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True to

CIRCLE NO. 123



*Continued from page 50*

associated with Jack Nicklaus and Nicklaus Design, but this is an opportunity for me to grow something on my own," Etchells said last December.

The 59-year-old Etchells, however, will continue to work closely with Nicklaus-designed courses, including Muirfield. Greens Management assumed all current maintenance con-

tracts with Nicklaus Design upon acquiring GolfTurf.

"The bottom line is I have to worry about billing and cash flow on top of everything else I used to do," Etchells says, only half-joking.

### Keeping up with Jack

Nicklaus hired Etchells in 1972 during construction of Muirfield when Etchells was superintendent of Brookside Golf & CC in Worthington, Ohio. Working for Nicklaus has been a treat and a trip, Etchells says. When asked about their working relationship, Etchells sighs deeply before answering.

"He's a perfectionist," Etchells says. "He's a workaholic, and he wants to do everything right. He brutalizes himself with the way he goes about his work. You must have stamina to stay with him. He's just go, go, go, go."

Etchells says Nicklaus is tough but fair — and very generous.

"He'll be there for you, and he has been there for me," Etchells says. "I've done a lot of things and I've gone a lot of places that few people get to go because of him. He's been very good to me."

The two have had their differences. Nicklaus expects the keepers of his courses to learn their playability. That includes Etchells, who doesn't play golf.

"Playability is about how a course plays, not about how pretty or green it is," Nicklaus says. "I had to hammer [that] into [Etchells'] head. It took a long time for him to understand what I was interested in."

"I have an eye for playability . . . it has been drilled into me," Etchells says with a laugh. "I give Jack credit for that."

Nicklaus is his friend, but not his pal, notes Etchells, who had no desire to be buddy-buddy with his former boss and now client, even if he's arguably the world's all-time greatest golfer.

"I've always been a firm believer in separation between employer and employee relationships," Etchells adds. "But Jack knows where to find me, and he can get a hold of me if he needs to."

Interestingly, the Philadelphia-born Etchells, who earned a turfgrass degree from Rutgers University in 1964, describes himself the way Nicklaus has been described.

