Continued from page 28

because the company's predominant focus was on the private golf sector where new faces on the staff often tilt members' comfort level.

"We learned long ago that that's the heart and soul of a club – the people who touch the members daily," says Beryl Artz, ClubCorp's executive vice president of golf/country clubs.

Today, however, most of the major golf management companies feel the employee-retention issue is mortally wounded and soon to be dead and buried. Several firms report that generally between 85 percent and 95 percent of a facility's staff is retained during a takeover. And most of those who aren't retained have left on their own.

PHOTO: CLUBCORP INTERNATIONAL

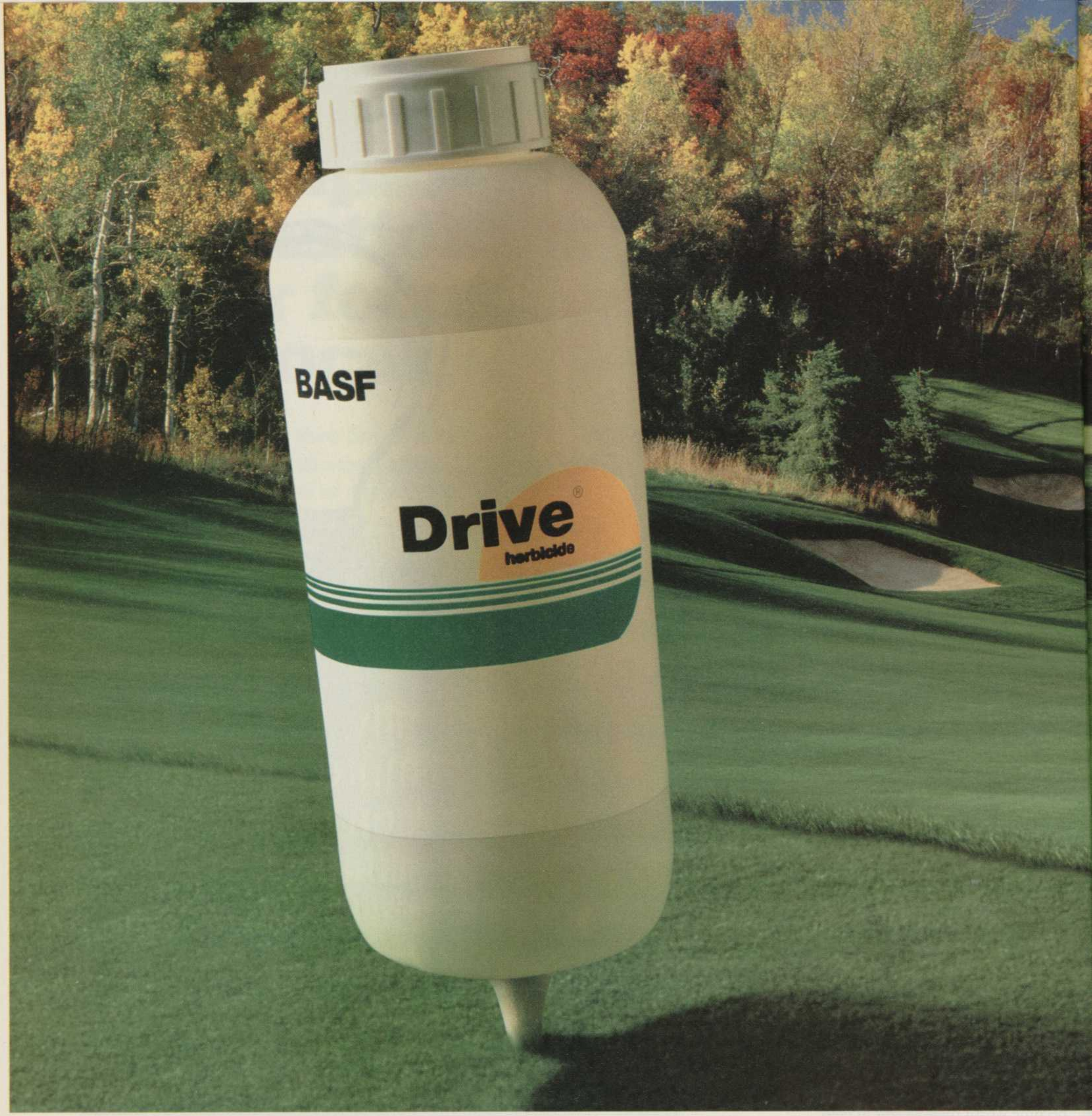
Companies like ClubCorp say they have learned not to unnecessarily tinker with "the heart and soul" of the facilities that they take over.

