

Hot Dog! Golf Course Owner's Idea Helps Increase Rounds

BY LARRY AYLWARD, EDITOR

Fred Smith rolled out the frankfurters and the golfers rolled in.

In the fall of 2000, Smith, owner of Riverwood Golf and Athletic Club in Clayton, N.C., a suburb of Raleigh, was looking for ways to increase rounds at his 27-hole golf course. Smith was disenchanted that his course, built in 1996, was only yielding 25,000 rounds a year. "I wanted people to play our course at a value and price that we could drive more traffic," Smith says.

Smith, whose company builds entire communities, not just golf courses, contemplated his approach. He wanted to keep his strategy in line with his business slogan, "Delivering More for Less."

"We strive to deliver value to our customers, and that's defined as getting more than you expect for what you're paying for," Smith says. "We're along the Wal-Mart philosophy."

Smith brainstormed for ideas how the course could deliver a golfing experience that was more for less. One thing was for sure: Smith knew the answer didn't lie with the course's food-and-beverage segment. Golfers didn't come to Riverwood for the fine dining because the course offers no fine dining. And golfers didn't stop in the clubhouse for a beer

after their rounds because Riverwood doesn't sell libations.

The course did, however, offer a modest snack bar. And that's where Smith turned his attention.

The snack bar employed one full-time person and offered the basic junk foods. It wasn't losing money, but it wasn't making a lot of money, either. After Smith studied the total cost of the operation, a notion came to him that involved mustard and ketchup.

The snack bar would be scaled back to a hot dog rotisserie and soda machine, and transformed into a self-service center that would also include vending machines, Smith thought. Hungry golfers could stop in the clubhouse after playing nine, grab a hot dog and soda and make the turn in no time.

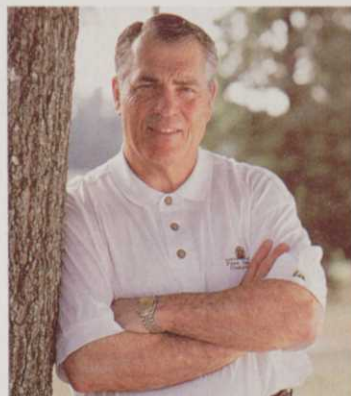
Smith put the idea into action last year.

"It's been well-received," Smith says, noting that rounds increased from 25,000 to 37,000 last year.

"We're now known as that place where you play golf and get free hot dogs."

Smith admits that nice weather last year also sparked the growth in rounds. But he's as sure as brown mustard is spicy that the free hot dogs had a lot to do with the increase.

Overall, the course made more money, thanks to the increased rounds (\$42 with cart



We're known as the place where you play golf and get free hot dogs, says Fred Smith, owner of the Riverwood Golf and Athletic Club.

on the weekend), and didn't miss the modest sales from its snack bar. The cost of providing free hot dogs and soft drinks was minimal compared to the revenue gained from nearly a 50-percent gain in rounds. Smith hopes the hot dog idea flies like a great tee shot this year.

"It's been a better economic decision," he notes, adding that a common sight is a golfer walking out of the clubhouse with two hot dogs in one hand and a soda in the other. "[The theme] is consistent with our entire brand."

Smith says the course doesn't promote the hot dog and soda giveaway, except for a sign in the pro shop that reads, "We want to deliver more for less, and we want you to enjoy your golf round. So have a hot dog and drink on us." Most advertising has been word of mouth.

The moral of this story? Don't underestimate the mighty, mouth-watering all-beef wiener.

"It's America," Smith says. ■

Aylward, the author of this story, can be reached at larryward@advanstar.com.



The business of growing grass has always embraced my workaholic tendencies. That reminds me, I recently celebrated the 10th anniversary of setting out on my dream (geez, I sound like an old geezer.) In May of 1992, I decided to take my soil-oriented, eco-agricultural-spiced and sustainable turfgrass-management strategies out on the road to see if I could make a difference in growing grass and actually help superintendents and the game.

