

# Starter

NEWS, NOTES AND QUOTES



## // HOLED IT



When Annbriar CGCS John Soetaert peered into the sinkhole that swallowed golfer Mark Mihal on March 8, he said it resembled "a bell-shaped void."

## REPAIRS MADE ON ANNBRIAR GC SINKHOLE

BY BETH GERACI // Senior Editor

➔ On Friday March 8, Mark Mihal of Creve Coeur, Mo., was enjoying a leisurely round of golf with friends at Annbriar Golf Course in Waterloo, Ill. Things were going great until, while standing on the 14<sup>th</sup> fairway, Mihal suddenly was swallowed by a sinkhole 10 feet wide. The accident left Mihal with a dislocated shoulder — and Annbriar CGCS John Soetaert with important repairs to make.

"I couldn't believe it. It was unbelievable," said Soetaert. At the barbershop with his kids when the accident happened, Soetaert rushed to the course and assessed the scene before launching an intensive response plan.

"I've been working on golf courses since 1986 and I've never seen anything like this," Soetaert said. "The guy just disappeared. He just fell through the earth."

In responding to the accident, Soetaert first fenced off the sinkhole, a bell-shaped void he likened to "a Hershey's Kiss under the ground." But onlookers kept knocking the fencing down to get a closer look, leaving Soetaert and his crew no choice but to collapse the entire hole.

The accident hits home for Soetaert, considering just two weeks earlier his crew was spraying on the very same fairway. "They went right over where

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## // SWEET RIDE

### BUBBA'S HOVERCRAFT MAKES QUITE A SPLASH

Bubba Watson knows how to create buzz on the golf course even when he's not swinging a club. Case in point, the PGA Tour star lit up the Internet on April 1 when, via YouTube, he introduced the world to his new hovercraft prototype made by Oakley.

Combining hovercraft technology with golf cart elements like a roof, the BW1 hovercraft glides easily over water, sand, turf, even through woods. "And my ball likes to go in and out of the woods, so we gotta be able to get there in the best way and quickest way possible," Watson says in the video.

He adds: "People are 'just going to want to drive the hovercraft and not play golf. But that's how I got started, driving the golf cart then golf got in the way.'"



## // NEW HIRE

### KRUGER JOINS ARYSTA TEAM

Arysta LifeScience North America early this month announced the hiring of Jim Kruger as the Great Lakes territory sales manager for its Turf and Ornamental team.

Kruger previously held sales and technical positions at Cleary Chemical, Harrell's Fertilizer, Helena Chemical and Michigan State University. As Great Lakes sales manager, he will serve Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Michigan, Ohio and Wisconsin.

"We welcome Jim to our team and look forward to him sharing his expertise and knowledge with customers throughout the Great Lakes region," said Laurie Treu, business manager with Arysta LifeScience T&O. "He has a deep understanding of the T&O market and its customer base."



(L) To stabilize the sinkhole, the Annbriar crew dug 16 feet down and filled the hole with 200 tons of riprap. (R) The hole after it was filled and before grading.

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the hole developed,” he said. “It’s kind of freaky.”

In the sinkhole’s aftermath, the Annbriar grounds crew was so busy making repairs Soetaert had to call in reinforcements a few weeks early.

Ultimately, Soetaert and his crew dug down 16 feet, as far as the backhoe would go. Within one week of Mihal’s fall, the maintenance crew had dug out the hole, lined it, filled it with more

than 200 tons of riprap to stabilize it, and graded it. Soetaert had planned to sod the area but decided to wait until it rained a few times and the ground settled. The ground did settle, more than Soetaert would have liked, and repairs continue to be a work in progress.

“I’m afraid it’ll be an ongoing thing every year,” Soetaert lamented of the sinkhole’s maintenance. “You’re picking a fight with Mother Nature, and oftentimes that’s not one you win.”

**THEY SAID IT**

**AUSTIN ALLISON, 26**  
SUPERINTENDENT, TIMBERLAKE GC

On achieving success so young  
(see full story on page 20)

**“I’ve been able to work for some good superintendents who didn’t accept mediocrity. I learned from them, and I took what they taught me and made it my own style.”**

PHOTOS BY: JOHN SOETAERT

BY THE NUMBERS

**51.4**  
**PERCENT**

The amount of the continental U.S. in moderate to exceptional drought as of March 26

// **ALMOST FAMOUS**

## AP MEETING GETS AP MENTION

Well, that’s something that doesn’t happen every day.

Here at *Golfdom*, we were honored to get the chance to stop by Arnold Palmer’s office and meet the King in person. Sure, Arnold Palmer and the magazine go way back, but that doesn’t mean we take a meeting with Mr. Palmer lightly. So when he invited us to come down to the Arnold Palmer Invitational in Orlando (see full story, page 32) we arrived with bells on.

And then, something awful happened. *Golfdom* editor-in-chief Seth Jones had a case of bad timing, and was brought into Palmer’s office while he was in the middle of a meeting with the Associated Press.

Pleasantries were exchanged, and the meeting was quickly over, leaving AP to his meeting with the AP.

Turns out our bad timing was actually good timing. That brief meeting between *Golfdom* and Palmer made the Associated Press’ story a few days later, and both *Golfdom* and Jones had their names in newspapers from Miami to Winnipeg.

Doug Ferguson of the Associated Press wrote, in part, “A staff member came into the room and mentioned two men were outside and wanted to say hello. One was Seth Jones, the editor of *Golfdom* magazine, who recently interviewed Palmer for a project. ‘Well, bring him in,’ Palmer said, rising from his desk with a broadening smile...”

“I’ve always said I’d rather be lucky than good, and it turns out the timing of that meeting was lucky,” said Jones. “It’s never a bad thing to get the name of the magazine in a syndicated news story, especially a story about a meeting with such a legend of the game.”