

Golfdom

www.golfdom.com

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King of Prussia, Pa.
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13 GCSAA Seminar: Management Strategies for the Turfgrass System
Manchester, Vt.
Contact 800-472-7878

16 GCSAA Seminar: Developing Your Hazard Communication Program
Palm Desert, Calif.
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20 Midwest Association of Golf Course Superintendents Meeting
Schaumburg, Ill.
Contact 847-310-3618

20 USGA Regional Education Meeting
Burlington, N.C.
Contact 800-476-4272

22 USGA Green Section Meeting
Baltimore
Contact 888-643-8873

30 American Society for Golf Course Architect's Remodeling University
Chicago
Contact 312-372-7090

APRIL

17 Cactus and Pines GCSA's Annual Meeting
Phoenix
Contact 480-609-6778

25 American Society for Golf Course Architect's Remodeling University
San Francisco
Contact 312-372-7090

MAY

5-6 Oregon GCSA's Annual Meeting
Bandon, Ore.
Contact 541-549-1960

6-8 California GCSA's Annual Meeting
Shell Beach, Calif.
Contact 559-643-8707

12-16 American Society of Golf Course Architects Annual Meeting
Columbus, Ohio
Contact 312-372-7090

14 Cactus and Pine GCSA's Karsten Field Day and Seminar
Tucson, Ariz.
Contact 480-609-6778

16 North Carolina State University Field Day
Raleigh, N.C.
Contact 800-476-4272

22 Management of Localized Spots and Water Repellent Soils
Houston
Contact 800-833-4451

22 Managing Turfgrass Root Systems
Houston
Contact 800-833-4451

JULY

12 Managing Turfgrass Environment
Scottsdale, Ariz.
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19-21 Turfgrass Producers International Conference and Expo
Toronto
Contact 800-405-8873

NOVEMBER

1 Golf Course Managers Association of Cape Cod's Annual Meeting
Contact 508-693-0578

3-7 Georgia GCSA's Annual Meeting
St. Simons Island, Ga.
Contact 706-742-2651

5-8 Virginia Turfgrass Conference
Virginia Beach, Va.
Contact 888-634-8873

6-9 West Virginia GCSA's Annual Turf Conference and Show
Morgantown, W.Va.
Contact 304-243-4112

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You don't have to be Alan Greenspan to know that the "irrational exuberance" that fueled the U.S. economy for the past six years has largely vanished — at least for the time being. The markets have tanked, many dot-coms have become dot-bombs, fuel prices are outrageous, layoffs keep coming and Santa left a lump of coal in most retailers' stockings last Christmas.

It feels like we all just sobered up after a wild college road trip to Daytona.

At a time like this, bearish financial analysts might look at the golf business and see an industry that's highly vulnerable in an economic downturn. After all, golf *seems* like a leisure activity that would quickly be sacrificed if paychecks don't grow or prices for necessities go up.

Logically, less disposable income equals fewer rounds, fewer rounds equals less revenue and less revenue equals tough times in an industry already condemned by some for building too many new courses.

But before anyone starts plowing up their course to build condos or plant rutabagas, I'd like to make a case that a downturn may not be as bad as some might think. Here are five reasons to stay bullish:

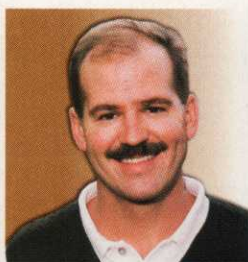
1. Anyone who assumes that players will abandon the game because money is a little tighter has obviously never seen normal, rational people who ignore snow, lightning, tornadoes or plagues of locust to get in a round. Golf isn't a casual hobby that people easily give up over a few bucks — it's an obsessive-compulsive disorder disguised as a game.

2. As tight as things may get for the maintenance side of the business, you're in much better shape than the balls-n-sticks side of the business. Golfers may continue to play about as often, but I'm not sure they'll be rushing out to plunk down \$900 for a new Uranium-235 Super-Atomic Driver or pay \$18 for a sleeve of balls with moon dust in the middle.

3. There are more than 800 new courses in planning or under construction, and my educated guess is that more than half are ultra-ex-

Still Bullish On the Golf Business

BY PAT JONES



THIS BUSINESS HAS
MOMENTUM THAT
PUSHES BEYOND
THE SHORT TERM

pensive daily fees. Do we really need more \$150-per-round daily fees in resort areas that are already overbuilt? Maybe a downturn will force some to reassess a market that needs affordable courses more than pricey glamour tracks.