I didn't have much support from my peers. My entire superintendent buddy system told me I'd be back at the helm of a course when the first grand opportunity came along. All of my commercial "friends" had opinions, too, that weren't supportive. But I embraced the challenge that my dream presented. Proving people wrong was a great motivator.

I did prove them wrong, thanks to my solid work ethic and love for the industry. But I'm starting to wonder if my dedication to the industry is healthy.

People talk about "giving back to the business" as if that's taking the same noble paths as Mother Theresa and the Dali Lama in their quests to help the world. I'm guilty of a similar mantra and have been known to spew forth my version of "doing so much for the business that has done so much for me."

But times are changing. Jaded in my old age, I'm not. Realistic about what I see and hear, I certainly am. I'm in love with our crazy business, but it isn't obliged to love me back — and it certainly isn't giving more than I put into it.

Looking back, not much else mattered when I was growing grass as a superintendent. Well, beer did, but that was something to drink with other turfheads when you needed to *talk* about growing grass.

Then, marriage No. 1 came and went in a flash of nights spent at the pump station and mornings out of the house at 4 a.m. after going to bed at 9 p.m. The weekends spent working didn't help sustain that marriage. Neither did two job changes.

A few weeks ago, after yet another plane trip where I was stuffed into a seat too small

I Give and Give and All I Got Was . . .

BY DAVE WILBER



I THOUGHT I WAS
GOING TO DIE.
WHAT DID I SEE AS
MY LIFE PASSED
BEFORE MY EYES?

for my ever-expanding and road-food nourished ass, I collapsed into a heap after not remembering how I got home. I'd experienced a hypertension attack along with angina. The doctor said it was a near heart attack. I thought I was going to die as I stupidly drove myself to the hospital.

What did I see as my life passed before my eyes? A person who has given his life, his love, his health, his money and his never-ending determination to The Business.

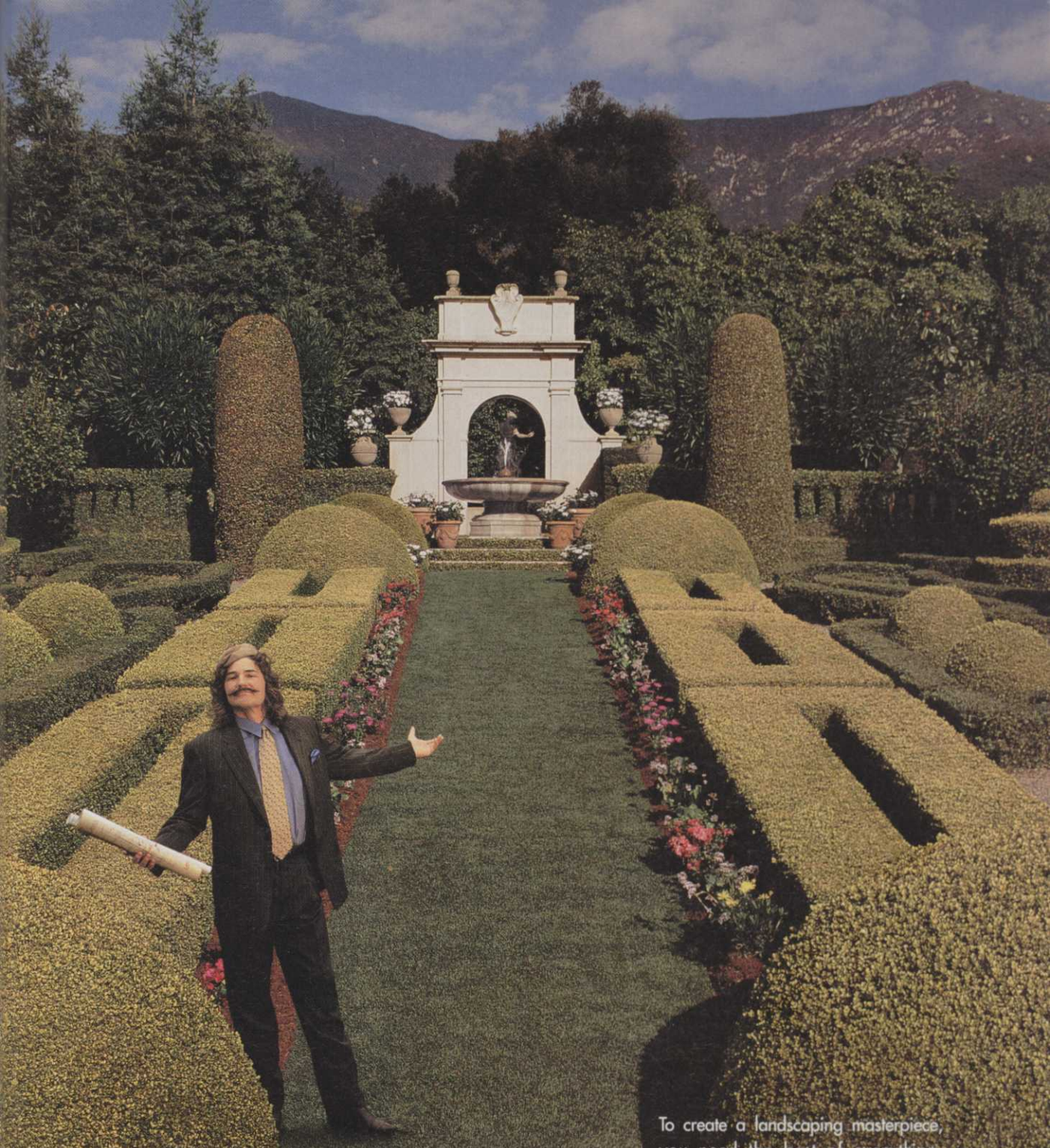
I think to myself that I've given a lot to the greater good of turfgrass — maybe too much. After all, isn't giving your livelihood the ultimate sacrifice?