Golf course superintendents have been sensitive to this issue for many reasons – not the least of which is the struggle between the veteran superintendent and his or her personalized maintenance practices and the corporate idea of leaner, cheaper methods. But as the sphere of golf management companies has grown and the competition for luring golfer rounds has reached serious proportions, good course conditions have become imperative and good course superintendents, in estimations of one management executive, have become worth their weight in gold.

"We can't find enough good help as it is," notes Jeff Warren, director of business development for KSL Fairways, which owns nearly 50 properties around the country. "We strive to have the foresight to retain and develop good employees who will execute our standards for the golf course daily."

Still, fairways across the country are dotted with disgruntled superintendents; victims of being a bad fit with a management takeovers. Joe Redling, chief operating officer for Orlando-based Arnold Palmer Golf Management, acknowledges that the emphasis on a more busi-

Continues on page 34



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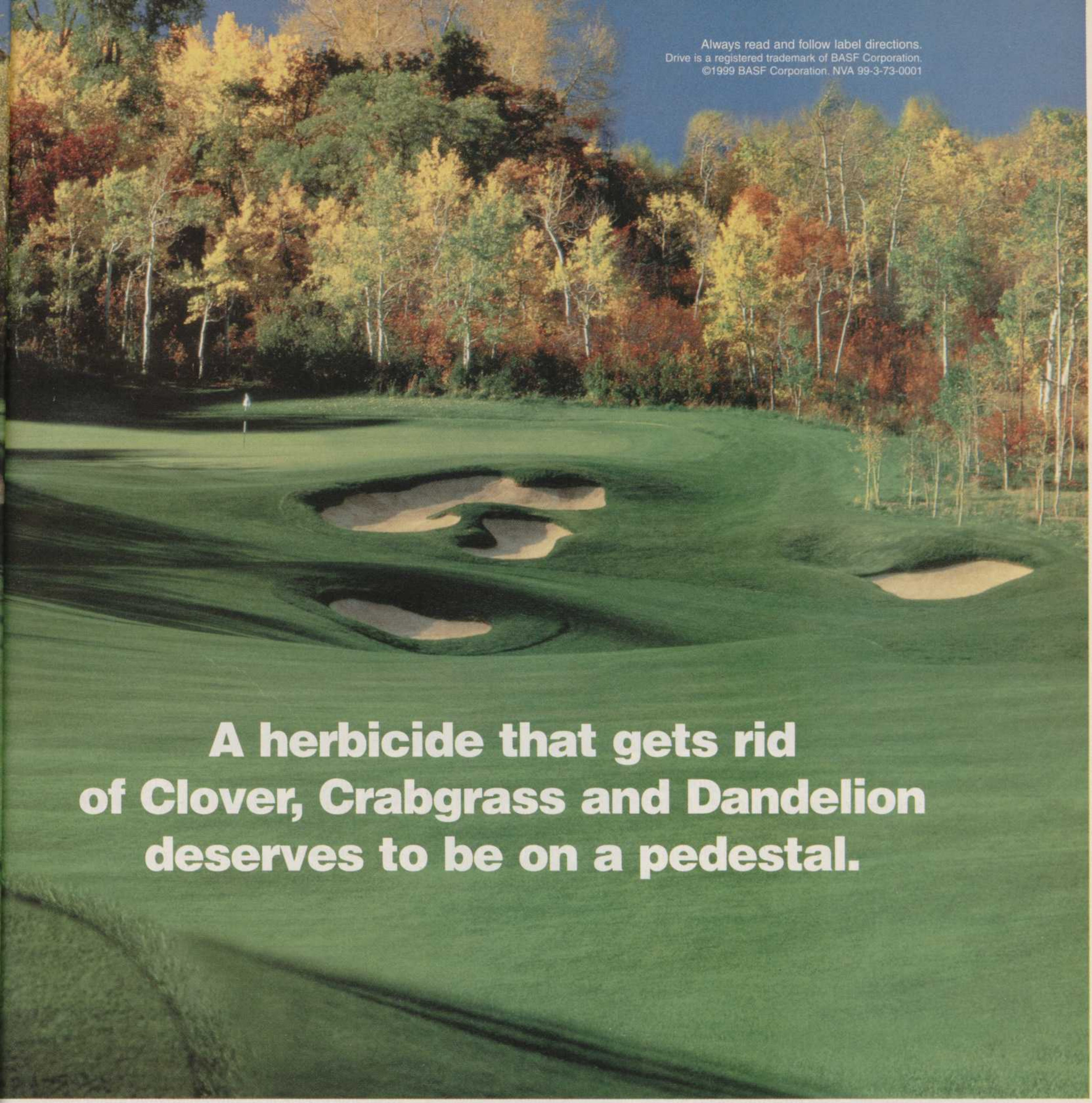

