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knows the pressure that comes with fleet greens at classical courses. Kuhns, currently in his fourth year as director of grounds of Baltusrol GC in Springfield, N.J., previously worked as superintendent at Oakmont CC for nine years, where super-swift greens are the norm. Oakmont's members prefer the greens stimping at 12 feet or more — daily.

Kuhns says the time he spent at the Henry Fownes-designed Oakmont, where he hosted the 1994 U.S. Open and the 1992 U.S. Women's Open, was challenging.

"Their demands are clear — they want firm and fast greens on a day-to-day basis," Kuhns says of the Oakmont membership. "Sometimes that's hard to achieve and people get upset with you when the greens aren't that fast."

Kuhns and Oakmont parted ways in 1999, and Kuhns immediately landed at Baltusrol, another esteemed old course designed by A.W. Tillinghast in 1922.

Kuhns firmly understands why members at Oakmont and other historic courses expect nothing but the best when it comes to condi-

tioning and playability. "They pay a lot of dues and a lot of green fees, and believe the courses should be in top condition all the time," he says.

While there's expected pressure that comes with being superintendents at classical courses, many superintendents are known for placing extra pressure on themselves, Shaffer says.

"You put more pressure on yourself than anybody else puts on you," he adds. "The fear of failing is far greater than the joy of success."

Agronomic challenges

While Oakmont's greens have historically been known for their wicked speed, they've also always been known for their high maintenance. When the greens are maintained consistently to be faster than the norm, the risk of them getting stressed and contracting disease rises.

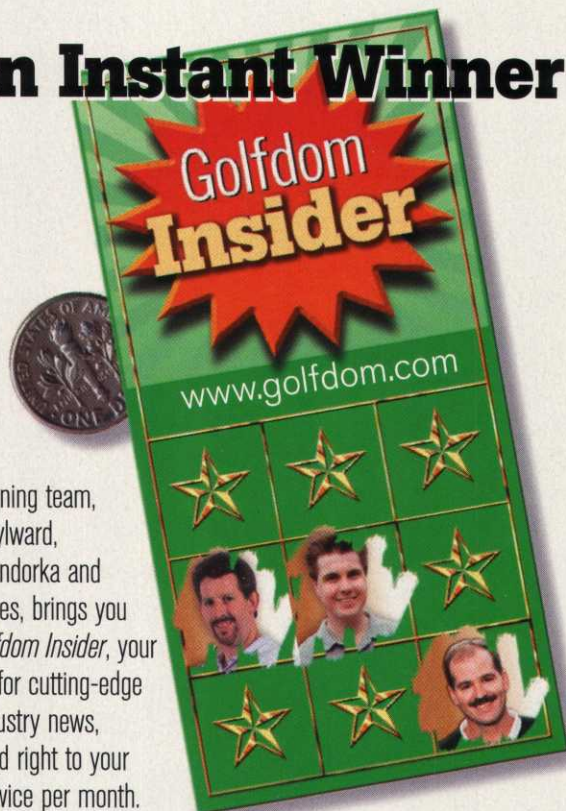
Oakmont's 100-year-old greens are also known for their perennial *Poa* turf, which doesn't grow quickly or recover from injury or disease quickly. That makes them even more

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Augusta and the Sounds of Silence.

See Larry Aylward's Pin High column on PAGE 22

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“It’s nice to be recognized, but no one has to tell the membership at Crystal Downs that this is a great place.”

MICHAEL MORRIS
CRYSTAL DOWNS CC

Continued from page 63

difficult to maintain. John Zimmers, superintendent of Oakmont CC, acknowledges that the maintenance of the greens, which were originally built on a 6-inch base of clay and have never been renovated, have caused him stress. “In the summer, it can be nerve-wracking,” he says of maintaining them.

Zimmers and his crew combine various techniques in their maintenance approach, including deep-tine and core aeration. “We also do a process of sand injection into the top 3 inches to 4 inches of the soil profile,” Zimmers says, adding that the injection improves oxygen flow, root growth and drainage.

