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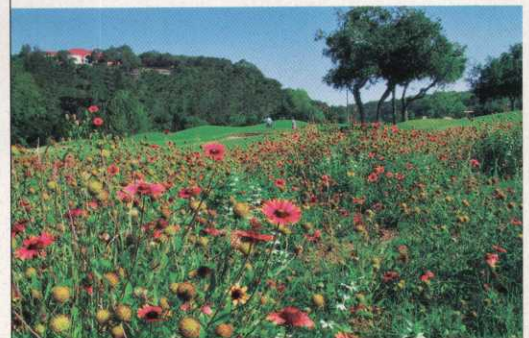
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Golfdom

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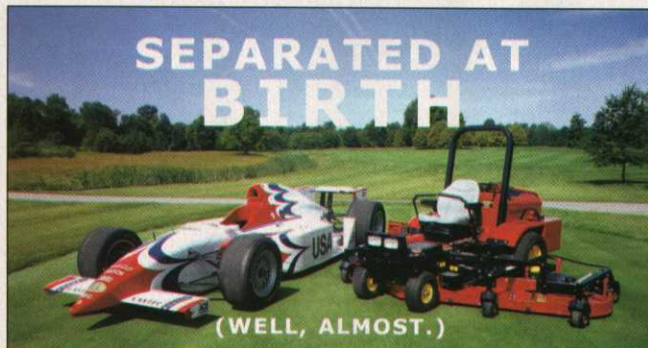
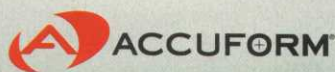


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A pastor, a doctor and an engineer are waiting for a particularly slow group of golfers ahead of them.

Engineer: "What's *with* these guys? We've been waiting for 15 minutes already!"

Doctor: "I don't know, but I've never seen such ineptitude!"

Pastor: "Here comes the greens keeper. Shall we have a word with him?" [the greens keeper catches up with them] "Say, George! This group ahead is rather slow, isn't it?"

George: "Oh, yes, that's a group of blind fire fighters. They lost their sight saving our clubhouse from a fire last year, so we let them play for free anytime."

The group is silent for a moment.

Pastor: "Why, I think I'll say a special prayer for them tonight!"

Doctor: "Good idea. And I'm going to contact my ophthalmologist buddy and see if there's anything he can do for them."

Engineer: "Why can't these guys play at night?"

Golfdom's

J  **KE**
of the month

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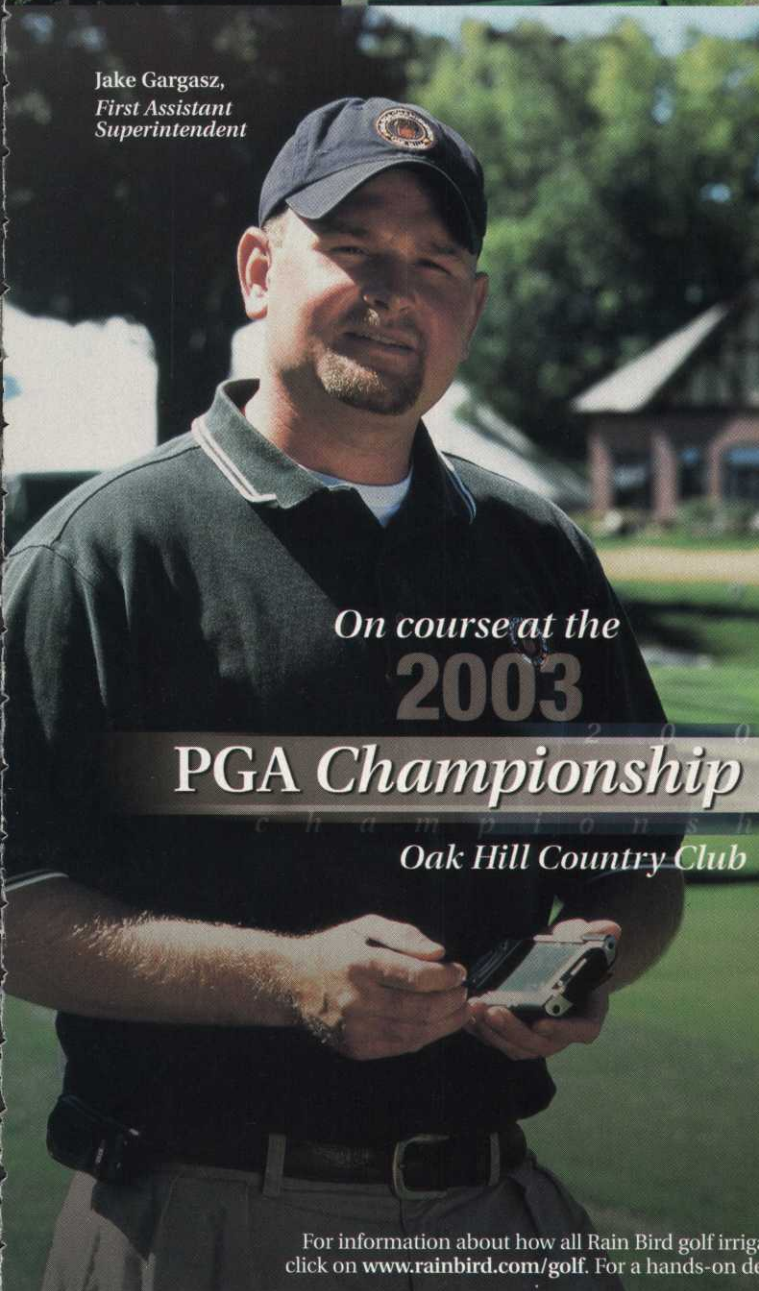
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Jake Gargasz,
First Assistant
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On course at the
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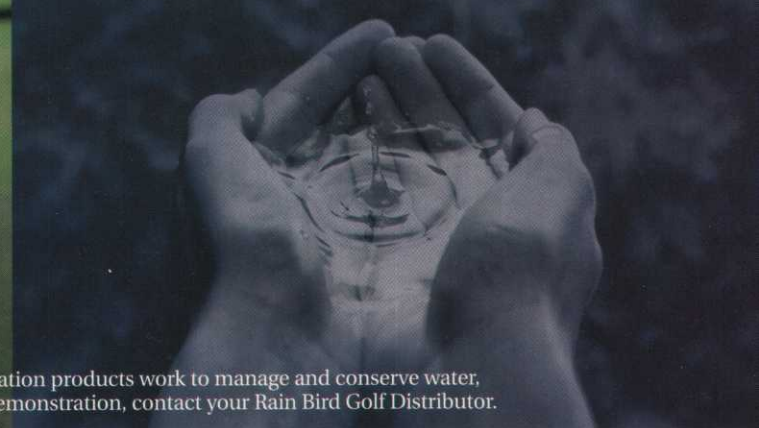
- Paul Latshaw, Superintendent