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Continued from page 31

nesslike, accountable approach to a golf course operation often clashes with a maintenance professional. But even more to the point is the pressure of high expectations a management firm demands in its efforts to please the paying customer.

"Golf course conditions are such a high priority," Redling says. "When you put out the Arnold Palmer brand, the customer expects improvements and a quality playing experience."

Headed by Jim Ellison, a veteran superintendent and the company's top agronomist, APGM employs regional superintendents who in turn train and direct the maintenance managers at its 30 courses across the United States.

"We don't have a policy to put our own people in place when we acquire properties," Redling says. "We strive to get superintendents to buy into the Palmer standards and take the properties to a new level. Our mission is to help them enhance their abilities to do their jobs."

ClubCorp has a similar structure of regional superintendents who act as mentors and coaches for the course managers at the company's more than 175 golf properties around the country.

"We retain 95 percent of the superintendents at properties we acquire," Artz says. "We assess their strengths and ask them to enroll in the vision of where we feel the property needs to go."

ClubCorp also puts its course managers in the spotlight each year when it encourages their attendance at seminars and a company awards program held in conjunction with the GCSAA's annual conference and show.

ClubCorp's commitment to the golf course and its management came through loud and clear when its showcase property, Pinehurst, was awarded this year's U.S. Open. The company promptly provided the resources needed to redesign, renovate and maintain the resort's historic No. 2 course to meet the USGA's rigid championship standards.

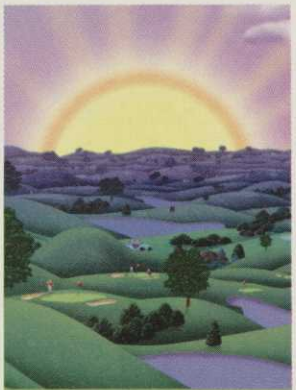
Andy Crosson, vice president of acquisitions for the Del Mar, Calif.-based Cobblestone Golf Group, admits that a managerial or ownership change can be difficult – often traumatic – for a superintendent. But he believes the situation will ease in time, especially if both sides keep an open mind when dealing with potential problems.

"We don't have a stable of ponies we trot out to take over," he says. "We like to retain the managers already in place, provide them with good pay, great benefits, a chance for upward mobility and a career path."

Indeed, management companies have found it's good business to provide site managers with medical and dental benefits, 401K and promotion opportunities. Many times such benefits were unavailable before the acquisition and will go a long way toward smoothing troubled waters.

Companies also tout on-the-job benefits and support that management brings, such as national purchasing, equipment sharing and the necessary resources to maintain a property according to set standards.

AGC cites significant gains in employee retention and relations as its managerial empire has grown to nearly 300 properties. For instance, Dave Pillsbury, AGC's vice president of operations, disputes lingering charges that his company is overly cost-conscious and corporate-driven.



"I'M AN OLD-TIMER who likes to spend time out on the golf course, not spend time on paperwork and such. But I learned it comes with the territory."

GARY BELL
Superintendent

"Unfortunately . . . the perception of American Golf seems to lag five or six years behind reality," Pillsbury says. "Our company has changed immensely, more in the past two years than in the previous 10."

AGC's concentrated effort to retain course managers is bolstered by a vast network of regional superintendents and new staff-friendly policies. The company, which has nearly 6,000 maintenance employees, says it's constantly training superintendents and seeking new ones to join the ranks.

When Troon Golf Management acquires a new property, it's the job of Jeff Spangler, its vice president of operations and a superintendent himself, to work with the maintenance staff on board and provide an understanding of the company's agronomic principles.

