



Rick Wehl, inventor of the Hurricane Blo-Vac, demonstrates what the ride on tool can do.

Blown away

The 2013 *Golfdom* Summit knocked attendees off their feet, both literally (see: the Hurricane blower) and figuratively (witness: Annika Sorenstam's keynote address).

BY MOLLY GASE

From a blower that was strong enough to knock grown men off their feet to a stunning presentation by arguably the greatest female golfer of all time, the 2013 *Golfdom* Summit was full of breath-taking moments... and that's not even including the cigar roller.

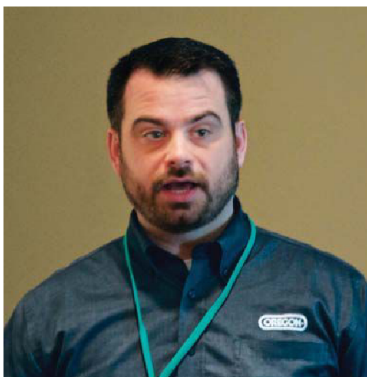
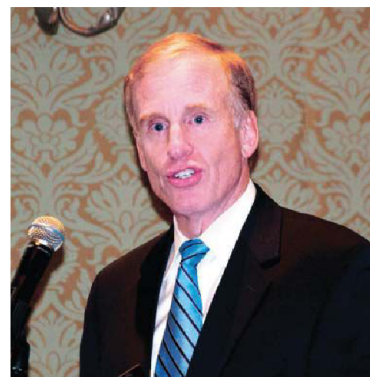
The *Golfdom* Summit, now going on its fourth year, takes the opportunity for superintendents to learn, network and have fun and combines it with a guarantee that sponsors will get sufficient time with their most desirable demographic. The 2013 Summit, held for the second straight year at Reunion Resort in Orlando,

hosted nearly 50 hand-picked superintendents from across the country and was sponsored by a benchmark 15 industry suppliers.

To attend the event, qualifying superintendents needed to apply (see sidebar, page 30) via *Golfdom.com*. Not every applying superintendent was selected, but those who were experienced firsthand arguably the most innovative event in the industry.

"This is absolutely, by far the best conference that I've ever attended, and I've been to many over my 24 years in the industry," Darin Pearson, (pictured above) superintendent at Eagle Bend GC in Lawrence, Kan., said of the event. "The one-on-one time

PHOTO BY: SETH JONES



The *Golfdom* Summit included four guest speakers and presentations from 15 sponsoring vendors. Pictured left to right, top then bottom: Annika Sorenstam; Chuck Greif of Jacobsen; Steve Mona of the World Golf Foundation; Scott Kinkead of Turfco; Josh Huffman of Oregon Cordless Tool System; and Melissa Swart of Cushman.

with the vendors is priceless. And the facility is first class, you couldn't host it at a better place."

Learning materials

Unique to the *Golfdom* Summit is the many one-on-one meetings that occur — almost 500 meetings take place between industry suppliers and the superintendents in attendance at the Summit. Sponsors also get the opportunity to present their products in a group demonstration.

The 15 sponsors of the 2013 *Golfdom* Summit included: Air-O-Lator Corporation; Cushman; FMC Professional Solutions; GenNext Biotech; Healthy Grow; Holganix; Hurricane Inc.; Jacobsen; John Deere Golf; Lebanon Turf; Oregon Cordless Tool System; Phoenix Brands by UPI; Quali-Pro; Smithco Inc. and Turfco.

It wasn't uncommon for mingling su-

perintendents to share notes about what caught their eye. Rick Weihl, inventor of Hurricane Blo-Vac, was happy to be on the receiving end of a lot of the chatter this year.

The stand-on riding blower he invented and brought to the Summit gives operators the ability to clear course paths, from leaves to small logs, on the go. In a short demonstration video, Hurricane showed its ability to not only direct air to the right, left and front, but also to literally knock someone's feet out from under them when hit with a blast. (To view the video, visit hurricanedemo.com.)

"A lot of people say they've never seen anything like it before," Weihl said. Weihl worked in the landscape industry previously and had wished for a blower that could switch directions. As of press time he had sold 1,000 units.

"The biggest thing is to be able to blow three ways and be able to switch directions of air flow within two seconds," Weihl said.

One superintendent who was pleasantly surprised by the Hurricane Blo-Vac was Fred Gehrisch, Highlands Falls CC in Highlands, N.C. "The Hurricane Blo-Vac was one of those products that, at first I didn't think much of," Gehrisch said, "but after demoing it and going out with them, that's a great product for a golf course."