Ten years of consulting has yielded me a bit of credibility, yet I'm apt to measure myself by the failures I've had and to some degree by what others are saying about me from their safe, salaried, protected, non-grass growing positions. I've been an independent solo act and have not worked with a net. (Actually, that's not entirely true. I have true friends in this business who are indeed my net as they understand the plight of the workaholic.)

But is my life worth giving to the business that has given me so much? Or is it really true that the business has taken and taken and taken at considerable expense? Maybe when I'm carrying the bag for the Dali Lama at Nirvana Golf and Zen Bunker Raking Club, I'll get that answer and achieve my Total Consciousness.

For now, the wisdom I'm learning that I can share with you is that balance is a thing turfheads like me don't do well and must learn to do better. That includes being real about what we can and should be giving and to whom we should be sacrificing for.

Dave Wilber, a Sacramento, Calif.-based independent agronomist, can be reached at dave@soil.com



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PEOPLE ON THE MOVE



C. Hague

The TPC at Deere Run in Moline, Ill., hired **Chris Hague** as its superintendent, replacing Patrick Franklin, who recently

took over as superintendent at the TPC of Iowa outside Des Moines, Iowa.

Western Golf Properties named **Steven C. Thomas** as director of agronomy for the Pelican Hill GC in Newport Coast, Calif. The company also appointed Matthew Morton as superintendent of Oak Creek GC in Irvine, Calif., replacing Thomas.

Robert A. Laubach was named the winner of the United States Golf Association's Green Section's Piper and Oakley Award.

The Golf Course Builders Association of America added **Southeastern Golf** to its professional certification program.

Randy Oberlander was named national sales manager of Growth Products.



N. Toshikuni

Kubota Tractor Corp. named **Nobuyuki Toshikuni** as president.



B. Brochin

Bryan Brochin was named sales specialist for the Turf and Ornamental Group for BASF. The company also named Chad LeBlanc as a senior sales specialist.

Palmer Course Design Co. pre-

sented **Bill Kubly**, chief operating officer and owner of Landscapes Unlimited, with its award of merit for his contributions to the golf course construction industry.