As a company that specializes in running quality, luxury-brand golf courses, Troon's standards for the golf course are understandably demanding. To that end, Troon generally waves off the traditional modes of management – an overall manager passing instructions to regional superintendents and on to the site superintendents.

Instead of this overseeing style, Spangler says company philosophy is to consider each property on its own merits and to nurture open communication among the maintenance management staff pertaining to that end.

The result has been a Troon Golf agronomic management plan that's basically full of input from all company superintendents and serves as the company line on fundamental maintenance.

"The plan is simplistic and universal in nature, and applicable to each golf course with only minor tweaking," Spangler says, adding that the program has gone a long way toward ensuring consistent course conditions and appearance from one property to the next.

The superintendent's view of golf management companies may never lose its glint of suspicion or outright fear. But efforts by the companies to render the retention issue moot are taking root.

Craig Schleider had been in golf course maintenance for 10 years – starting as a teenager – when

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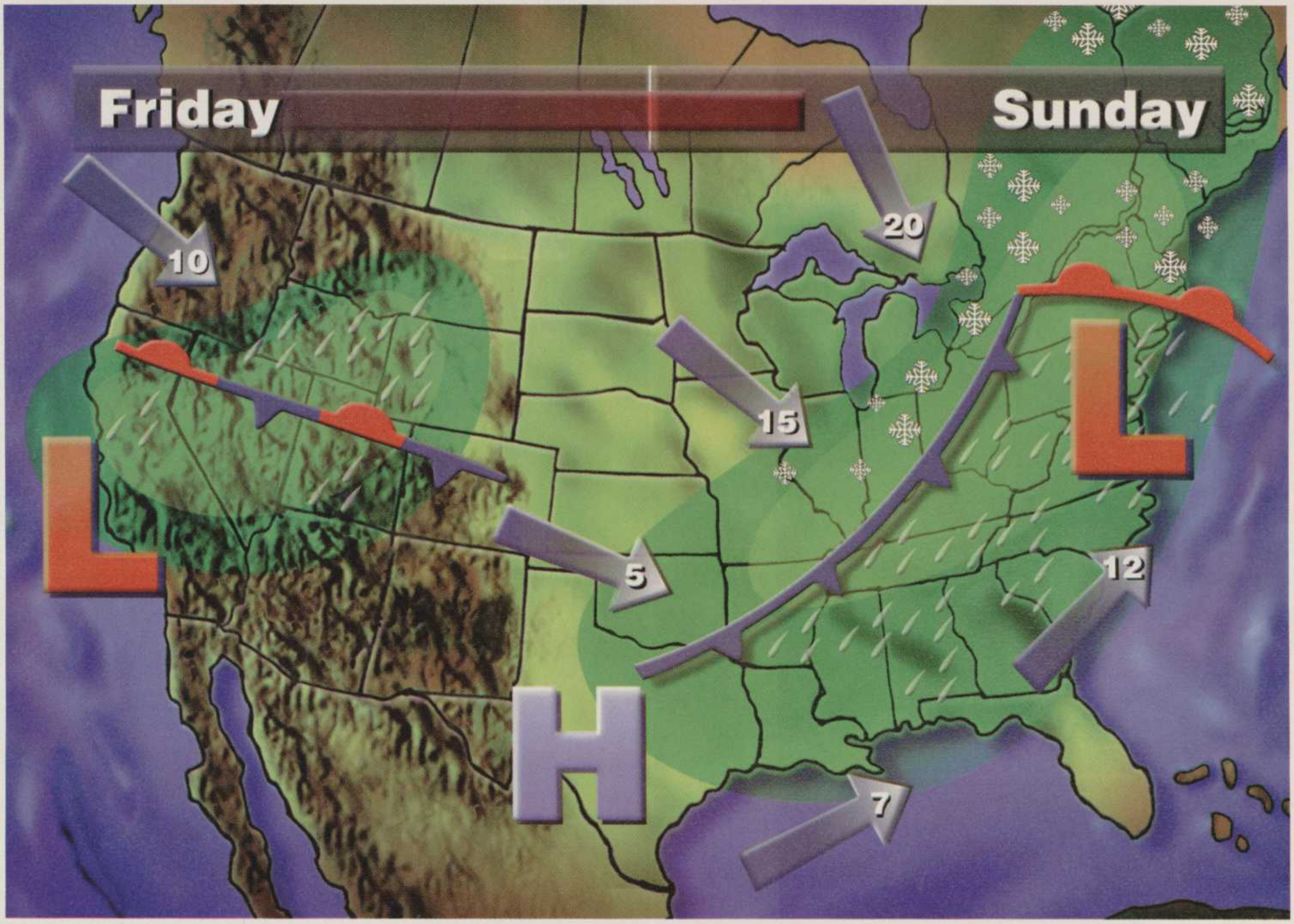

