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Kurt Thummel



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MARCH 2003 • VOLUME 59 • NO. 3



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Combination fertilizer products provide superintendents the opportunity to do two jobs for the price of one. But companies aren't marketing them aggressively.

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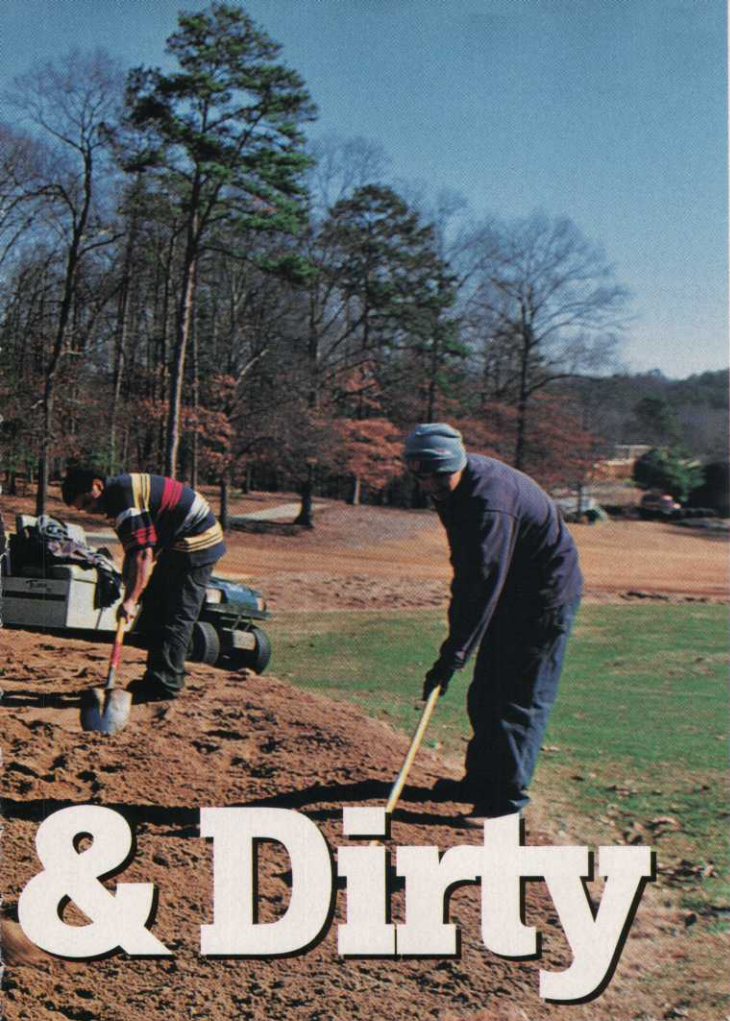
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SEMINARS & CONFERENCES

MARCH

17 Sierra Nevada GCSA Monthly Meeting

Sacramento, Calif.
www.californiagcsa.org

17 USGA/Northern California Golf Association Meeting

Pleasanton, Calif.
www.californiagcsa.org

17 Central Texas GCSA Monthly Meeting

Kerrville, Texas
www.ctgcsa.org

17 Kansas GCSA Monthly Meeting

El Dorado, Kan.
www.kgcsa.org

18-20 Atlantic Golf Superintendents Association's Atlantic Turfgrass Conference and Trade Show