*Continued on page 54*



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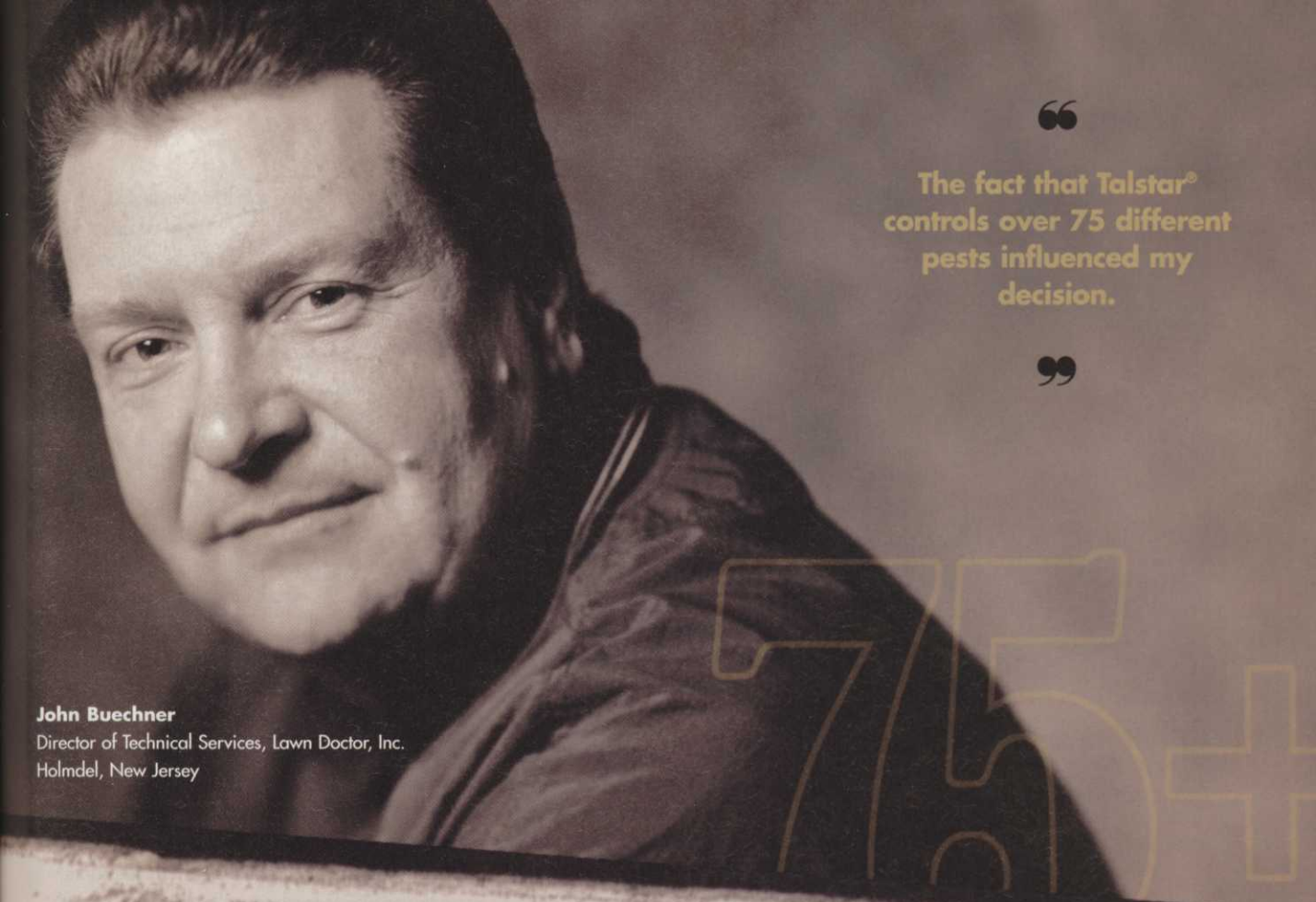
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CIRCLE NO. 138





**“I have an eye  
for playability. . .  
it has been  
drilled into me.”**

— ED ETHELLES

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“Many people think I can be tough and abrasive at times,” Etchells admits. “But they also know me as being very fair and telling it like it is. I never have to look over my shoulder.”

#### **On the road again**

Etchells’ business serves accounts from The Golf Club of Purchase (N.Y.) to Spring City Golf Resort in Kunming, China. He’s a road warrior—logging more than 230,000 air miles annually.

Etchells usually travels Mondays through Thursdays and is back in the office on Fridays tending to paperwork. “Most of my work days are around 18 hours,” he says.

Life on the road is fun but taxing, says Etchells, who often visits Japan and China. Earlier in his career, Etchells traveled almost nonstop. It took a toll on his first marriage, which ended in divorce. Etchells celebrated his 25<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary in April to his second wife, Lanna, who he says is more tolerant of his travel schedule.

#### **Been There**

Ed Etchells has consulted at more than 75 golf courses worldwide. Some of the more notable courses are:

- Augusta (Ga.) National
- Shoal Creek (Ala.) GC
- Muirfield Village (Ohio) GC
- Desert Highlands GC, Scottsdale, Ariz.
- Firestone CC in Akron, Ohio
- Tokyo (Japan) GC
- Glen Abbey GC in Oakville, Ontario
- Bear Creek GC in Chandler, Ariz.

While on the road, Etchells visits up to five golf courses a week. But his job isn’t just talking turf and filing reports. There’s a human element, which Etchells enjoys. Last summer, he says he helped save a superintendent’s job during a visit. The superintendent and the club president were at odds and Etchells acted as a mediator between the two.