Classical courses feature several maintenance challenges that are directly related to their age. At Crystal Downs, Morris says the course’s bunkers are a prominent feature, but they don’t appear modern-looking, which is tricky when it comes to maintenance. “With the bunkers, like many other aspects of the course, it’s a challenge to strike a balance between the ‘old and natural’ elements and the

‘new and manicured’ elements of the course,” Morris says.

Pine Valley is known for its vast bunkers, which present Christian and his crew with plenty of tedious work.

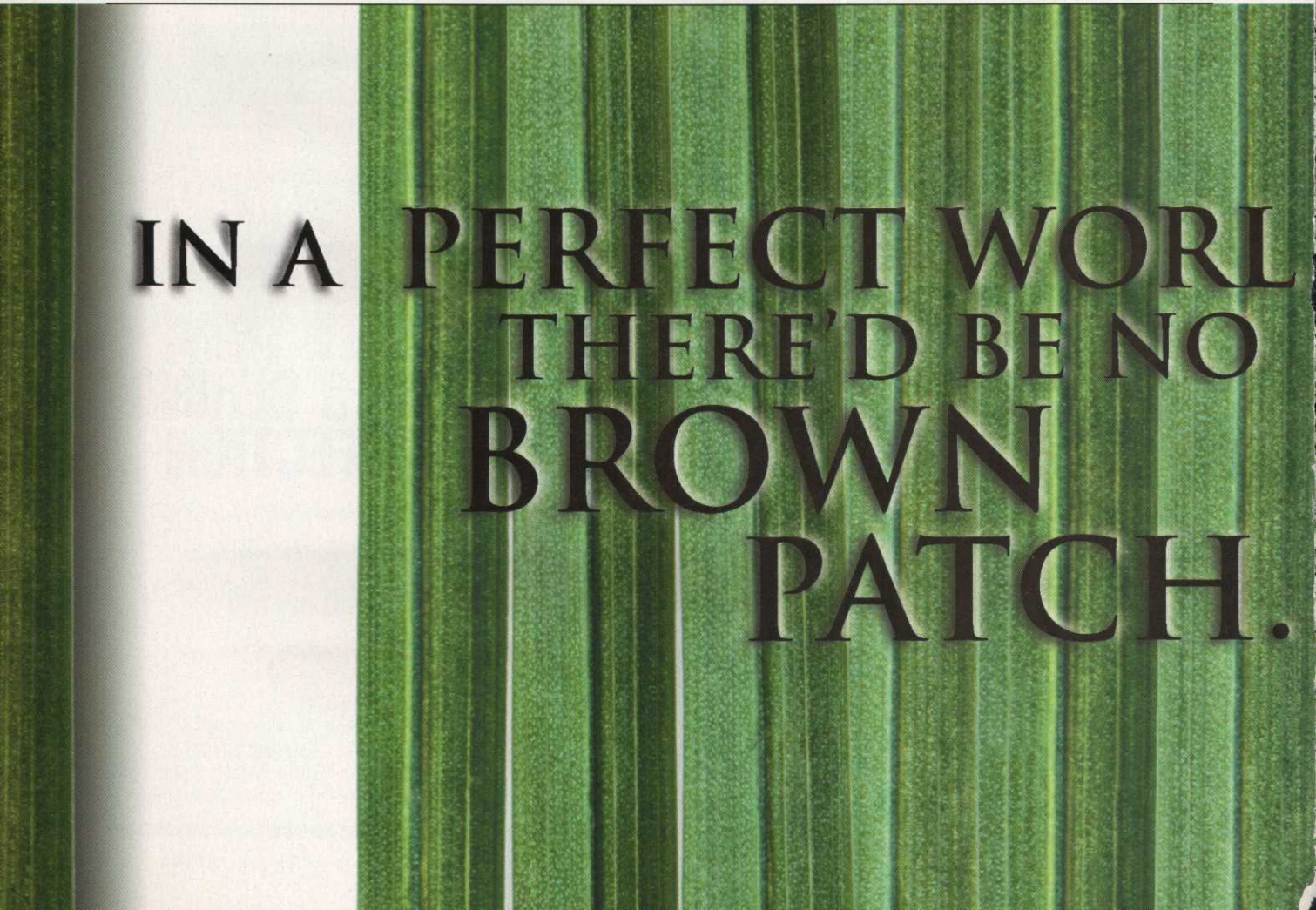
“The bunkers are large areas that look like waste areas,” Christian says. “While they look natural, it’s a tremendous amount of work to keep them that way. It almost looks like we do nothing to them, but they require constant cleaning and sand replacement.”