Throughout the sessions, superintendents saw everything from fertilizer produced on a chicken farm to a self-sharpening chainsaw that dramatically shot sparks across the room. Steve Cohoon, CGCS at Heritage Hunt G&CC in Gainesville, Va., was most impressed by the new Cushman utility vehicle he saw at the Summit.

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"I like the electric (drivetrain) — I think that's really a nice product," said Cohoon.

After absorbing so much information, attendees were ready to get some fresh air and hit the course. The Summit golf tournament was played on Reunion's Tom Watson course, the first Watson design in Florida. While it was best that most scores were soon forgotten, the day wrapped up with a more memorable outdoor barbecue dinner, live music and a cigar roller.

Words of inspiration

The 2013 Summit featured four speakers who shared their wisdom with attendees.

Mark Woodward, senior vice president for OB Sports as well as principal of Damarco Golf, spoke as *Golfdom's* featured columnist. Woodward centered his discussion on the reality of employment in the industry, which closely mirrored his monthly "At the Turn" column for the magazine. Woodward advised superintendents to plan ahead, thinking about which of their skills could be translated into another industry.

"I'm sure all of you know someone who has worked for 20 years in this industry and is now unemployed," Woodward said. "The only thing constant in our industry is change."

Wayne Kappleman, superintendent at Sharp Park GC in San Francisco, was the



The 2013 Summit was the second in a row to be held at the Reunion Resort near Orlando, Fla.

2013 Herb Graffis Businessperson of the Year winner. A truly humble guy, Kappleman began his lecture by saying how shocked he was to have been selected for the Graffis award. He then told the group about some of the challenges of his course.

"Some of the things we have to overcome are pretty special compared to situations at your typical golf course," Kappleman said with a shrug.

One example? Frog delays.

Kappleman's course is home to the threatened red-legged frog and the endangered San Francisco garter snake. Because of these tenants, he must think outside of the box and tread carefully — one of the reasons he was selected for *Golfdom's* prestigious award.

"My No. 1 priority is the protection of these two species. Legally, if we kill one frog or snake, we could be shut down," Kappleman said of his situation at Sharp Park. "I told the lawyers that I shooed a frog away and it became a 30-minute discussion on (if) shooing the frog was harassment... That's how ridiculous it becomes," Kappleman told the group, evoking both laughs and looks of disbelief.

Planning ahead as the golf industry changes was a main topic of discussion for Steve Mona in his "State of the Industry" speech. Mona, the CEO of the World Golf Foundation and a former CEO of GCSAA, advocated changing aspects of golf to match modern society.


"There's always going to be a group of people who will play the game," Mona said. But that group alone will not grow the game, he warned. Instead, women, children and minorities need to get involved. The changes of society, including the economic downturn, divorce and second families, run parallel to the game of golf. "We don't operate in a bubble, so

these are things we have to consider," Mona concluded.

Rounding out the roster of speakers was Annika Sorenstam, eight-time Rolex Player of the Year and 2003 World Golf Hall of Fame inductee. Sorenstam spoke with passion about getting more women and children involved in the game and making it more of a family activity.

Sorenstam reflected back on her time working at a golf course as a good experience that helped her understand what happens behind-the-scenes. "I worked with the greenskeeper for three months on my summer break. It was early mornings, so I know what you guys go through... I'd go out there and cut some greens, cut some fringes," Sorenstam said.

Understanding her audience, Sorenstam spoke to their struggles in this ever-changing industry. "We heard numbers from (Mona) here, but you play a big part in (the industry). I'm sure things have changed. I'm sure regulations have changed. The expectations have changed and the way we build golf courses nowadays, the way we maintain golf courses nowadays... I'm sure you hear sustainability constantly," said Sorenstam.

Recognizing the challenges of the changing nature of golf, she tipped her hat to the attending superintendents. "I applaud you guys for the efforts that you put in. You're a big part of growth of the business." 

HOW TO QUALIFY FOR THE 2014 GOLFDOM SUMMIT

One of the hottest tickets in the industry, the *Golfdom* Summit will once again be seeking attendees for 2014. To increase your odds of being selected, applicants are encouraged to...

- Make sure their subscription to *Golfdom* is current (of course!)
- Subscribe to the *Golfdom* Insider e-newsletter (it's useful!)
- Be planning to make serious course improvements in 2015 (who isn't?)
- Be willing to participate in active discussions with colleagues from across the country (we like talkers)
- Apply online at Golfdom.com