4. This is a good time to be a talented superintendent who understands customer service. More than ever, conditioning has become part of the marketing mix in a highly competitive marketplace. Even incidentals like good signage, plentiful water cooler stations, decent restrooms and well-crafted tee markers can make a difference. This is the perfect time to challenge yourself to see what you can do to make sure your facility retains or grows its share of the local market.

5. This business has momentum that pushes beyond the short term. Golf has become synonymous with a lifestyle that people desperately want. The Boomers are retiring to quiet, little developments in Florida and Arizona (and keeping their memberships in Minnesota and Michigan). The Xers think golf is cool (and a link to the "grown-up world") and the Ys and Zs (our current youth categories) have Tiger to inspire them. Putting a Tiger in your economic tank is like having Jordan, Bird, Magic, Kobe and Kareem starting against the Washington Generals.

So next time the gloom-and-doom headlines get you down, remember that you're in the business of selling an image — a place for fun, beauty, relaxation, competition, camaraderie, challenge and tradition. No one else is selling what you have to offer, and 25 million Americans want to buy it.

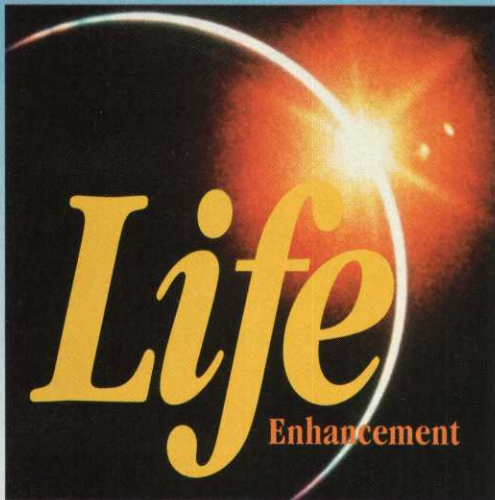
And that's no bull.

Pat Jones is the publisher/editorial director of Golfdom. He can be reached at 440-891-3126 or pjones@advanstar.com

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A special news bulletin? Hardly. The big story at this year's National Golf Course Owners Association meeting in Orlando had to do with getting more people to play golf.

Big sigh. Yeah, it's the same old story, but it still has to be addressed.

If you live and breathe in the golf industry, you should know that your livelihood is not without its problems. You've been told time and again that more courses are being built, but they don't come with more golfers. The result, as put by NGCOA executive director Mike Hughes, is that "competition in the industry is at a level that no one would have ever anticipated."

If you aren't aware of the increased competition, you must be living under a granite tee marker. And judging by the response of several golf courses to a recent NGCOA promotion, there are industry people living under such rocks.

Last fall, NGCOA debuted its City Golf Blitz in three cities. The simple goal of the City Golf Blitz is to attract new golfers. But more importantly, the program's goal is to convince potential new golfers that the game is more hospitable and fun than they think.

Anne Lyndrup, NGCOA's administrative director who helped organize the City Golf Blitz, assumed that course owners in the three cities — Atlanta, Charleston, S.C., and Phoenix — would be champing at the bit to get involved in NGCOA's program upon hearing about it.

"But I was shocked at the lack of response," Lyndrup reveals.

Apparently, many owners don't want to take on new golfers because they don't want to have to attend to their needs, Lyndrup says, noting that some owners don't even see the need to develop new players.

What would happen if New York Yankees owner George Steinbrenner announced that he didn't need to develop new players in his organization's farm system because he was content with his present lineup? Georgie and his Pin Strippers would soon be in the basement of the American League.

This is basic stuff, as in marketing 101. If a golf course owner is content with his current amount of business — and he doesn't think he

Time for Owners to Don Thinking Caps

BY LARRY AYLWARD



YOU MUST BE
WILLING TO
TAKE ON NEW
GOLFERS AND
ATTEND TO
THEIR NEEDS

has to gain new players through promotions and customer service — he'll be out of business as fast as a Chinese restaurant that doesn't sell chop suey.

Owners must realize they can't be solely concerned with the now. Yes, they must attend to their current customers' concerns. It's understandable if owners are worried that new golfers, with their slices and unseasonedness, will get in the way of their veteran customers.