Zimmers and his crew have a bundle of bunkers to maintain at Oakmont — about 200 (there used to be about 350), including the famous “Church Pews” bunker between the third and fourth fairways. “They are demanding,” Zimmers says.

Another major maintenance challenge at old courses is tree management. There are going to be tree issues when a course is as old as Oakmont.

When Zimmers joined the club about three years ago, he found himself in the midst of the

Continued on page 66



**IN A PERFECT WORLD
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The competition is tough for jobs like Baltusrol GC, an A.W. Tillinghast design in Springfield, N.J.

Three Superintendents, Three Classical Tracks

It was a low point in Matt Shaffer's distinguished career. He didn't get the job at Baltusrol GC.

Shaffer, who was the superintendent of The Country Club, a 1931 William Flynn design in Pepper Pike, Ohio, was a finalist for the director of grounds job at Baltusrol in the late 1990s. He desperately wanted the job at the 1922 A.W. Tillinghast design. But he had stiff competition from two superintendents who tended turf at a couple of classical gems – Mark Kuhns, the former certified superintendent at Oakmont CC; and Mark Michaud, the former superintendent of Pebble Beach Golf Links.

Kuhns got the job. Shaffer and Michaud got the spoils, which didn't turn out to be so bad.

In 2002, Shaffer landed at Merion GC in Ardmore, Pa., one of the nation's greatest old tracks designed by Hugh Wilson in 1912. Ditto for Michaud, who took a job at Shinnecock Hills GC, designed by Howard Toomey and William Flynn in 1931.

"I never dreamt that Merion would come along," Shaffer says, after not landing the job at Baltusrol. "The competition is stiff for jobs like these."

– Larry Aylward, Editor

MIKE KLEMM

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“The bigger the maintenance budget, the bigger the expectations.”

MARK KUHNS
BALTUSROL GC

Continued from page 64

course's tree-removal program, which began in 1994 and is almost near completion. When finished, more than 4,000 trees will have been removed from the course.

“It's amazing to take a 100-year-old course and to think you can change it that dramatically without moving any dirt,” Zimmers says.

Ongoing restoration, such as leveling tee boxes and dealing with encroaching trees on bunkers, is a constant challenge for Christian and his crew, as well as superintendents at other classical courses.

“The restoration is all part of preserving Pine Valley,” Christian says. “This is a special piece of land.”

Yeah, many of the old clubs have big maintenance budgets to get a lot done. But having lots of money to do those things is overrated, Kuhns says.

“The bigger the maintenance budget, the bigger the expectations,” he says. “You must be able to perform.”

Getting along

Zimmers says keeping Oakmont's members happy is the most difficult part of his job. While members desire greens as fast as the traffic on the nearby Pennsylvania Turnpike, they often don't understand the agronomic risks that he and his staff take to make them that quick. But Zimmers' philosophy for his work is simple.

“I try to focus on the right thing to do for the golf course and what I was hired to do,” he says. “You never have to apologize for doing the right thing.”

Zimmers has taken it upon himself to educate the membership with the help of PowerPoint presentations. He attends various board meetings and dinners, and talks turf with the members. It's vital — and beneficial to Zimmers and his crew — that members understand exactly what it takes to maintain a place like Oakmont.

Christian says he strives to communicate strongly with Pine Valley's members daily.

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Hence, they're more understanding of turf problems and supportive of his remedies to combat them.

But Christian, who describes himself as an intense person ("My wheels are always turning," he says), puts pressure on himself to deliver the finest course possible to players. Christian realizes that members' guests view playing Pine Valley as a golf chance of a lifetime.