IN A PERFECT WORLD  
THERE'D BE NO  
BROWN  
PATCH



"Lately, a lot of superintendents have been coming to me for services, which is a change," Etchells says, noting that it's usually general managers or green committee chairmen who seek him for consulting. "They say they need help in trying to deal with their memberships."

It's been a nearly 40-year career and Etchells has seen many changes in the industry, from height of cut to heightened pressure on superintendents to maintain near-perfect tracks.

"When I came to Columbus in 1968, the standard for height of cut on greens was a quarter of an inch," Etchells says. "Now everybody's aiming for six-sixtyfourths and seven-sixty-fourths of an inch."

### Career highlights

Etchells wears several feathers in his cap. He's proud that three PGA Tour agronomists have worked for him, including Jon Scott, the tour's current vice president of agronomy, who was employed by Golfturf for several years. "Golfturf seems to get its fair share of



PHOTO BY JIM MANDEVILLE

talent that goes on to bigger and better things," Etchells says.

Being a member of Augusta National's Turf Advisory Committee is another career milestone, Etchells says. When Augusta was hav-

*Continued on page 56*

Ed Etchells (left) makes a point while Jack Nicklaus (right) and others look and listen.

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**“When I came to Columbus in 1968, the standard for height of cut on greens was a quarter of an inch.”**

— ED ETHELLETS

*Continued from page 55*

ing problems converting its ryegrass/overseeded bermudagrass greens to bentgrass in 1979, Etchells was called in to help. He remained on the committee for several years.

Etchells says he's also proud he's become a respected consultant in Japan's golf industry. He's also respected among superintendents, including Muirfield's McBride, who says Etchells is his mentor.

“We go way back, and I've learned a tremendous amount from him,” says McBride, who worked as laborer under Etchells when Muirfield was built. “It's been a long-lasting relationship.”

Etchells advises up-and-coming superintendents to *not* expect the world to be handed to them upon graduating with turfgrass degrees. “You have to get your hands dirty and learn how to crawl and walk before you can run,” he says.

While superintendents can be taught how to grow grass, they can't be taught the nuances of how to manage people. Etchells be-

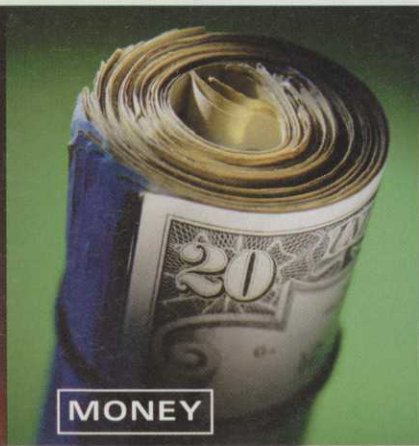
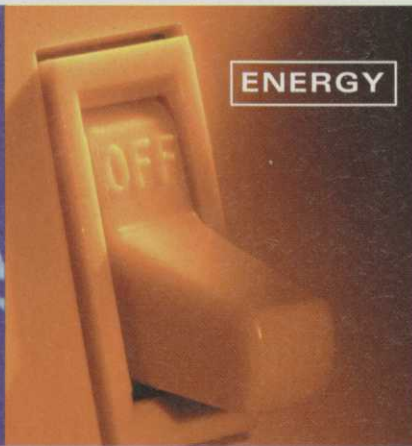
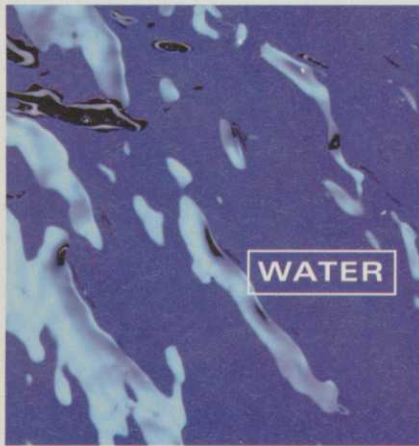
lieves the business is 90 percent people skills and 10 percent growing grass. “There are some real talented young people out there, but they don't know how to manage their laborers,” Etchells says, adding that superintendents must motivate workers to want to work for them.

