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Mike Friedman, Superintendent of The Links at Lang Farm in Burlington, VT

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Tragedy /s Waiting to Happen

Continued from page 40

"We put red dots on it," Trinkino says. "If a person was sick or didn't attend the safety session, he or she gets a red dot. That enables us to go back, determine why the person wasn't there, then train the person."

Language and other barriers

A recent investigation by *The Associated Press* showed that one Mexican worker per day is dying on the job in the United States across all industries. Mexican workers, the study noted, are 80 percent more likely to die on the job in the United States than native-born workers.

With the high proportion of Mexican and other Spanish-speaking workers at courses around the country, it's critical that any employee safety program take into account potential language and cultural barriers, Blankenship says.

"Older employees have been doing the same thing forever and, right or wrong, they don't even think about potential hazards."

Mike Blankenship
Safety Director
Mississippi Farm Bureau Federation

If you're training Spanish-speaking workers from other countries, don't assume that they received the same amount of schooling as most workers from the United States. Present your safety training orally — and in their native language (or have a bilingual employee verbally translate the session from English into Spanish).

Also, be aware of potential cultural barriers — for example, in many Hispanic cultures it is not appropriate to question persons in "authority," so your

Hispanic workers may not ask questions of their supervisors, even when there is something they don't understand. In addition, direct eye contact with a person in authority is considered disrespectful in many Hispanic cultures.

Another potential barrier to effective safety training with any worker is that longtime employees who have done

things a certain way for many years are often reluctant to change their habits.

"If employees have never been around equipment, they are more likely to think about safety than those who can't see the forest through the trees," Blankenship says. "Older employees have been doing the same thing forever and, right or

Continued on page 44

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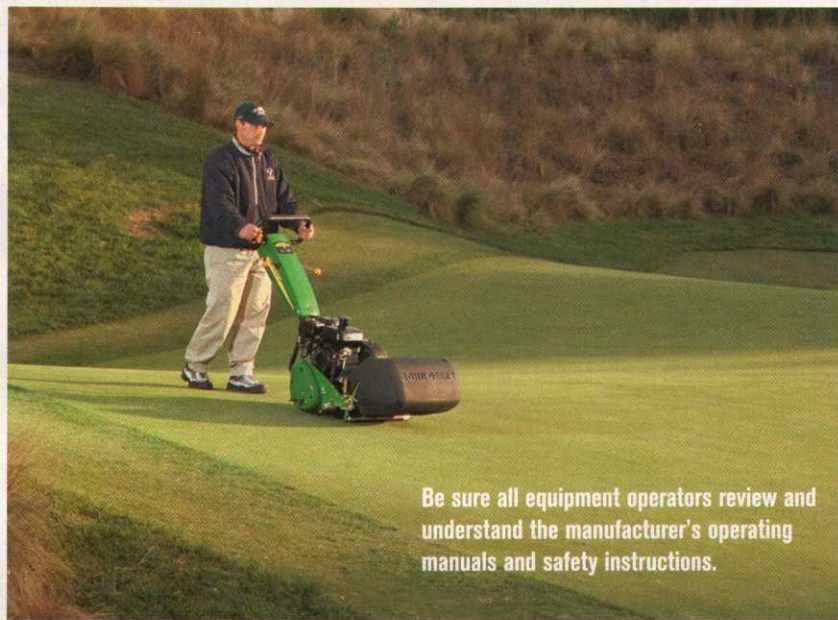
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Tragedy Is Waiting to Happen



Be sure all equipment operators review and understand the manufacturer's operating manuals and safety instructions.

JOHN DEERE

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wrong, they don't even think about potential hazards."

Pryseski pleads with other superintendents not to wait until an employee is killed to start thinking about safety.

"You'd better wake up and realize that these things can happen," he says.

"There's the legal side — you have attorneys calling you and OSHA coming down on you. But you also have this

personal side. Someone comes to work on a golf course, then never goes back home. You liked this person — his son still works for you. You think, 'Maybe there's something more we could have done.' You can make 100 excuses not to start a safety program, but it's not that difficult once you do it." ■

Mulhern is a freelance writer from Belleville, Wis.

Safety Resources

The Golf Course Superintendents Association of America (GCSAA), some private companies and other safety organizations offer many helpful resources. Among them are:

GCSAA: An information packet on employee safety; various self-study courses on such topics as responsible pesticide use and personal protective equipment for pesticide applicators; the Environmental Management Program (which includes a section on employee safety and the right to know); and a members-only online compliance section (that includes a category on worker safety and links to various articles). For more information, go to www.gcsaa.org.