"So we want it to be the experience of a lifetime for them," Christian says. "But sometimes if things aren't absolutely perfect [on the course], you feel like you let them down."

Members complain about the course at Crystal Downs, but Morris says their protests are a positive thing.

"The membership's sincere interest in the golf course and how we care for it is palpable," Morris says. "Almost all concerns or complaints about the golf course stem from a love for the course."

Morris says there's not a lot of pressure from members for him to do his part to keep Crystal Downs high in the rankings of "top" classical courses.

"It's nice to be recognized, but no one has to tell the membership at Crystal Downs that this is a great place," Morris says. "For me, like every superintendent, I work with my staff to make the golf course the best it can be every day."

Course rankings mean more to Baltusrol's members, though. When Kuhns joined the club, members told him they wanted to see its Lower Course improve in various rankings after slipping for a few years. "Through our conditioning, we've begun to bring the course back up," Kuhns says.

Baltusrol also hired architect Rees Jones last year to help renovate and restore tees and bunkers in preparation for the 2005 PGA Championship.

Dream jobs, but ...

While Kuhns cruises Baltusrol's Lower Course in a utility vehicle, he chatters about the track's storied history. Baltusrol has changed dramatically over the years, Kuhns explains. It opened as an 18-hole course in 1895, but Tillinghast returned to Springfield nearly 30 years later and replaced the one course with two new designs.

"It's neat to be at a club where the great

est players that ever played the game walked the fairways," says Kuhns, who calls Baltusrol his dream job. "The history here is awesome."

Kuhns says Baltusrol, located amid the traffic and concrete of a busy New Jersey city, is a "beautiful piece of land in the middle of metropolis."

"I'd love to be here for the rest of my life," he says. "But there's no guarantee of that."

Most all superintendents face job pressures at their respective courses, but the superintendents at the big-name classical courses face pressure that perhaps is even more intense.

Shaffer, who grew up on a farm near Altoona, Pa., studied turf maintenance because he loves working outdoors. He sought a job at a high-profile classical course with high maintenance standards because he desired the ultimate challenge his field could bring. But Shaffer also realizes that the ultimate challenge can be risky business when it comes to job stability.

"I've been fortunate because I've never been fired," Shaffer says. "But I can imagine the wheels can fly off pretty quickly at this level." ■

