

HAPPY FIVE-OH, Turfco

The company that brought the first topdresser to the industry celebrates its golden anniversary as a family and a team.

BY SETH JONES

IT MIGHT SEEM hard to imagine today, but 50 years ago, topdressing was done by a laborer armed with a shovel. He'd start off on one green and pitch sand all day until all 18 greens and a practice green had received a layer of sand.

By the 18th green, the consistency of topdressing was, well... lacking. And pity the laborer who worked at a 36-hole facility.

Enter the mechanical topdresser. The first mechanical topdresser — it had wooden slats and a wooden hopper — was shipped by Turfco on Sept. 29, 1961.

That topdresser was called the Mete-R-Matic, just like Turfco calls their topdresser series

today. But a lot has changed in 50 years. Turfco's patented Chevron belt promises consistent topdressing of all materials, both dry and wet. The company offers small walking topdressers to spinner topdressers all the way up to the big boy CR-10 fairway topdresser and its 4-cubic-yard hopper capacity.

But that doesn't mean the 1961 Mete-R-Matic, invented by superintendent Herb and Arthur Cohrs from Minneapolis Golf Club, is totally out of style.

"We still get calls for the old wooden machines wanting to know if we have replacement parts," laughs Scott Kinkead, executive vice president.

"That's our biggest problem," adds John Kinkead, 81 years young and the CEO of the company. "They last too long!"

The warranty pool

Turfco Manufacturing (Blaine, Minn) is a family-owned and operated company. John Kinkead's father, Robert Stanard Kinkead, founded National Mower in 1919. John, who is now mostly retired, jokes that he recalls getting involved in the family business "somewhere around age two." His two sons, George, president and Scott, executive vice president, have been working with the company 26 and 20 years, respectively.

"Family companies can

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"The people in the golf business are a pretty good crew of guys. It's not like you're in the junk business," says John Kinkead, CEO of Turfco, left. "They like what they're doing or they wouldn't be doing it."

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Fifty and Fabulous



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be the worst thing in the world or the best thing,” Scott Kinkead says. “We’re fortunate, John’s been great. He may be even more hands-off than we want him to be. My brother and I get along great, so it’s enjoyable. We’ve both made a commitment to get out



The first powered topdresser in the industry was sold by Turfco. This Mete-R-Matic was bought by Christina Lakes Golf Course near Grand Forks, British Columbia, in 1962.

there in the field to help superintendents problem solve. I don’t think I’d be here for 20 years if it wasn’t a fun job.”

The family atmosphere transforms into a team atmosphere from the front office to the shop on the backside of the building. That’s because employees at the facility are focused on making machines that won’t break down. The better the machines, the better the employees’ bank accounts.

Every year the company establishes what they call “the warranty pool.” The pool is a large amount of money dedicated to repairing equipment still under the company’s three-year warranty.

At the end of each year, the money that isn’t spent from the warranty pool gets distributed to the staff in the factory. So the fewer machines that are returned for service, the bigger the warranty pool check for each factory worker.

“That check can be pretty substantial,” Scott Kinkead says. “Like John always says, those are the best checks we write every year.”

Most of Turfco’s product line is built on-site, with the exception of parts they buy from the outside, like engines, tires and rubber grips. And don’t let the phrase “family-owned and operated” fool you, the company uses the latest in CNC equipment, plasma cutters and robotic welders.

“Quality is important – superintendents expect this equipment to last,” Scott Kinkead says.



"The fun part is getting the superintendents engaged," Scott Kinhead says. "They tell us, 'Hey, you could make my life so much easier if your equipment could just do this.'"

Easier, efficient equipment

Scott Kinhead takes a stroll through the factory and greets employees as he sees them. He used to work here in the summers when he was in high school and college. He even worked one year in the factory after college – not something he planned on doing with his shiny new economics degree.

"I've been here for 20 years now," he says. "John said, 'We just need help for a few years.'"

"The golf and lawn care industry are great industries. You see a lot of people who get into it never leave," he says. "There are probably easier ways to make money. (Superintendents) have got to love what they're doing. It's a lot of fun working with guys who love their jobs."

John Kinhead says they didn't realize it at the time, but the superintendents with the wooden topdressers 50 years ago had it easier because expectations at their golf courses were lower.

"This industry, like all industries, has changed a lot," he says. "My father said the toughest and the most gambling guys in

the world are the farmers because they only 'get' one out of three. Now, the superintendents better not get one out of three! But they're still working with the weather and grass. You can lose a green in a day, so they've got to be there."

What it all comes down to for the company is the desire to help people do their jobs better.

"The fun part is getting the superintendents engaged," Scott Kinhead says. "... We enjoy working with superintendents to make their jobs easier and more efficient."

Now, if they could just do like John asks, and stop making the equipment last so darn long. ■

50 Anniversary Giveaway

In honor of their 50th anniversary, Turfco is giving away ball mark repair tools, 10 Apple iPads and a grand prize of a WideSpin 1540 EC. To enter the drawings, visit www.turfco.com/50years.

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