But as marketers, they should look at the situation as the ultimate business challenge and devise a plan to attract new golfers without disrupting their regular patrons. It's a matter of putting on your thinking cap, as my fourth-grade teacher often said.

Lyndrup suggests that courses use their down-times to create programs for new golfers. "New players don't want to play 18 holes or even nine holes," she says. "Courses should think about starting three-hole leagues for new players."

Don't laugh. It's a simple and sound idea.

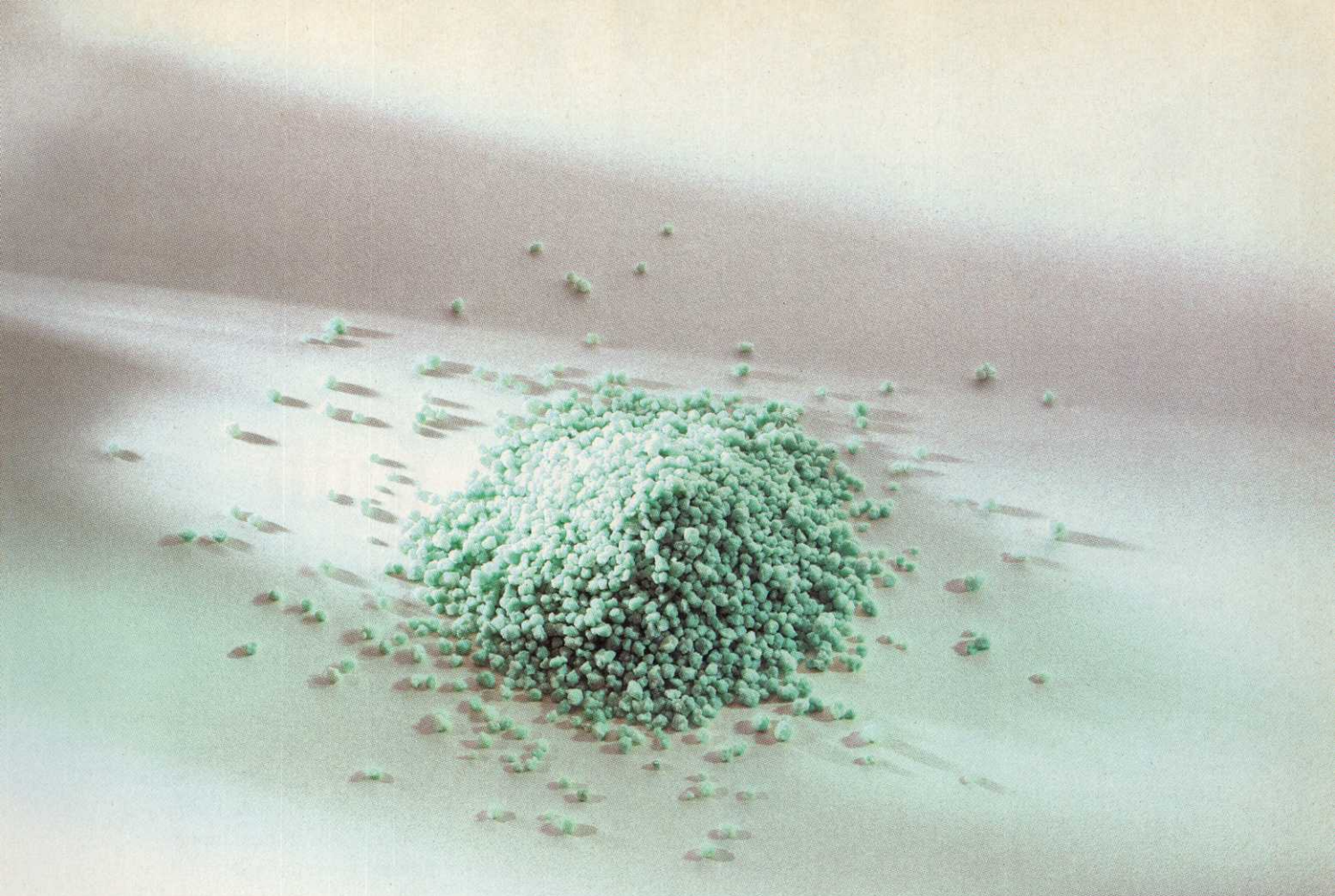
However, there's more to gaining new players than just finding the time for them to play at your courses. A vital component of the City Golf Blitz is the art of dealing with the delicate egos of crummy golfers. If you know a lousy golfer, you know that person is as terrified of the little, white ball as New York was of Godzilla.