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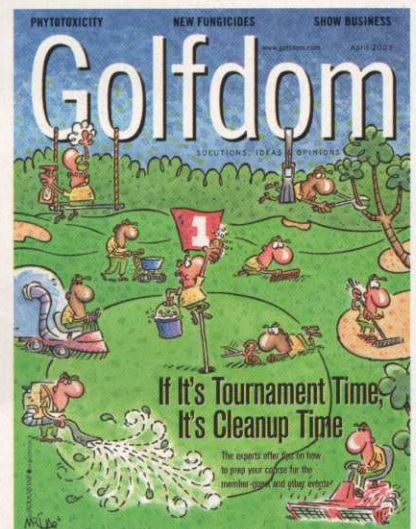
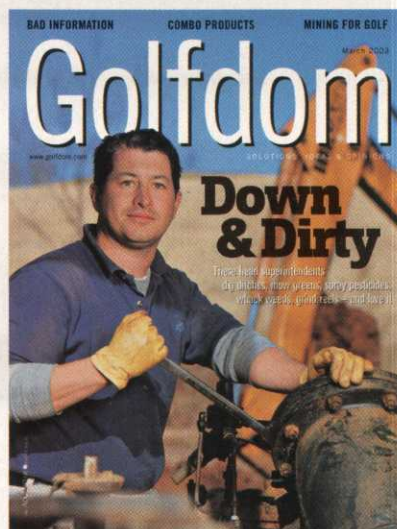
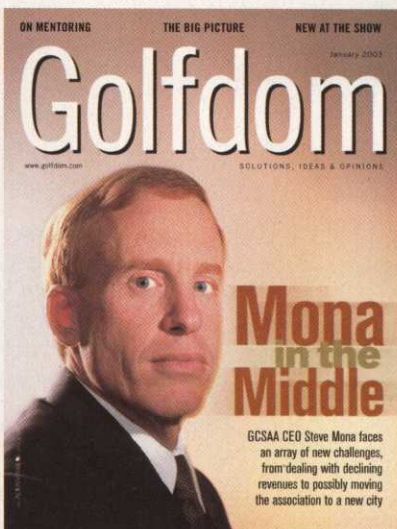
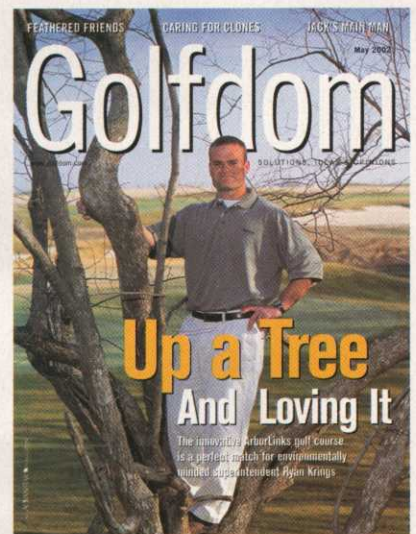
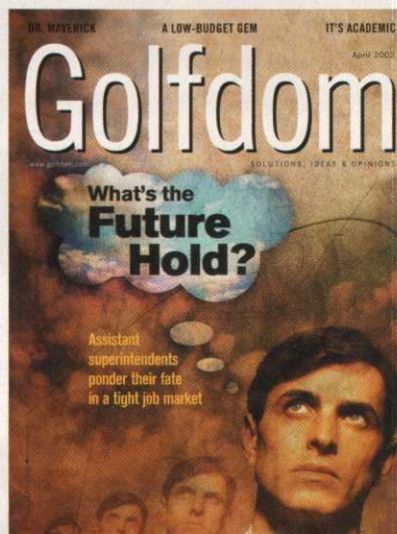
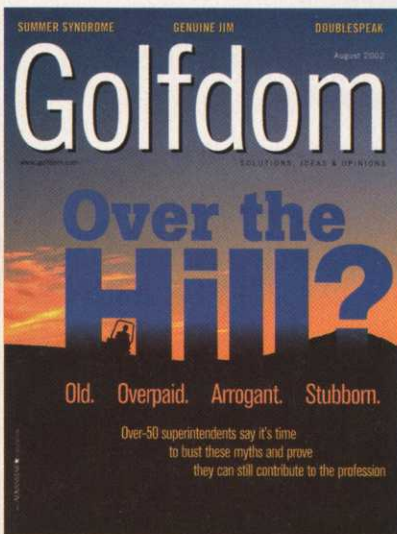
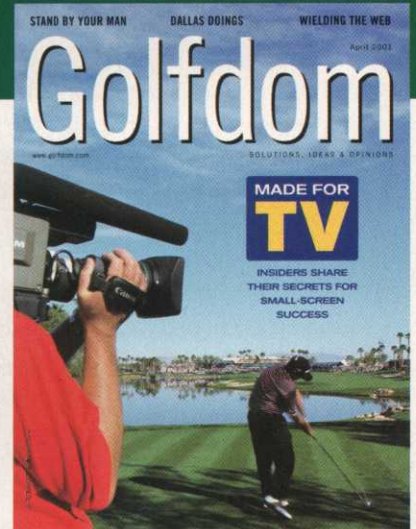
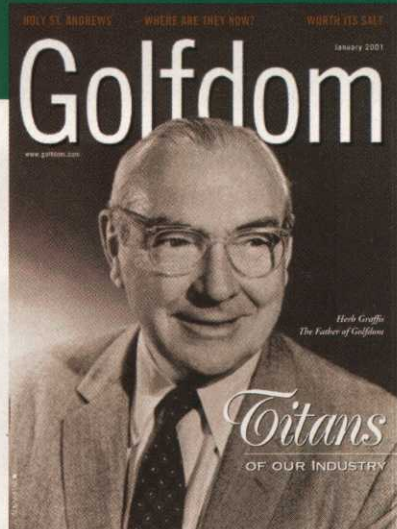
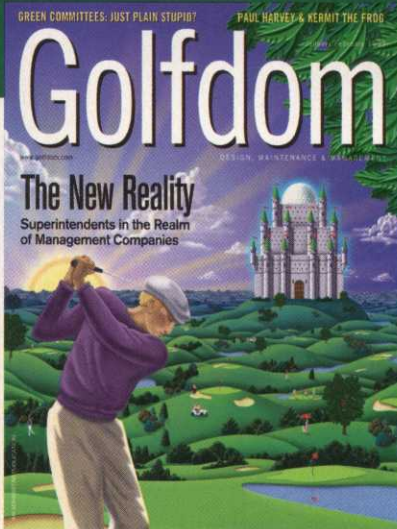