D. Thrailkill

OASE Pumps named **David Thrailkill** as its eastern regional sales manager for the company's commercial division.

Barenbrug named **Kees Bleeker** as president and CEO.

Flowtronex named **Dave Talboo** as worldwide golf sales director. In addition, the company appointed **Joe Sciole** western regional golf sales director and **Bernie Meave** as international golf sales director.

Lesco named **Michael P. DiMino** as

president and CEO. The company also elected **J. Martin Erbaugh** as chairman of its board of directors

KemperSports Management named **Joe Wisocki** as general manager of Heron Glen GC in Hunterdon County, N.J.

DEATHS

Paul Runyan, 93, one of golf's legendary instructors, died March 17 in Rancho Mirage, Calif. Runyan, known as "Little Poison" because of his slight size, relentless attitude and deadly accuracy around the green, taught golf for 78 years.

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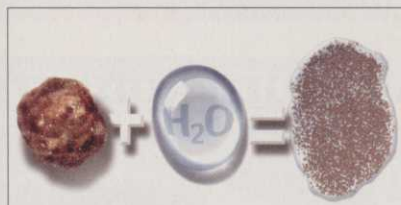
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The Company Line

PRODUCTS & SERVICES



▲ Granular carrier

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- Particles are designed for minimum dust and drift to improve applicator and non-target safety.

The company is converting several granular fungicides to DG Pro.

For more information, contact 419-891-2910, www.AndersonsGolfProducts.com or CIRCLE NO. 200



▲ Deer repellent

Deer-Off is an effective repellent to deter deer from grass, flowers, etc. The product's patented formula features a Dual Deterrent System that protects plants by leaving both an odor and taste that animals find offensive. Made from natural, biodegradable food products, the repellent is EPA-approved. It contains no harmful chemicals and is safe for people, animals and the environment, the company says. It's also long-lasting, with one application lasting up to three months.

For more information, contact 800-333-7633, www.deer-off.com or

CIRCLE NO. 201

▼ Striping mower

National Mower Co. introduces the I-Stripe 22 rotary mower, which provides striping capabilities at a low cost. The I-Stripe is a 22-inch walk-behind rotary mower with powered rear roller for creating a striped finish. It features a die-cast aluminum deck and a blade friction disc to limit the impact to the engine drive shaft.

For more information, contact 651-646-4079, www.nationalmower.com

or

CIRCLE NO. 202



Fungicide

Cleary Chemical offers Endorse, a new translaminar antibiotic fungicide. Endorse attacks turf diseases in warm- and cool-season grasses through both foliar and translaminar systemic activity and can be used in either a

preventative or curative management program, according to the company. Endorse is recommended for brown patch, gray leaf spot, gray snow mold, pink snow mold and other diseases.

For more information, contact 800-524-1662, www.clearychemical.com or

CIRCLE NO. 203

Utility vehicle

The Toro Co. offers the Toro Workman 2110 utility vehicle, featuring hydraulic self-cleaning front disc and rear drum brakes. The enhanced braking system allows for increased braking ability and a towing capacity of 1,200 pounds when using a heavy-duty tow hitch. In addition, the Workman 2110 has a powerful 16 horsepower Briggs & Stratton Vanguard air-cooled gas engine.

The mid-duty Workman 2110 offers a range of attachments such as a canopy, solid and folding windshield, portable refreshment center, hard cab, brush guard and bumper.

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"But I'm going to wreck my club— it's all rocks and gravel," he says.

"Hey, no favors. You play from where you lie."

The poor guy stops arguing and takes his first trial swing. Gravel and sparks fly everywhere. Second swing, same again. Finally he feels ready, moves to the ball and hits... gravel and sparks everywhere, but the ball flies off beautifully, lands on the green and stops inches from the cup.

His friend is astounded. "My God, what a shot! Which club did you use?"

"Your five iron..."