Halifax, Canada
www.atlanticgolfsupers.com

18-20 New England Regional Turf Conference & Trade Show

Providence, R.I.
nhgcs.nhgolf.com

20 Cactus and Pine GCSA Golf Industry Day at the Capital

Phoenix
www.cactusandpine.com

20 University of Florida and Institute for Food and Agricultural Sciences Field Day

Ft. Lauderdale, Fla.
www.floridagcsa.com

20 Chicago District Golf Association and USGA Green Seminar

Chicago
www.magcs.org

24 Central California GCSA Monthly Meeting

Tulare, Calif.
www.californiagcsa.org

25 Building with Trees Seminar

Omaha, Neb.
www.arborday.org

25-26 American Society of Agronomy Branch Meeting

Madison, Wis.
www.agronomy.org

27 Building with Trees Seminar

Des Moines, Iowa
www.arborday.org

APRIL

8 GCSAA Seminar: Turfgrass Stress Management

Denver
www.gcsaa.org

8 Building with Trees Seminar

Greensboro, N.C.
www.arborday.org

8 Cactus and Pine GCSA Annual Meeting

Scottsdale, Ariz.
www.cactusandpine.com

8 Rocky Mountain GCSA Seminar: Turfgrass Stress Management

Arvada, Colo.
www.mgcsa.org

15 Central California GCSA Monthly Meeting

Paso Robles, Calif.
www.californiagcsa.org

23 GCSA of New England Monthly Meeting

Chatham, Mass.
www.gcsane.org

MAY

2 GCSAA Seminar: Golf Course Drainage - Application and Design

Orlando
www.gcsaa.org

6-7 University of Arizona Field Day and Seminar

Tucson, Ariz.
www.cactusandpine.com

6 Iowa GCSA Equipment Demo Day

Iowa City, Iowa
www.iowaturfgrass.org

12-15 Second International Conference on Irrigation and Drainage

Phoenix
www.uscid.org

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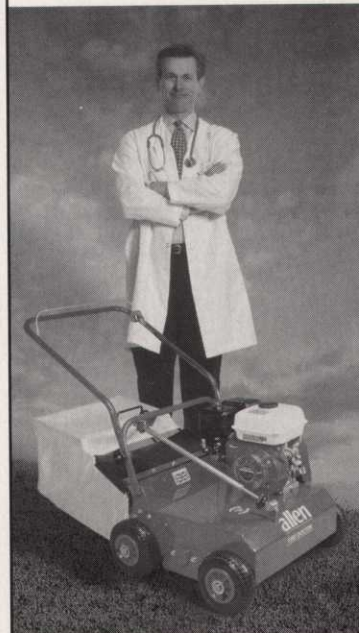
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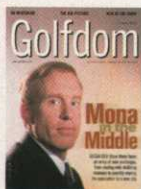
www.golfdom.com **Golfdom** 5

We've Got Mail

LETTERS FROM THE FIELD

Mona Is a Great Politician

I wanted to compliment *Golfdom* on "cracking the nut" with the article about Steve Mona — he would make a great politician ("Mona in the Middle," January). Mona's behavior is perilously close to the CEOs of cor-



porate America. If you are unwilling to take responsibility during poor economic times, how can you possibly take any

responsibility for what was done well during good economic times? The debate over how well GCSAA is functioning is not about the mission statement. It's about the philosophy on how to pursue it.

PDI may not be the reason for the money problems, but it is a huge expense to the association at a time when we find ourselves in the red and requiring dues increases. Mona, as with other business leaders, didn't want to believe that the economic boom would end. As a result, he didn't plan accordingly.

Shouldn't the growth that the association experienced during the '90s be attributed to the economy also? The money for too long has been flowing toward the association. In my opinion, the money should flow

back to the local associations to strengthen and unify them. After all, they are the ones fighting the grass-roots battles we face today.

There are no easy answers or solutions, but I think a full and detailed disclosure or audit of the association's finances to the general membership would be a good place to start.

Rick Slattery
Locust Hill CC
Rochester, N.Y.

Shack Attack

I want to ask Geoff Shackelford ("Bummer! Golf Now Viewed as Uncool," January) how many times he has been on a snowmobile? Has he ever been to Yellowstone in the winter? He wonders why golf is viewed as elitist. He should examine his own biases and do his homework.

Jack Handly
Sales Representative
Dow Agrosciences
Auburn, Calif.

I normally don't take the time to respond to articles I read, but Geoff Shackelford's recent ineffective stab at editorializing the state of golf today (January) prompted me to respond.

His remark regarding "lessons with the course's best sweater

folder" just reconfirms my belief that golf course maintenance staffs have a negative perception of golf professionals, and thus will always build walls between the two.

Steve Ranney
Head Professional
Quail Hollow CC
Painesville, Ohio

Be Careful Out There

As I was reading your November 2002 issue, I noticed a serious safety violation in the photos on page 28. There are workers in deep trenches without side-wall supports. Photo 1 is particularly troubling.

This is not good for worker safety, nor is the lack of attention to safety the message that I believe you would want to send to your readers.

Karl Guillard
Associate Professor of Agronomy
University of Connecticut
Storrs, Conn.

Back off the GCSAA

I've had limited exposure to Pat Jones' dealings with GCSAA, but it seems that he is always exposing the down side of things. His online column ("Digital Flagstick, Nov. 16, 2002) insinuates that the powers that be in the association have no regard for its employees. His statements also project the image of as-

sociation leaders making the decisions without informing the public about how those decisions were made. I don't believe that's the case.