In preparation for the 2003 PGA Championship at Oak Hill, first assistant superintendent Jake Gargasz installed EAGLE™ Series rotors and a centrally controlled FREEDOM™ system to more efficiently manage water.

"The fairways were firmer and more consistent because we had much better control of the water. We substantially cut back on areas that we had to previously hand-water – fairways and edges of fairways – because of uniformity and distribution through the nozzle.

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We get a lot of interesting “pitches” from public relations people. A pitch is typically a call or an e-mail suggesting a story idea. Usually, they’d like us to do a piece on their client’s new turf gadget or potion or — if they’re a wee bit misinformed about *Golfdom’s* readership — a revolutionary new plutonium-covered ball that’s guaranteed to fly 400 yards, never slice, cure the common cold and bring lasting peace to the Middle East.

Despite my cynicism about clever or even wildly exaggerated story pitches, I have to admit that I was intrigued when a PR person working for Bayer Environmental Sciences recently called and said, “You need to talk to Dan about the purple cow.”

What? OK ... Sure. Huh?

I eventually figured out that she meant Dan Carrothers, Bayer’s vice president of sales and a major player in the turf chemical biz. Baffled but curious, I dialed his number and, deciding that it must be some sort of coded password, whispered “Purple Cows” over the phone. Predictably, being a responsible adult, he hung up on me.

I called back and said, “Hey Dan, don’t hang up. It’s Pat and I want to know about the ‘purple cow.’”

Relieved that he wasn’t being harassed by some deranged cattle freak, Carrothers put it in simple terms for me. “Say you’re driving down a long country road and see hundreds of plain old cows in the fields along the way. After a while, a cow is pretty much a cow and you tune them out ... until you glance over and see a *purple* cow. That will get your attention. In other words, in a crowded marketplace where companies and products may seem the same, you have to stand out from the herd ... just like a purple cow.”

Interesting, I said, but what the heck does this have to do with golf? “We’re in a maturing market where there are lots of products competing for a share of the superintendent’s budget,” Carrothers said. “We’re also seeing generic companies offering no-frills alternatives supposedly at a lower price. So we have to do something more than just offer good stuff. We

The Power of the Purple Cow

BY PAT JONES



THE IDEA IS TO
BUILD A CLOSE
CUSTOMER
RELATIONSHIP
THAT GOES BEYOND
JUST PRICE AND
PRODUCT
PERFORMANCE

have to be like that purple cow in the mind of customers by doing something special to give them value beyond just product performance.”