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top 10 CDs

There's an old parlor game you can play that's guaranteed to keep you occupied for hours. The premise is that you're stuck on a

desert island indefinitely. The question you have to answer is, "What 10 CDs would you take to pass the time?"

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Paramount to this gambit is your ability to cover the musical bases. Lord knows what kinds of mood swings you'll go through, but you'll want to make sure you can turn it up, tone it down or find some middle ground as necessary.

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STRANDED ON A DESERT ISLAND **BY MARK LUCE**

So at the risk of angry e-mails telling me how ignorant, foolish or misguided I am, here, in alphabetical order by artist, is the Official *Out of Bounds* Top 10 Desert Island CDs list:

Miles Davis, *Kind of Blue*. Potent, timeless, simultaneously soothing and energetic.

Arthur Dodge and the Horsefeathers, *Nervous Habit*. A hard-to-find 2000 release on the Horsemonkey label, but Dodge's songwriting and the tight musicianship are worth the search.

Bob Dylan, *Blood on the Tracks*. This latter-day Whitman carves arguably the best of his records.

Ella Fitzgerald, *Sings the Duke Ellington Songbook*. Two masters for the cost of one.

Glenn Gould, *Bach's Goldberg Variations*. Gould was a bit of an eccentric, as you can hear him murmuring to himself underneath his exquisite piano work.

Elmore James, *Dust My Broom*. The king of blues slide guitar. Often overlooked and underappreciated.

Aimee Mann, *Bachelor No. 2.2*. Elegant lessons in song-craft and ennui.

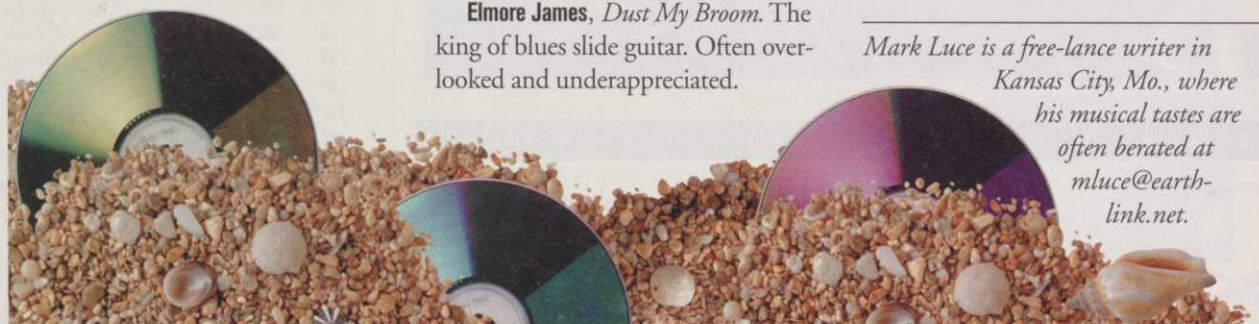
Mos Def, *Black on Both Sides*. My all-time favorite hip-hop album.

The Rolling Stones, *Exile on Main Street*. The bad boys rip this joint at their most daring and naughty.

Lucinda Williams, *Car Wheels on a Gravel Road*. Luscious, heartbreaking, slightly countrified songs with bite.

And a baker's dozen back-up: The Beatles, *Revolver*; The Clash, *London Calling*; John Coltrane, *Giant Steps*; Ry Cooder, *Paris, Texas*; Elvis Costello, *My Aim is True*; Cowboy Junkies, *Trinity Sessions*; Billie Holiday, *Lady Day: The Best of Billie Holiday*; Nirvana, *Nevermind*; Frank Sinatra and Antonio Jobim, *Francis Albert Sinatra & Antonio Carlos Jobim*; The Sonics, *Here are the Sonics*; Uncle Tupelo, *Anodyne*; Tom Waits, *Small Change*; and The White Stripes, *White Blood Cells*.

Mark Luce is a free-lance writer in Kansas City, Mo., where his musical tastes are often berated at mluce@earthlink.net.



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