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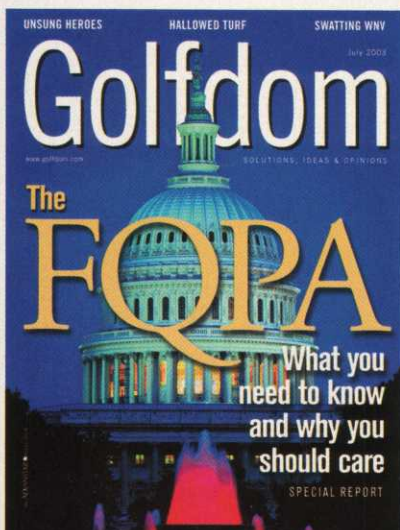
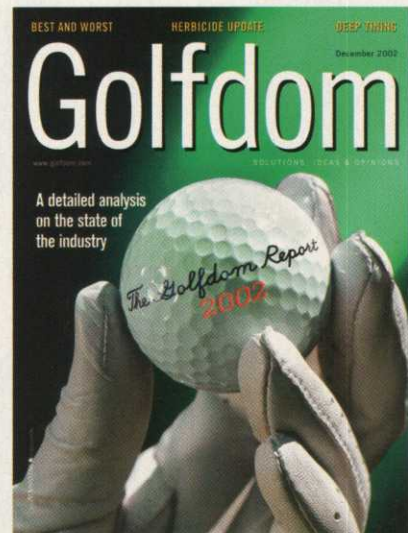
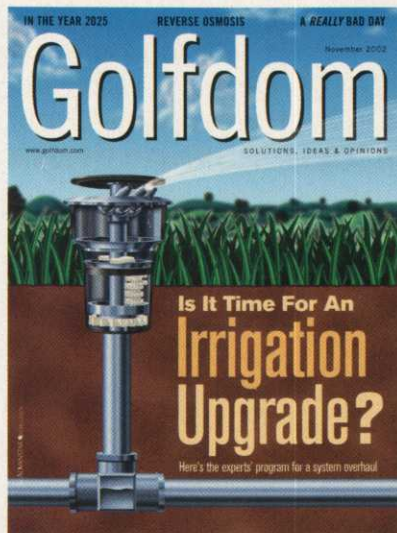
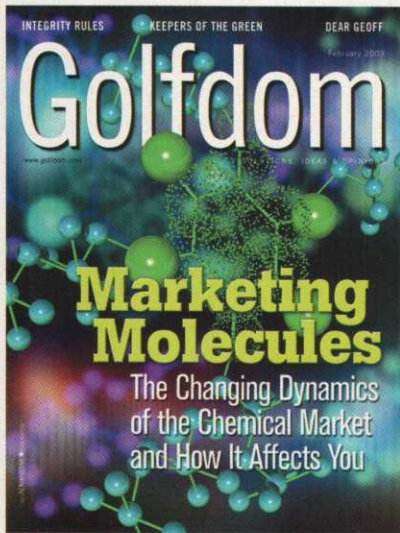
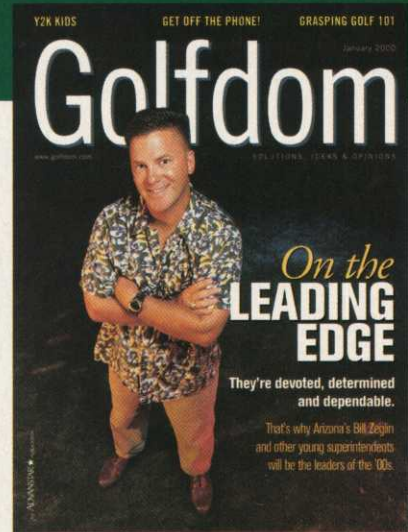
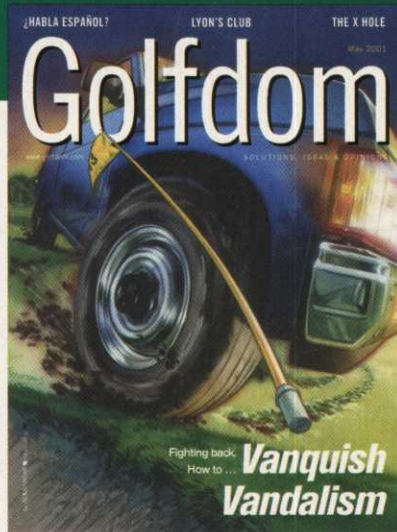
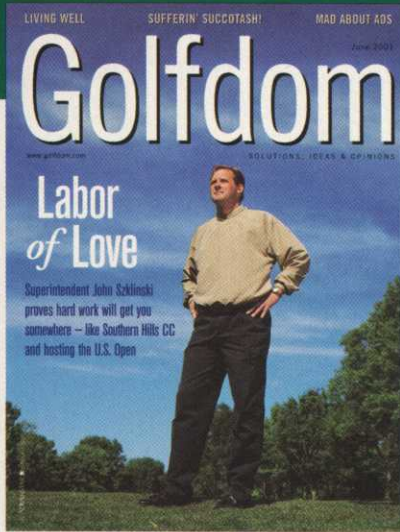
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Watching for