In short, you must have the patience of Job and the tenderness of Mother Teresa in dealing with new golfers. But is that so difficult considering what's at stake?

NGCOA is gearing up for its second City Golf Blitz. This time, Lyndrup isn't expecting owners to overwhelm NGCOA with interest.

Maybe the owners will prove her wrong. And maybe they should — for the sake of the game and the industry.

Larry Aylward, editor of *Golfdom*, can be reached at 440-891-2770 or larylward@advanstar.com.



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Off The Fringe

NEWS WITH A HOOK

Business briefs

Bayer Acquires Compass

Bayer Professional Products recently acquired Compass fungicide from Novartis, which recently merged with Zeneca Professional Products to form Syngenta.

Kansas City, Mo.-based Bayer holds all patents, marketing authorizations, trademarks, and production and formulation expertise for the strobilurin-based fungicide line.

Toro, Disney extend, expand agreement

Bloomington, Minn.-based Toro Co. and Lake Buena Vista-based Walt Disney World have extended and expanded their agreement to make Toro the "official turf and irrigation company" of Walt Disney's Resort.

The new agreement applies to most Walt Disney World properties, including five championship golf courses. Disney will use Toro mowers, utility vehicles, irrigation systems and trimming products.

The Toro-Disney pact began in 1996 when it was announced that Toro would provide turf and irrigation expertise for Disney's then new Wide World of Sports complex. Details of the extension were not announced.

Deere receives ISO 9000 Certification

The John Deere Turf Care facility in Raleigh, N.C., recently received ISO 9000 certification. ISO 9000 is a voluntary system in framing procedures for manufacturing quality and is administered by the International Organization of Standardization in Geneva, Switzerland. The standards for manufacturing facilities cover multiple elements, from paperwork and tracking systems to parts inventory and the assembly process.

To Tell the Truth

SCOTTS FIGHTING MYTHS ABOUT GENETICALLY MODIFIED TURF

The product is still at least three years from the market, but the Scotts Co. is already waging a quiet communications war to combat myths about its plans to introduce Roundup Ready bentgrass to golf.

Even at this early stage, the Marysville, Ohio-based company is actively gauging superintendents' in-



Herbicide-tolerant Kentucky bluegrass (right) shows no effects from the same spray that killed greenhouse controlled Kentucky bluegrass.

terest in the concept, addressing concerns about the politics of genetically modified turf and attempting to counter what it feels is disinformation being spread by competitors.

In an effort to set the record straight, *Golfdom's* Pat Jones sat down with the man leading the charge for Roundup Ready turf, Bob Harriman, Scotts vice president of biotechnology.

Golfdom: Let's get right to the bottom line. Suppose I'm a superintendent. What's in it for me?

Harriman: First and foremost, selective control of *Poa annua* and *Poa trivialis*. Superintendents will finally be able to have bentgrass without any of the headaches of *Poa*. What does that mean? Better playability, improved aesthetics and reduced inputs.

Golfdom: You're doing lots of focus groups with superintendents. What feedback are you hearing?

Harriman: Primarily that Roundup Ready turf will be easier to maintain. You only have to take care of one species instead of two. It ends the age-old dilemma of, "I want bent, but I hate dealing with *Poa*." They also like the environmental benefits — like reduced pesticide and water usage — and they realize that glyphosate is ecologically friendly.

Golfdom: OK, but nothing's perfect and superintendents are always skeptical. What are they worried about?

Harriman: They're initially concerned about the broad use of Roundup and how they'll apply it. For example, they'll need to use different application equipment like injection rollers. They ask whether it will cross with crabgrass, but the two plants simply aren't biologically compatible — it's like trying to cross a cucumber and a tomato. Some have asked about yellowing or other damage to the bentgrass, but our testing shows that our variety is tolerant of even extraordinarily high rates of glyphosate.