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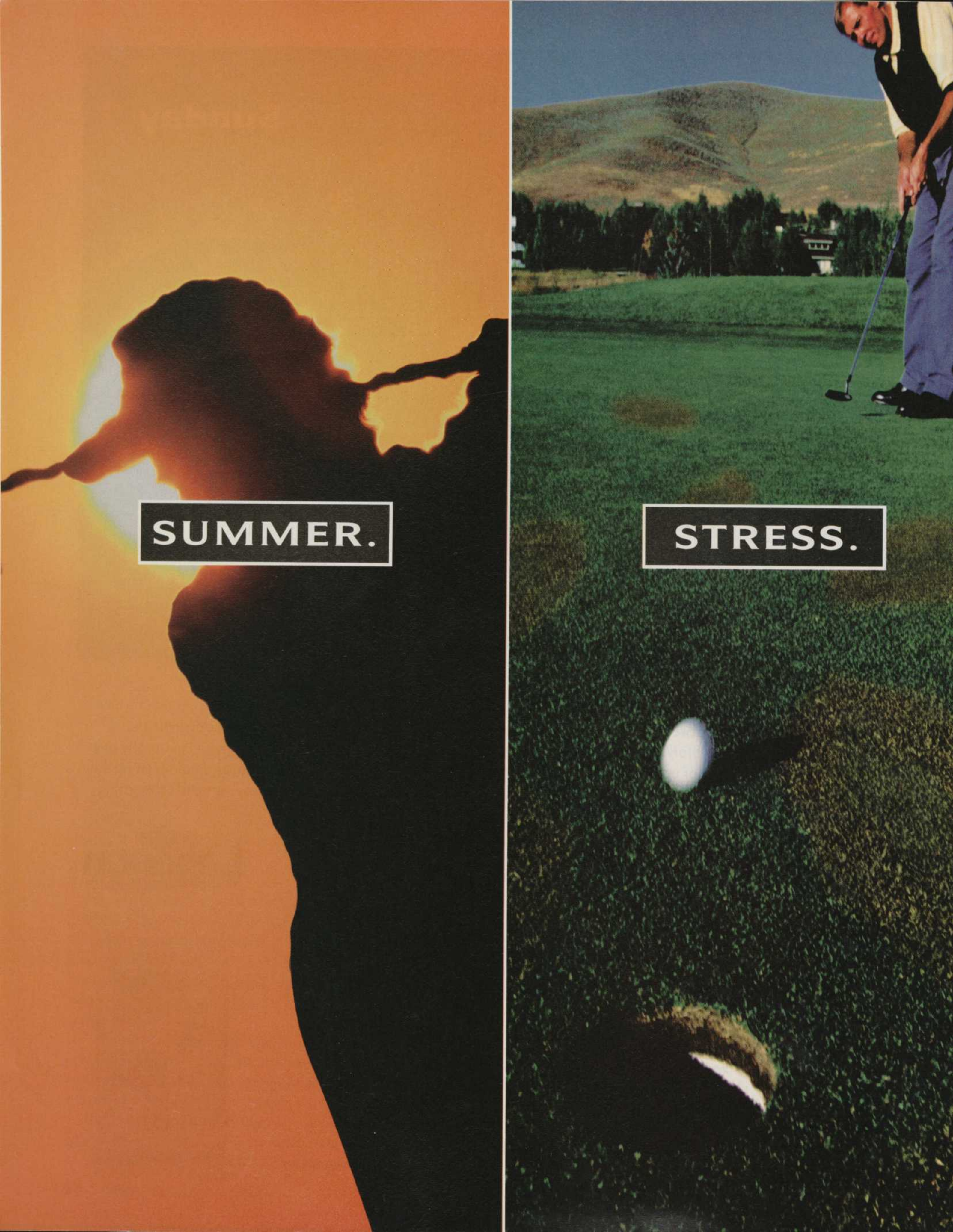
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Source: Martin, Clemson University, 1996

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Continued from page 27

Noting the obvious synergies with Palmer Course Design Co., Redling also foresees a grouping of services that would bring the management company more into the development side of the business.