Etchells didn't mention the importance of having a passion for the profession, but he did display his zeal for his job during a recent visit to Muirfield. He and McBride, who Etchells says does a “fabulous job” overseeing Muirfield, spent several hours on the course discussing possible renovations. You could sense the fresh approach both took to studying the course, which they know so well.

“It's my favorite place to come,” Etchells said softly, while driving his golf car down one of Muirfield's finely groomed fairways.

That comes from a man who comes and goes many places. ■

*You can reach the author of this article, Larry Aylward, at [larylward@advanstar.com](mailto:larylward@advanstar.com).*



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# Caring for the

The World Tour Golf Links in Myrtle Beach, S.C., gives you the opportunity to play No. 17 from the TPC at Sawgrass without going to Florida.

# Carbon Copies

It's hard enough for most superintendents to take care of *one* signature hole. Imagine trying to take care of 18 of them at a replica course

By Frank H. Andorka Jr., Managing Editor

**Y**ou'd think Joel Ratcliff would feel pressure. After all, as certified superintendent of the World Tour Golf Links in Myrtle Beach, S.C., Ratcliff isn't just taking care of any course. He's taking care of Cypress Point, Inverness, Oakmont and St. Andrews — all rolled into one. Each hole on the 27-hole facility is inspired by famous holes from 23 courses around the world, which golfers often see on TV. Visitors to World Tour dream of imitating the great saves and shots they see their golfing heroes make on these holes. Furthermore, they expect the holes to play the same as they've seen them play on TV, even if the original holes exist in blustery, old Scotland instead of sweltering Myrtle Beach.

Some superintendents might buckle under the pressure of having so many hallowed holes under their care, but Ratcliff shrugs off the idea that there's additional pressure on him. To his

*Continued on page 60*

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CIRCLE NO. 126





(Above) No. 3 on the International Course at World Tour Golf Links owes its inspiration to the fourth hole at Baltusrol, Lower Course, in Springfield, N.J., while players shoot for a small green which mirrors the 12th hole at Augusta (below).

*Continued from page 58*

way of thinking, it's the same throughout the industry.

"Pressure is not a word I ever worry about," says Ratcliff, who adds that caring for the course is a team effort with his maintenance crew. "Golfer expectations are sky-high everywhere. As long as I satisfy my owners' commitments to the patrons, there's no added pressure."

Ratcliff is not alone. Superintendents at several replica courses across the country feel the same way. Still, with green fees ranging up to \$275 at The Royal Links in Las Vegas, golfers expect near perfection on replica courses, right down to turf that lines the walls of the pot bunker on No. 17 at St. Andrews. The trick, the courses' superintendents say, is not to let the hype scare them. No matter how venerable the holes you're replicating, it's still as simple as maintaining the best quality playing conditions for the golfers as you can, they agree.

### **Overcoming intimidation**

When golfers drive the long, narrow driveway while entering Tour 18 Houston, the anticipation is palpable. You can't see the holes from the driveway, hidden as they are by tall hedges. Golfers eyes flit around. Where's No. 11 from Augusta? Where's No. 17 from TPC at Sawgrass? By the time they reach the tee-time desk in the pro shop, they're anxious to start playing those holes with the hope of conquering them. Superintendent Todd Stephens watches them enter the clubhouse and smiles. He knows the feeling.

Stephens admits the idea of maintaining such famous holes worried him when he first took the job in 2000. But once he stopped focusing on the history of the replica holes and created a maintenance schedule that treated the course as his own instead of 18 individual courses, the pressure abated.

"It's no longer a collection of disparate holes from around the world," Stephens says. "It's a course with its own challenges, but nothing that can't be overcome. My goal every day is to deliver the best golf course experience to our guests."

Brian Schafer, superintendent at The Royal Links, a course that replicates European holes in Las Vegas, agrees it's important not to focus on the hype surrounding a replica course.

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