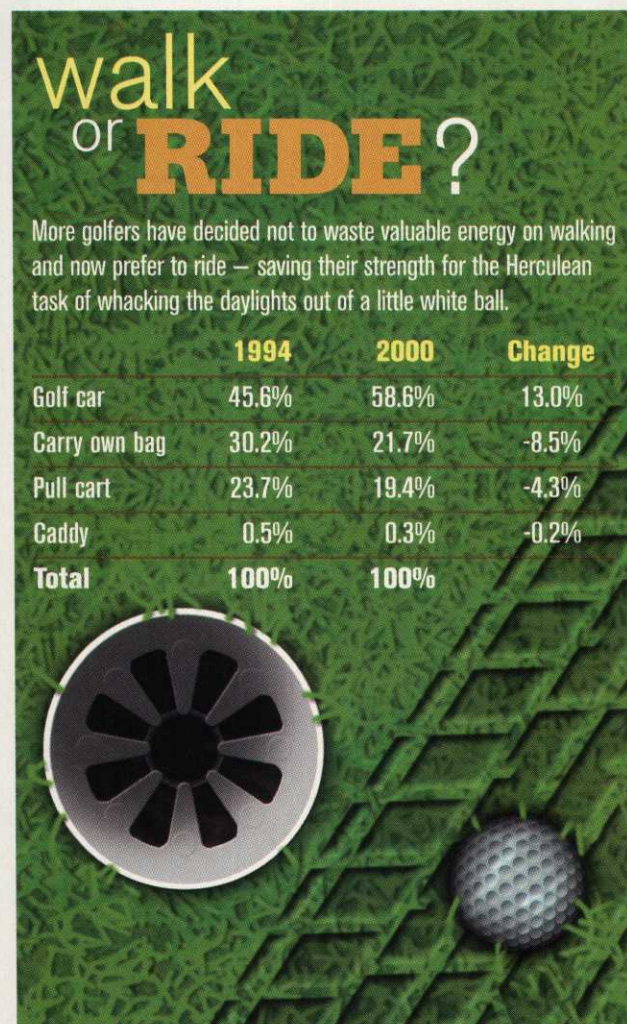
Golfdom: What about the possibility of resistant *Poa*?

Harriman: Remember that Roundup is the most widely used herbicide in the world, and there have been virtually no reports of resistance. Just to be safe, we'll still recommend preventative management programs, like product rotation and using combos of pre-emergents. Last but not least, we're projecting that it'll only take one to three Roundup applications per season to get optimum *Poa* control.

Golfdom: How soon will we see the famous glow-in-the-dark grass or purple lawns we've heard about?

Harriman: It's amazing how many myths have been started by misquotes in the media. This is new stuff, and new can be scary. Scary makes for good headlines. That's why we have to focus on educating the media, the public and everyone else. The story last year about monarch butterflies being killed by corn is a great example. The initial headlines were sensational, but the scientific rebuttal gets no attention. That's the battle we have to fight. It's no ac-

Continued on page 18



SOURCE: NATIONAL GOLF FOUNDATION
ILLUSTRATION: DAN BEEDY

Quotable

"It's going to turn golf courses into pitch-and-putt courses. ... Twenty years ago, a 420-yard par-4 was considered a tough test. But no longer."

John Viera, director of golf at Mission Inn Resort in Howey-in-the-Hills, Fla., on Callaway's new ERC II forged titanium driver. (The Orlando Sentinel)

"He is still on the team, but Arnold Palmer is not our star player right now."

A USGA spokesman on the continuing saga of the King's controversial involvement in the dispute between Callaway and the USGA over the ERC II's "springlike effect."

"The sun never sets on grasses developed at Penn State University – nor does it ever set on the school's graduates."

Stan Zontek, USGA agronomist for the mid-Atlantic region

"Any posting of a Stimpmeter reading [on a golf course] is a terrible [idea]. Don't go there."

Bob Brame, director of the USGA Green Section's North-Central region

"Here you see an environmental area – you know, those areas around greens with big weeds that you can't whack down."

Peter Dernoeden, professor of turfgrass management at the University of Maryland, showing a slide of an environmental area at a recent turf show.

Off The Fringe

Continued from page 17

cident we're introducing this first in golf. It's an excellent way to enter the market and demonstrate its safety and effectiveness. But before we do that, we have to prove that we can keep this product from doing unintended things.

Golfdom: How?

Harriman: First, by complying with extremely strict regulations that apply to all products enhanced by biotechnology. For example, moving even just one seed is regulated and has to be approved by USDA. We have regular federal and state inspections of our greenhouses, collaborators and field plots. Second, we're doing the most extensive testing that's ever been done on a turf-seed variety. We have more than 50 test sites at 20 of the nation's best universities. We've confirmed that the technology works, and we've seen no loss of color or performance. There's no phytotoxicity even at four times the recommended rate at fairway cut. It helps that bentgrass is already inherently resistant to glyphosate, but it does smoke the *Poa*.