Do you think that these gentlemen and ladies aren't intelligent enough to realize the percentage of current staff that won't move? Do you think they're not intelligent enough to study the cost of living and the cost of doing business in other cities? Do you think that they aren't intelligent enough to realize what effect such a move will have on the association's programs and services they provide? Do you not think that a move would be to a location where there would be people fully capable of taking of the duties and responsibilities that its current staff handles?

Jones says, "I seriously doubt the relocation consultant's findings could possibly capture all the costs in terms of money, people and service a relocation will entail." You clearly have no faith in the abilities of such consultants. I think they have done enough work in their field that they have presented enough information and resources to provide GCSAA with reliable numbers.

Having recently attended the Chapter Delegates meeting, it seems to me they have considered all the necessary factors. Believe me, they have considered the effects it will have on the staff. But they are also intelligent enough to know that there are other factors to consider. One of the primary purposes for the existence of the GCSAA is to promote and improve the stature of the superintendents, on the local level and in the entire golf world. I don't believe there is anything in the association's articles of incorporation or bylaws that says the association exists for the benefit of the staff and employees.

Brian Holland
Superintendent
Kentucky Dam Village
State Resort Park
Gilbertsville, Ky.

Editor's Note: To read Digital Flagstick twice a month, sign up
Continued on page 8

Preaching to the Wrong Choir

I have been a superintendent at the same South Florida club for nearly eight years now. For the past 10 years, I have been reading trade magazines and all I ever read about is how hard we work, how good of a job we're doing, how difficult it is to maintain a golf course to member expectations and finding solutions to everyday problems. The odd thing is that we superintendents know how hard we work, the dedication it takes to produce consistent and quality playing conditions, and the enormous amount of stress we endure. But do the members of our clubs really know or even care what we go through to provide them with

these conditions?

I think we need to stop telling each other how difficult our jobs are in our own publications and write articles in golfer publications instead. Let them know how many weeks or months of preparation go into a PGA event. They see these courses on TV week after week with green speeds of 10, 11 or even better. We need to have reliable sources (i.e. TV commentators) and articles from superintendents that host PGA events to explain how these conditions are achieved and how most superintendents shouldn't try them at home on a regular basis.

I think the GCSAA should find

a way to fund commercials to promote superintendents and their credibility. Golfers need to know how we are promoters of the game and the environment as well. We are fighting for them through our associations to work towards reasonable solutions on water allocations with water agencies and the use of specific pesticides with the EPA. I would think that most of us are well educated, and should be treated as any other professional that has a college degree.

John A. Morsut
Superintendent
North Palm Beach CC
President, Treasure Coast GCSA
Jupiter, Fla.



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Continued from page 6
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'Sharp' Job

I haven't been associated with American Golf Corp. for nearly three years, but I do feel compelled to respond to the nasty little article by Shane Sharp ("American Golf at the Turn," January).

AGC certainly has its faults and has experienced some hard times in the last three years as the economy tanked, play remained flat or down, and the "one new course per day" lunacy of the National Golf Foundation eventually resulted in significant overbuilding nationwide.

No doubt Sharp's friends have had reason to complain about conditions at AGC courses as the company struggled to reduce costs and remain profitable.

Eventually, they struggled just to remain alive, and now Goldman Sachs is about to dine on the body.

AGC's market is primarily public, daily-fee golf, including a fair amount of high-end public golf, with about 25 percent or 30 percent private clubs in the mix.

Most are not old-money, high-end clubs. AGC accepts all business risk for the owner and operates as if it were the owner, guaranteeing an annual minimum rent for use of his property vs. a percentage of the gross (if that exceeds the minimum rent guarantee). AGC covers all losses with its own cash.

For 25 years, AGC's business model produced much greater profits and growth as it provided affordable golf with better course conditions than its competitors.

However, once the market overbuilt and the economy tanked, AGC was exposed to crushing business risk and suffered losses for three successive years after completing the best year in its history.

When the dust settles, look for AGC's directors of maintenance to be running the golf course maintenance operations under Goldman. With some new financial support, they'll quickly fix the problems Sharp harps on.

**Mike Heacock, Agronomist
and former American Golf Corp. employee**

How Could You Forget Him?

I always look forward to reading this publication each month, but I was a little disappointed in December.