Recently, APGM solidified its realm by merging with the Arnold Palmer Golf Academies and also formed a joint venture with University Clubs of America to develop university- and college-affiliated golf clubs across the nation. Redling says the expansion is part of the company's belief in a tremendous future for golf.

"We're focusing on breaking down barriers for new players and what that will bring to the industry in the future," he adds.

Quality growth

Joe Guerra, American Golf Club's executive vice president of acquisitions, says that quality deals and refinement of services to its landlords are his company's emphasis, not sheer volume. But he admits the big will get bigger .

"We have gained a much better understanding about who our customers are and, above all, what their expectations are," Guerra says.

The diversity and complexities of the golf course operation led AGC in recent years to establish separate operating divisions within its company, such as American Golf Country Clubs and the revolutionary National Golf Properties. The latter, the industry's first real estate investment trust, has invested more than $500 million in acquiring more than 130 golf properties since 1993. Most of those properties are managed by American Golf.

In the future, it's possible that AGC will continue to create separate operating organizations as its portfolio of properties becomes more diverse. AGC also plans to expand its golf operations internationally beyond its presence in the United Kingdom, preferably in Asia and Australia. The company's long-standing goal is to attract landlords of top-quality golf courses so it can manage them and maximize their productivity.

The concept of commitment in the golf management industry may drive KSL Fairways more than most. Bolstered by the support of its parent company, KSL Recreation, Fairways' emphasis on ownership has strength in terms of stability and necessary funding.

"We firmly believe in owning the assets we are responsible for," says Warren, whose look into the future sees not only consolidation but a stabilization of growth and an ability to manage the limitations of available capital.

KSL's portfolio is solid, with such resort properties as Doral, PGA West and Grand Traverse. The company anchor, however, is its acquisition of community-based properties that currently includes 30 private, semiprivate and daily fee golf courses.

Golfdom's Bottom Line

- Management companies are a megatrend in the industry. More than a hundred companies now control a total of about 1600 courses. Consolidation is likely as larger players acquire small firms and medium-sized companies form strategic alliances to create a nationwide presence.
- The historic problem of management companies firing incumbent superintendents and replacing them with less-qualified, cheaper personnel seems to be waning.
- However, the transition from in-house ownership/management to a new management company system is often difficult for superintendents. Some have trouble adjusting and leave within a year.
- Although the "corporate" mentality of management companies grates on some superintendents, many like the stability, mobility, benefits and opportunity for advancement the management company structure allows.

Bottom Line: Management companies are both a threat and an opportunity for superintendents and Golfdom will devote continuing coverage to the subject.

"WHILE WE LOOK at our needs on a case-by-case basis, most of the golf courses we buy require considerable capital expenditures to bring them to our standards."

JEFF WARREN
Director of Business Development, KSL Fairways

Clout counts

Arguably, few in the golf management industry have positioned themselves for the future as well as ClubCorp, the venerable company established in 1957 that has annual revenues of $1.1 billion.

For much of its 40 years, ClubCorp was dedicated to enhancing members' experiences in the private golf, club and resort sectors. It continues to do that among its more than 175 golf properties under ownership or management and operated by company affiliates – such prestigious properties as Pinehurst Resort & CC, The Homestead, Firestone CC and Mission Hills CC.

But in recent years, ClubCorp developed significant holdings in the public sector and currently has more than two dozen daily-fee courses. The company wasn't sitting on its corporate hands in 1998. A new Tom Fazio-designed layout was added to its Barton Creek resort in Austin, Texas, and it recently opened a new Jack Nicklaus course in Aliso Viejo, Calif. — signs that it's getting serious about new development.