Superintendent's Video Workshop: This training, produced by EPIC of Wisconsin, includes safety videos, tests, sign-off sheets, and instruction guidelines. For more information, go to www.swonline.com.

Monthly Video Safety Training for the Golf Industry: Produced by Risk Compliance (Hobe Sound, Fla.), this service provides monthly videos, quizzes and an instructor's guide. For more information, go to www.golfsafety.com.

National Ag Safety Database: This database includes information you can download at no cost. Search by topic (such as Machinery Safety [mowers] or Personal Protective Equipment). For more information, go to www.cdc.gov/nasd/.

National Safety Council: The NSC produces numerous safety videos and other safety-related materials. For more information, go to www.nsc.org.

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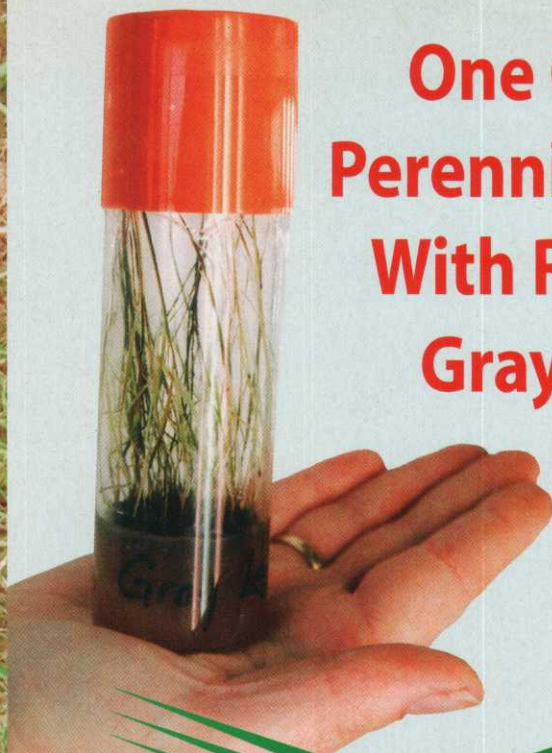
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Business Record

Profile Meet Bill Fountain, the "Banana Man" — Page 50

Money Shot Wanted: Golf Fanatic With a Fabulous Voice — Page 52

The Fun and Value Factors

These simple components are integral to growing the game and should not be underestimated, as three successful operations prove

BY MATTHEW J. WARD

Denial. It's easier to state than dealing with the reality of the truth. The U.S. golf industry is facing its own denial of sorts. The total number of players is not growing by most independent accounts.

In fact, it may be decreasing, and the industry's rush to open a course a day from just a few years back is now causing many existing courses throughout the country to decide if closing is a more viable option.

The naive belief of "build a course and they shall

come" is simply ringing hollow for many. For instance, the East Course at Blue Heron Pines, the highly touted 18-hole layout that makes up half of the 36-hole complex just outside Atlantic City, N.J., may close at the end of the season. The course, designed by Steve

