



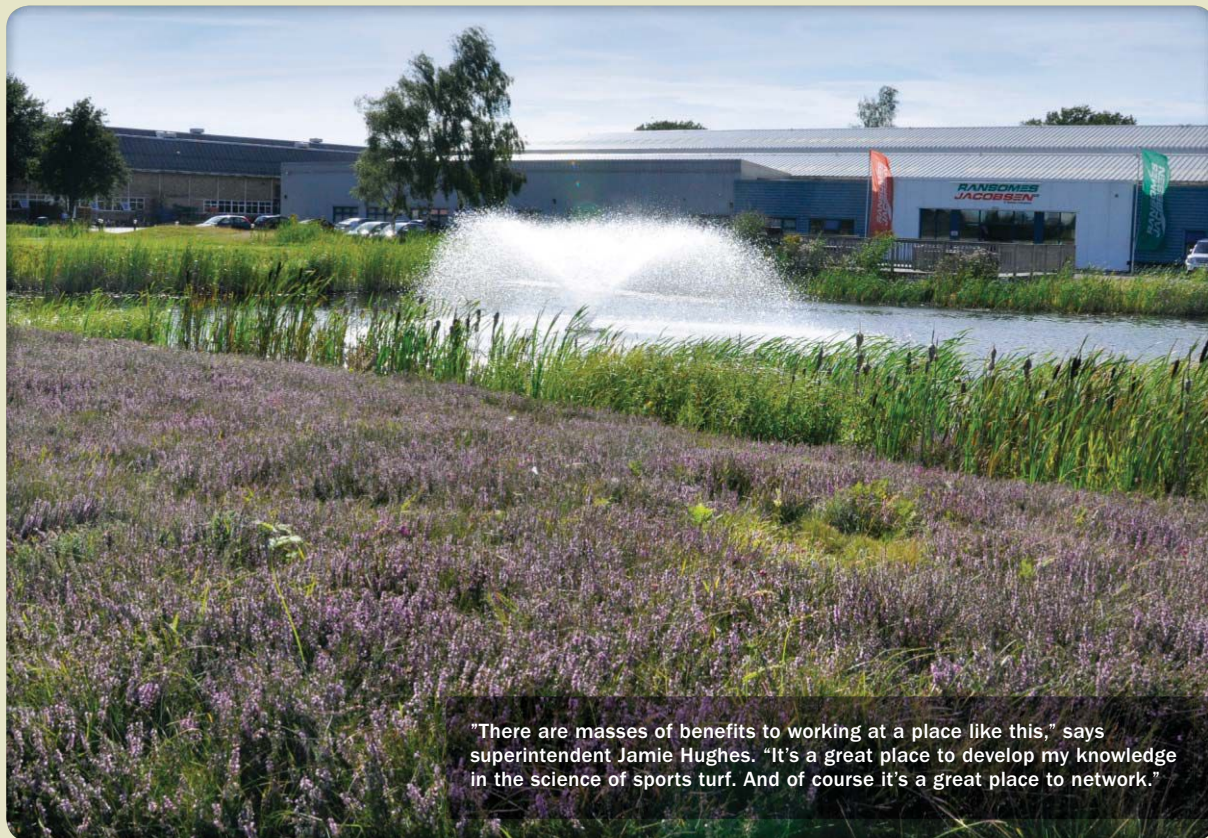
A DAY AT THE R.J.

By taking a wasteland and turning it into a three-hole golf course, equipment manufacturer Ransomes Jacobsen spreads the word about golf's environmental benefits.

BY SETH JONES

Ransomes Jacobsen — or simply Jacobsen as it's known in the U.S. — welcomes about 1,000 visitors to its manufacturing headquarters in Ipswich, England, every year. In the last six years, those visitors have also had the pleasure of being invited to play the first GEO certified golf course in Europe — the three-hole R.J. National.

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"There are masses of benefits to working at a place like this," says superintendent Jamie Hughes. "It's a great place to develop my knowledge in the science of sports turf. And of course it's a great place to network."

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Ransomes Jacobsen product trainer Ian “Mitch” Mitchell (left) and R.J. National superintendent Jamie Hughes, pictured this summer. Hughes says his Eclipse 1 walking greensmower is his favorite piece of equipment. “I’m a fan of hand-cutting greens, and when it’s quiet and peaceful out, it’s brilliant.”

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In the 1970s the area outside the main office at Ransomes Jacobsen was a driving range. That driving range eventually closed, leading the land to become a simple wasteland in an industrial area. David Withers, president of Jacobsen, wanted to see it turned back into something beautiful. So in 2007, architect Howard Swan was called in to create a three-hole, par nine golf course.

We wanted to show people in this area who aren’t familiar with golf that some of their preconceived notions are incorrect.”

For young superintendent Jamie Hughes, the environmental aspect of the course is what he finds most compelling about his new job.

“We’re a very environmentally aware company, as our GEO certification and our ISO 14001 accreditation shows,” he says. “This means I get to manage the heather

for what’s next,” Hughes says. “I dream of courses like Wentworth and St. George’s, but if an opportunity arose with Jacobsen, I’d find it hard to resist.”

Hughes is also responsible for maintaining the soccer field that adjoins the golf course. The field is used for sound and vibration tests, but it also sees regular action as the host field for Jacobsen’s intracompany soccer matches. “The blue collar guys in the factory actually get to kick management in the shins,” laughs Ian Mitchell, product trainer for Jacobsen.

The course is short but tough. Withers says he once shot a 7, then turned right around to play it again and shot a 14. Only one hole-in-one has happened at the course, and it was on No. 3, a tricky 60-yard carry to an island green.

But the difficulty of the course isn’t important to Withers. What is important is the positive reactions hosting customers on the course has brought the company.

“I know a lot of people visit us and they also visit our competitors. They all get a tour of the factory, and that’s nice. But let’s be honest, you see one factory, you’ve seen them all,” Withers says. “When they come here and see the R.J. National, that’s something that sets us apart. That’s something they’re going to remember.” **G**

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Withers is proud of the fact that the course was the first in Europe to be GEO (Golf Environment Organization — www.golfenvironment.org) certified.

“We decided from day one, even before we knew we were going to make it a golf course, we knew we wanted to make it sustainable,” Withers says. “When we decided it would be a golf course, we wanted to market that golf isn’t a green desert.

areas, the bug piles and the lake. I’m also adding wildflowers to the course, and those areas need to be maintained as well.”

Jacobsen hires young up-and-comers to a two-year contract to be the superintendent at R.J. National. Hughes, 25, has experience working on golf courses, but this is his first time calling the shots.

“I want to learn as much as possible in all aspects of the industry to prepare me