But Artz, a ClubCorp veteran of 20 years, would probably say you haven't seen anything yet. Citing a "huge potential internationally," Artz says ClubCorp is nurturing a great interest in Asia, where fewer than 50 golf courses are under a management company op-

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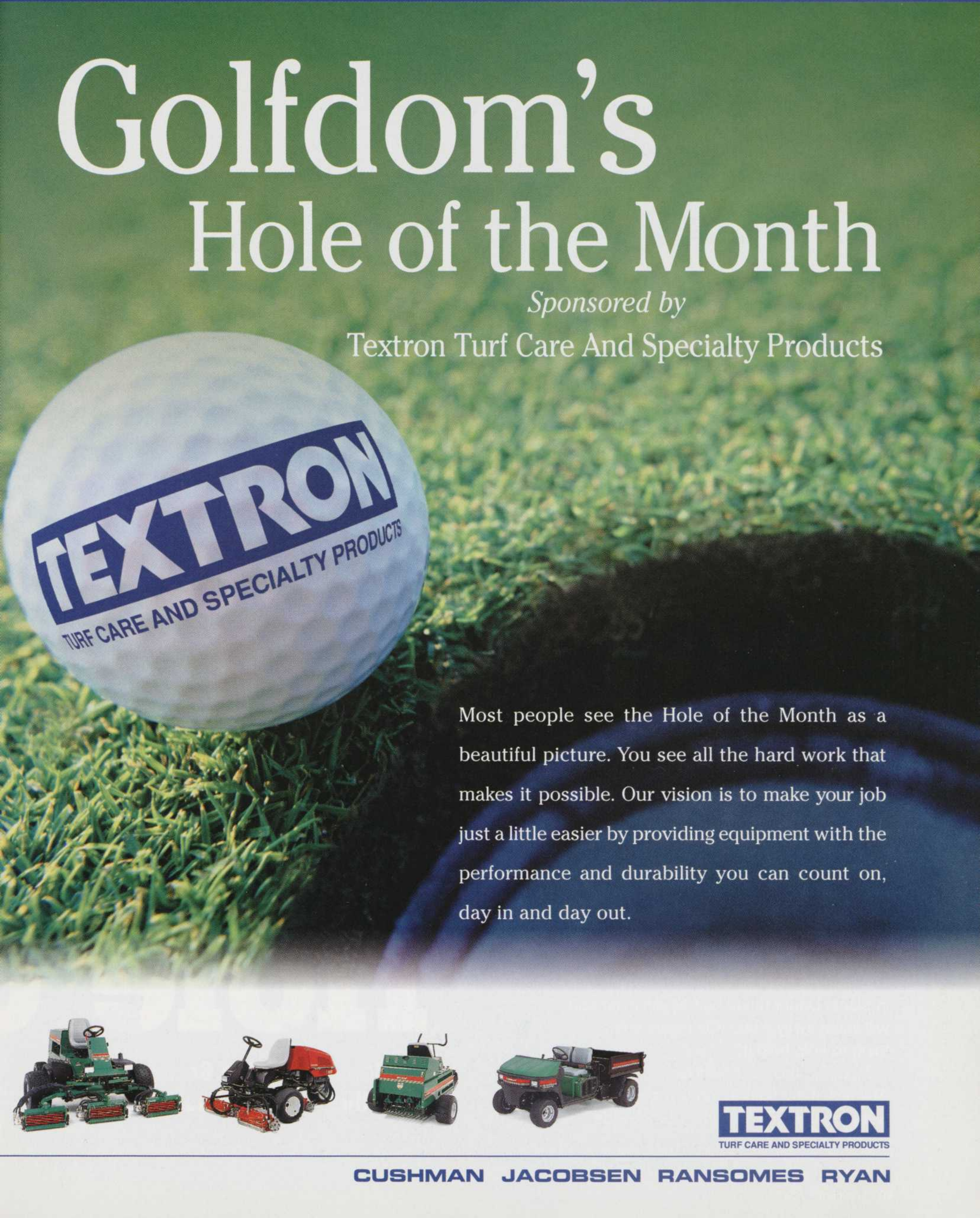
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Enjoy the Journey

The scorecards at Trillium Links urge players to "Enjoy the Journey." Some suggest that visitors to this mountaintop beauty should be warned to "Prepare for Adventure."

Designer Morris Hatalsky carved the course from the dense western North Carolina forests that still bound the layout. He used aerial-topographic maps to get a feel for the site before creating at least 20 different potential routings. "Then I walked the property a number of times," he said. "You have to have some imagination and visualization to carve the routing of what you think the golf course can be."

What he eventually routed was a course that followed, rather than changed the terrain. "My philosophy was to design the course within the lay of the land and move the least amount of dirt," Hatalsky said.