At Bayer, according to Carrothers, that means a renewed emphasis on field salespeople who consult with and support customers rather than just taking orders. The effort he describes goes beyond turf quality to encompass research and development, training, education and career enhancement. In short, Carrothers is proposing something more like an ongoing partnership with superintendents to build and keep their loyalty to Bayer.

I think this is an emerging trend, and I’m hearing similar things from a number of forward-thinking companies, including some notable Bayer competitors (although no one else has described it as colorfully). Today, as traditional sources of information and support (extension services, attendance at chapter meetings) are eroding because of budget and time constraints, progressive companies are stepping in to fill the void. Why? Because they want to become more “intimate” with you.

The idea is to build a close customer relationship that goes beyond just price and product performance. It’s certainly not a new concept but, frankly, in an era when many young superintendents find themselves facing challenges for which limited experience hasn’t prepared them, this seems like a welcome approach.

It’ll be interesting to see how many more suppliers adopt this strategy over the next few years. In the long run, it may be that superintendents who seek out and take advantage of the value these companies bring to the table will come to enjoy the taste of the milk from the purple cow.

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In August, I attended the second round of the PGA Championship at Oak Hill Country Club in Pittsford, N.Y., to research and write a story on the volunteers of Oak Hill's maintenance staff. (The story appears on page 28 of this issue.) It was a talented and hard-working cast of people.

Paul B. Latshaw, Oak Hill's former manager of golf courses and grounds, invited me to Oak Hill to do the story. Latshaw was thankful and proud of the nearly 100 volunteers he recruited to help him. And he wanted them to be recognized for their efforts in a story.

Oak Hill was in outstanding shape for the tournament — a testament to Latshaw, his staff and the volunteers for their hard work in getting the course prepped for the mega-event. And that's never easy, what with pro golfers' and fans' increased expectations for flawless greens, tees and fairways.

Jack Nicklaus noticed the great condition Oak Hill was in. Then he came and swooped Latshaw off to Muirfield Village Golf Club, the dream course Nicklaus built in Ohio about 30 years ago, to be its new superintendent.

"I spoke to several players who were in the PGA field, and to a person, they remarked on the fantastic condition of the golf course at Oak Hill," Nicklaus said. "August is one of the most difficult times of the year for turf management, so to hear such high praises of Oak Hill is a true compliment to Paul's ability."

Latshaw hadn't even had time to come down from the high of hosting his first Major tournament before Jack apparently made him an offer he couldn't refuse. But, hey, that's what this business is all about. Latshaw, one of the top superintendents in the business who led Oak Hill to a No. 10 ranking in the 2003 *Golf Digest* biennial ranking of America's 100 Greatest Courses, deserves his fate.

But let's get back to the volunteers, many whom are no-names in the industry when compared to Latshaw's name. They came to Oak Hill for a week or longer to work their posteriors off. Mainly, they came to help Latshaw, who will be the first to tell you that he couldn't have staged the PGA without them.

May Good Karma Come to Them

BY LARRY AYLWARD



THE BROTHERHOOD
COMPONENT IN THE
GOLF COURSE
MAINTENANCE
INDUSTRY IS TRULY
INSPIRING, WHICH
THE VOLUNTEERS
DEMONSTRATED AT
OAK HILL

Make no mistake. Latshaw worked his behind off for nearly five years at Oak Hill with the PGA Championship in his sights. The course needed a lot of work when Latshaw got there in 1999, and he directed the effort to get that work done.

But the volunteers, whose last names include DeCerce, Seibel and Rehr, quietly went back to their normal jobs as superintendents, assistant superintendents and mechanics when the tournament was over. They learned a lot and welcomed the experience of hosting a Major, but there was no fanfare or kudos for them from a guy nicknamed the Golden Bear.

So they should be recognized, and that's why *Golfdom* pursued this story. And the volunteers should be proud of themselves for extending an incredible effort to help a friend and ready a golf course for one of the game's biggest annual affairs.

It's a cool story, one I was honored to cover. All I can say is that the brotherhood component in the golf course maintenance industry is truly inspiring, which the volunteers demonstrated at Oak Hill.

If you believe in karma, the volunteers who helped Latshaw — as well as the volunteers who assist superintendents hosting other tournaments throughout the country — will get their due. And at least one volunteer already has.

Jeff Corcoran, one of Latshaw's top lieutenants on his volunteer team during the PGA, was named to replace Latshaw at Oak Hill. It was a step up for Corcoran, the former superintendent at Weston (Mass.) Golf Club, who also worked as Latshaw's assistant at Oak Hill in the late 1990s.

Here's to more good karma happening for all volunteers.

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