Superintendents are wary of disease threat, which is now nationwide

BY ROBIN SUTTELL



West Nile virus (WNV), which is making a determined westward march across the United States, looks like it's here to stay.

Researchers are delivering a grim prognosis for 2003. Officials at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta say it's likely all states will see incidences of this sometimes-fatal illness this summer.

In 2002, there were more than 4,000 cases of the mosquito-borne disease in the United States, including 284 deaths. Only Hawaii, Alaska, Oregon, Nevada, Utah and Arizona have yet to detect WNV. It's also likely that many more people were infected with the virus but experienced mild or no symptoms, public health experts say.

With the continuing spread of the virus seeming inevitable, it's imperative that Americans remain aware of the disease and take preventive measures. For superintendents, these measures go beyond merely applying insect repellent before going outside. It comes down to

addressing physical issues on the course, as well as educating staff members and golfers about the disease's hazards and protection from it.

"The key to preventing West Nile virus is to have an integrated mosquito control program, including trapping and surveillance, larviciding, adulticiding and community education," says entomologist George Balis, who works for Roselle, Ill.-based Clarke Mosquito Control.

With the Midwest being an area of high West Nile Virus activity already in 2003, for example, Balis says it would be "prudent" for superintendents in that region to have a control program in place to address the risk," he says.

"Waiting until an outbreak is in full swing before considering mosquito control can be a significant risk," he says. "Plan now for a mosquito outbreak and have a plan in place for any control measures."

In virus-free Oregon, superintendents are doing just this. They know the threat is real and that their courses are susceptible.

"The arrival of West Nile virus is imminent," says Michael Hindahl, a golf course industry consultant from Estacada, Ore., and an affiliate board member with the Oregon GCSA. "As we speak, there have been no reported cases that I'm aware of, but the assumption is that it will arrive at some point. Our superintendents are already starting preventive measures. The real challenge is clarifying the reality of the situation and avoid-



FILE PHOTO

Certified superintendent Tony Lasher must walk a fine line to treat the threat of West Nile virus because his course is home to endangered fish, including Coho salmon.