Golfdom: Assuming you get approval and enter the market in 2003, how popular do you think this variety can be?

Harriman: It's still hard to say how quickly this technology will gain acceptance. Obviously, new construction and remodeling will be a big focus. Our research indicates that 90 percent of superintendents say they are "probably" or "definitely" interested in Roundup Ready varieties. More than half say they'd consider replacing their ryegrass with herbicide-resistant bent.

Golfdom: Speaking of which, what's pricing going to be like?

Harriman: It'll be higher than standard bents, but superintendents say they're willing to pay more. There could be some multi-year payment plans as well.

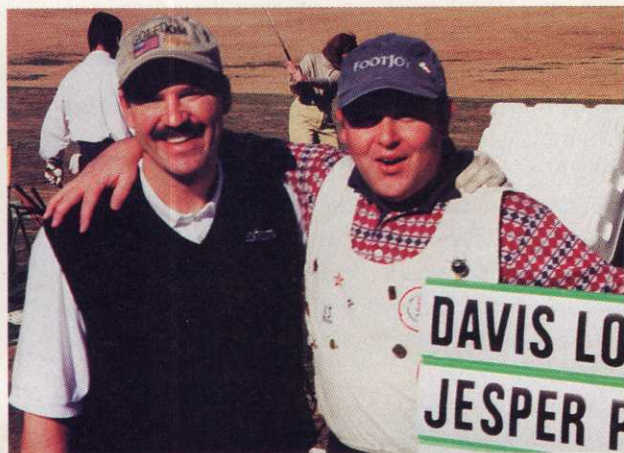
Golfdom: What's your final message to superintendents, owners and others who might be interested?

Harriman: You can break it down any way you want — dollars, environmental or aesthetics — but the most important thing is that it will simplify your life. In a couple of years, you'll be able to judge for yourself.

Editor's note: Roundup and Roundup Ready are registered trademarks of Monsanto.

What's Your Sign?

A confused "Signboy" latches on to *Golfdom's* Pat Jones. Matt Griesser, the star of several FootJoy commercials, mistook Jones for a Tour player after witnessing his power and grace (not!) on the range at the National Golf Course Owners Association's annual tournament earlier this year. Note that Jones' name is not on the leader board.



Can't Sugar-Coat This

Something got lost in translation in our January Real-Life Solutions piece about Novex fertilizer. We wrote that it was a sulfur-coated granular fertilizer, which it is not. A Lesco spokesperson offers the following explanation about how Novex works:

"The key to Novex is the AminoUreaFormaldehyde (AUF). Micronutrients and other soluble nutrient components are matrixed into the homogenous Novex granule. As the AUF is gradually released through microbial degradation, the soluble components become exposed to soil moisture and release. Therefore, Novex has multiple release mechanisms which are ultimately governed by the AUF. Novex is not a coated granule, so its release is not affected by attrition or mechanical damage."

Golfdom apologizes for the error.

Consolidation Caveats

Manufacturers and suppliers in the golf maintenance industry entered a merger-and-acquisition mode last year that had rarely been seen before. Among others, Novartis joined forces with Zeneca to form Syngenta, and Simplot expanded its portfolio with buyouts and strategic mergers

with other turf suppliers. Will the breathless pace of mergers continue this year?

According to industry experts, companies will take a short breather this year to digest what they've purchased. The lone exception could be e-commerce companies — but not

until those omnipresent Web sites start showing a profit.

Companies in 2001 will emphasize knowledge of their partners over growth, experts say. That advice extends to customers as well. Make sure you know who you're dealing with before you commit any money to a company, experts say. Otherwise, you could be left holding the bag.