There is an article called "A Historic Design." While this was a well-written article and was mostly about Gary Panks, I was curious why the superintendent was never mentioned. They do have one, and he does a great job. He has more to deal with in maintaining the "culturally sensitive" areas than the director of golf operations.

Maybe I am a little worked up over nothing, but I am from the area and a good friend of superintendent Todd Huslig. I respect him and what he does.

**Clay Guck
Superintendent, Tierra Del Sol CC
Los Lunas, N.M.**

Editor's Note: Guck is absolutely right. We certainly should have mentioned Huslig in the article, and we apologize for the oversight.

Got something to say? We want to hear from you. You can e-mail your letters to Frank Andorka at fandorka@advanstar.com, fax to 440-891-2675 or send them via snail-mail to: 7500 Old Oak Blvd., Cleveland, OH 44130. Make sure to include your name and phone number for verification. Letters may be edited for length or relevance.

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I watched a terrific show on *The Learning Channel* the other night about urban legends. The program debunked several of these unverifiable but true-sounding stories that periodically bubble to the surface of the public's consciousness. One in particular — the traveling businessman who succumbs to a beautiful woman's charms only to awake the next morning missing a kidney — can be traced back hundreds of years. Fascinating stuff.

Golf's urban legends are equally fascinating and just as hard to snuff out. The latest example of their persistence was in a hatchet job — er, article — on the online magazine, *Salon.com*.

If you're not familiar with *Salon*, you should know that, politically, it flies farther to the left than a John Daly duck-hook. Think I'm exaggerating? The title of the piece in question is "Poisoned Fairways."

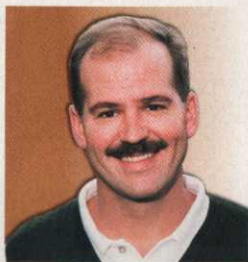
The article did a wonderful job of reviving several of golf-related urban legends repeatedly discredited by science, law and good journalism. For starters, it revives the now infamous 1982 "EPA study" of golf course pesticide use. This piece of wild extrapolation, actually done by the AARP, claimed golf courses used more active ingredient per acre than farming.

That's a stunning statistic, until you scratch the surface of the methodology. The "science" behind the study involved surveying a couple of dozen Northeast U.S. courses about how much active ingredient they applied to putting surfaces annually. Then that number was taken and multiplied by the total acreage of the average golf course — 150 acres or so. The result was a ludicrously high number based on the idea that every course in America applied chemicals wall-to-wall as often as possible. Good science, huh?

Next up, predictably, was yet another appearance by the industry's one-and-only ghost, Navy Lt. George Prior. Prior died "suspiciously" after playing a round of golf on a course that had been treated with a fungicide. His now famous habit of placing his golf ball in his mouth between holes was cited as the contamination method. The wrongful death suit was settled out of court, leaving an information gap that's caused Prior to pop up like a poltergeist in a bad horror movie for two decades.

A Witch's Brew of Misinformation

BY PAT JONES



SALON.COM

ARTICLE REVIVES

URBAN LEGENDS

REPEATEDLY

DISCREDITED BY

SCIENCE, LAW AND

GOOD JOURNALISM

All you need to know about this case is that the real facts behind it drove John Stossel of ABC News to convert from leading antipesticide crusader to leading skeptic of unsupported activist claims.

The famed University of Iowa Mortality Study also reared its ugly head once again in the story with the suggestion that superintendents died from higher rates from pesticide-related cancers. The article omitted the fact that the study's lead scientist said repeatedly that no cause-and-effect relationship could be inferred from the results.

Just to cap off this witch's brew of bias and misinformation, *Salon* claims that the golf industry gets away with all of this skullduggery because it has a powerful federal lobby whose campaign contributions rank somewhere between the NRA and Big Tobacco.

Pardon me while I laugh uncontrollably for a few minutes. Powerful? The golf industry couldn't lobby its way out of a wet paper bag. Influence federal legislation? The industry couldn't get a parking ticket fixed. Contributions? The average Congressman finds more spare change under the cushions of his couch than the industry gives annually.

Nonetheless, another urban legend is born. Thanks to the Internet, the myth of an all-powerful golf lobby will soon have the same resilience as the tale of the wayward businessman who loses his kidney. Pretty soon we'll be receiving e-mails about how President Bush has secretly conspired with Tiger Woods, Jack Nicklaus and Tim Finchem to turn all of Yosemite National Park into a giant driving range.

Hey, it must be true. I saw it somewhere on the Internet.

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