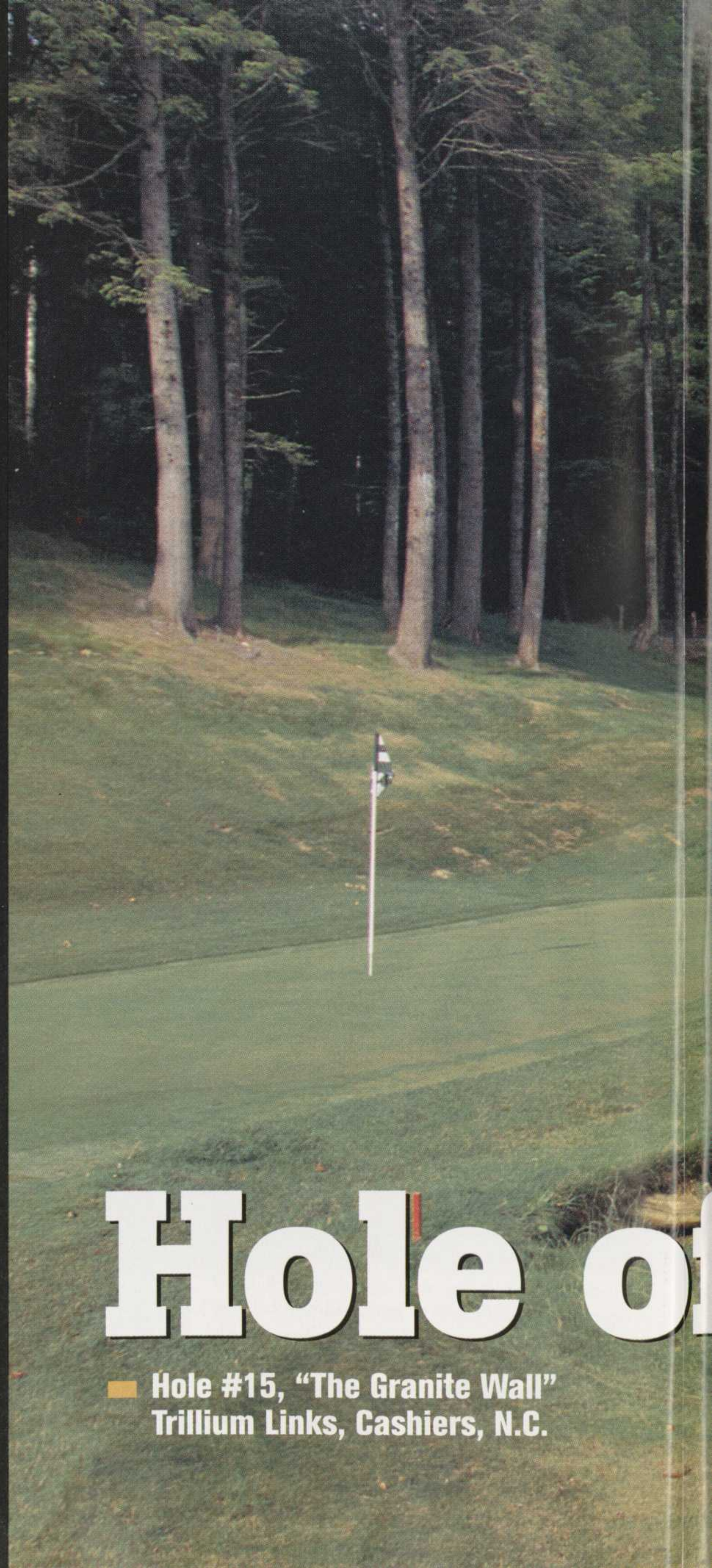
"Except for a few holes that were designed in sensitive wetland areas where we had to move the hole near the side of the mountain – the majority of the golf course was created without disturbing a lot of land."

That creative design posed some unique challenges during grow-in, according to superintendent Eric Shomaker. "We average 88 inches of rain a year," he said. "That total is second only to the Pacific Northwest."

So, how did they establish turf on the side of a mountain in one of the wettest spots in the nation?

"Ninety-five percent of the course was seeded," said Shomaker. "Where there was seed, we used jute-mesh matting. The matting helped hold the seed and soil in place. Under these conditions even sod will wash away if you don't have something to help hold it."

Installing the mesh was labor-intensive. At times, more than 30 crew members were required to place the 12-foot-wide



Hole #15, "The Granite Wall"
Trillium Links, Cashiers, N.C.