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Off The Fringe

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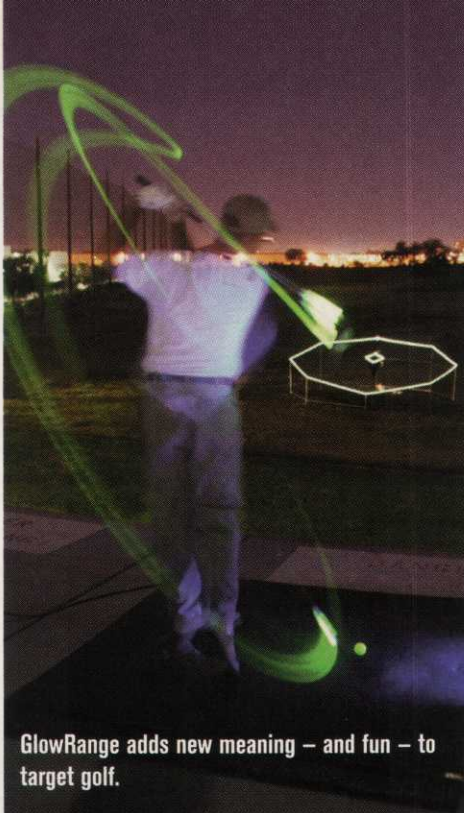
ENTERTAINMENT AFTER
DARK DRAWS GOLFERS
TO THE DRIVING RANGE

By Frank H. Andorka Jr.

Looking for a way to spice up nights at your course? Perhaps adding a GlowRange system to your driving range might do the trick.

GlowRange is a system that allows golfers to hit real glow-in-the-dark golf balls at illuminated targets on the range. The targets are 30 feet in diameter with a 3.5-foot bullseye in the center. Kyle Hogan, sales manager for the company, says the range can be used to attract a variety of business, from corporations looking to add a new twist for an outing to teenagers looking for something fun to do on a Friday night.

GlowRange scores each shot digitally, allotting points each time a golfer hits the target. Special ball dispensers



GlowRange adds new meaning – and fun – to target golf.

mark the balls with black light rays that allow them to glow for 45 seconds. The targets all have point values. When you hit a bullseye, an alarm goes off and the target lights up — sort of like rock 'n' roll bowling with the 14-pound balls.

But don't think GlowRange doesn't take the game seriously. Hogan says golfers of all skill levels will enjoy the innovation, and it helps even good players hone their skills.

"It takes less time to play and has fewer barriers for people who've never played the game before," Hogan says. "With luck, once they've played the GlowRange system, they'll be back to play the entire course at a later date."

GlowRange hopes to digitalize the entire process soon so that golfers around the country can compete for high scores. The company presently has 15 member ranges in Arizona.

"It brings fun back to the game," Hogan says.

The real draw, of course, is that in the dark, no one can see how bad you really are.

For more information, contact www.glowrange.com.

Scanning the Web

Frank Andorka revisits (gulp)
golfclubatlas.com

What a difference a year makes. When I first visited golfclubatlas.com last year, I wrote, "It kills me not to rank this site higher [I had given it two stars], but its occasional pomposity punctures its brush with greatness." It was a pompous statement itself, to be sure. But it accurately reflected my feelings about what the site had to offer to superintendents.

Recently, however, friends urged me to revisit the site, telling me that it had matured. So in honor of this month's focus on golf course design, I've decided to examine the site again, this time in depth.

***** – Bookmark it and return frequently;
* – Look at only if absolutely necessary

****golfclubatlas.com – This time around, I found the tone of the discussion groups passionate and fair-minded. In scanning the discussion groups, there were many insightful comments that can educate even a visitor who knows little about the intricacies of golf course architecture. In the last year, the number of courses reviewed by the site's administrators (Ran and John Morrissett) grew, which adds further texture to the site that had been missing last year. Additional course reviews are planned for the future.

The Morrissetts have also gently discouraged the number of anonymous postings, which detracted from the credibility of the site last year. The site is better because of this.

I watched from my screen as the anonymous lurkers identified themselves. The site is more authoritative because most posts bear names to which opinions are attributed.

Also adding depth to the site are the

new participants, including superintendents and architects. The site will provide useful information to any superintendent who wishes to know more about the thoughts behind architecture.

I also enjoyed the interview section, which has discussions with important architecture figures (including December's Q&A with Pete Dye).

The site still has a prejudice against anything built in the last 30 years, but because beauty is in the eye of the beholder, it's hard to criticize it on that basis alone. It's been fun watching the site mature into a dynamic place for discussion, and I look forward to seeing it continue to grow.

Scanning the Web is compiled by Frank H. Andorka Jr., [Golfdom's](http://Golfdom.com) associate editor, who hopes that he, too, has matured after hitting the big 3-0 last year. You can reach him at fandorka@advanstar.com with future column suggestions or sites you think he should visit.