, The Experience at FarmLinks, a research and demonstration venue and golf course in Sylacauga, Ala., that Pursell opened in 2001.

One might think Pursell would shed a tear or two about leaving the fertilizer business. But he's not sad at all. Of course, a lot of that has to do with the fact that he's still in the golf business with FarmLinks.

"I won't miss the fertilizer business," Pursell says. "But if I was walking away from [from the golf industry], I would be tearing up right now."

The Pursell family business started at the Sylacauga Fertilizer Co., co-founded by David's great-grandfather, DeWitt Parker, in 1904. Parker was the grandfather of Pursell's mother, Chris.

Parker passed the business to his son, Howard, when he died. Howard, subsequently passed the company to his son, Howard Jr., and his son-in-law, Jimmy Pursell (Chris's husband and David's dad), when he died in 1964. When Howard Jr. died unexpectedly in 1968, Jimmy Pursell was left at the helm.



David Pursell (left) and his father Jimmy headed up PTI for many years.

Quotable

"I swear, guys, I work at least eight and a half hours a day."

— Seth Strickland, superintendent at Miami Shores Country Club, after destroying the Independence Course at Reunion Resort in Orlando with three straight 4-under-par 68-stroke rounds to win the GCSAA tournament with a record-setting 12-under 204 total.

"High praise and extreme criticism are both exaggerations."

— Mark Wilson, certified superintendent of Valhalla Golf Club.

David joined the company in 1980 when it was still known as Parker Fertilizer. In 1992, the family changed the parent company name to Pursell Industries. In 1997, the Pursell family sold its consumer division and formed Pursell Technologies Inc. (PTI), and David became president and CEO, while Jimmy became chairman of the board.

In 2006, Pursell sold PTI to Agrium, a Calgary, Alberta-based global retailer, marketer and producer of crop inputs, specialty fertilizers and industrial products. Pursell has been vice president of marketing and new product development since that time.

Agrium paid \$74.5 million for PTI, best known for pioneering coating technologies with brands such as POLYON polymer-coated fertilizers, TriKote polymer/sulfur coated fertilizers and PRECISE controlled-release pesticide technology. At the time, Pursell said it wasn't a heart-wrenching decision to sell. And he says that AAT has done "a fantastic job" with the PTI business, which makes it even easier for him to walk away from it.

"[AAT] has a great strategic plan," Pursell says. "AAT can take the business to places that PTI could never have taken it."

Pursell has big plans for FarmLinks, of which AAT is a cornerstone partner along with The Toro Co. and BASF. He plans to add more amenities to the FarmLinks' experience.

Since last summer, Pursell had split his time between AAT and FarmLinks. Pursell says he's thankful for what the family business has provided him over the years, and he wants to give back to the golf industry.

"[I] have a fiduciary responsibility to give back to what made [me] successful," he says. "I love the golf business. I'm absolutely not sad [about leaving the fertilizer business] because I have a lot to look forward to." ■