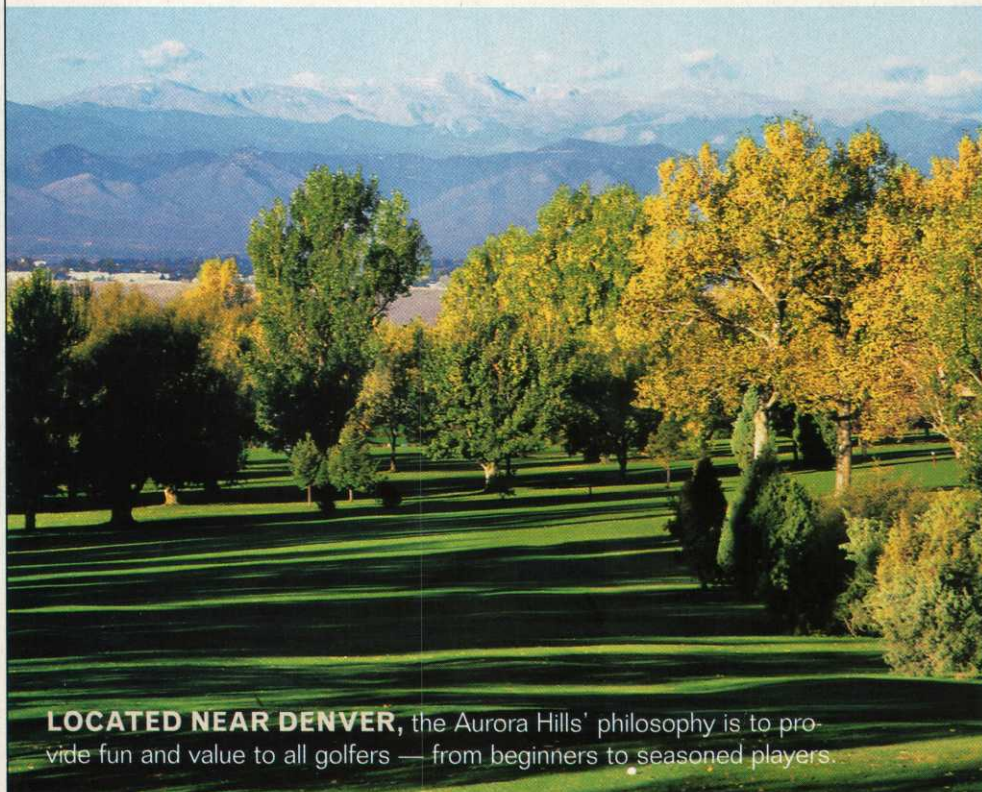
Smyers and rated among the top five public courses in the Garden State, also could face a major change if a developer gets his way in securing permits for age-restricted housing. Then the East Course would be transformed into a nine-hole course for the community.

Opinions vary when it comes to the numbers of players and how many rounds they play. In a recent report, Pellucid Corp., a research group that studies the golf industry, stated that the drop of players in American golf is not an aberration but the outline for a continuing trend.

The National Golf Foundation states the opposite conclusion. It reports that the total number of rounds for the first three quarters increased 1.3 percent when compared to the same period last year.

Statistics aside, most everyone agrees that the increasing cost to play and the growing amount of time it takes to play have hindered the game. Family life for many today features a crowded plate. Having the wherewithal to commit five

Continued on page 48



LOCATED NEAR DENVER, the Aurora Hills' philosophy is to provide fun and value to all golfers — from beginners to seasoned players.

FUN AND VALUE FACTORS

Continued from page 47

to six hours to play 18 holes doesn't make the grade of priorities — particularly females between the ages of 18 and 45 who typically serve as the primary caregivers for young children.

Many courses simply believed players would continue to come with each passing day, and little has been done to aggressively market their services to sustain patronage. The emergence of Tiger Woods on the world stage of professional golf had many believing the ascension of minority participation in the sport would mean a bump up in total players. That has not happened.

Despite these negative trends, there are some clear examples in America in which facilities and ownership entities have implemented strategies to increase rounds played in the belief they will build a future base of players beyond what exists now. The twin focus-points of fun and value are central to their success.

Golf courses looking to increase their rounds and attract new players might learn a few things from the three operations' stories below.

Join the club

Until the late 1980s and early 1990s, the golf course market in the greater New York metropolitan area was fairly two-dimensional — private equity clubs on one side and taxpayer-owned municipals on the other side. But upscale golf — or the “country club for a day” model — mush-



ERIC BERGSTOL, the founder of Empire Golf, says his company's goal is to create quality golf courses that are interesting and distinct.

roomed rapidly until it hit some clear bumps in the road as the total number of golfers stagnated and failed to keep pace with the burgeoning number of upscale facilities.

Such facilities need to understand that today's golfers want nothing less than equal or greater value in return for green fees. As founder of Empire Golf, Eric Bergstol has long understood what drives consumer satisfaction.

“Our goal has always been to create quality golf courses that are interesting and distinct,” says the 47-year-old resident of Rockland County, N.Y.

The Bergstol approach first started with a private club he initiated called Minisceongo Golf Club in Pomona, N.Y. Bergstol then built a range of upscale facili-

ties straddling the New York and New Jersey markets. Given the changing dynamics of the golf market, Bergstol initiated an idea that has been carried forward in other markets but not in the New York metro region — providing a private club membership at not one but six premier golf facilities through a program called Club Max.

“We take pride in creating quality, nationally recognized golf courses in this region, and we believe Club Max will represent the ultimate club membership and be of great value,” Bergstol says.

A refundable initiation deposit ranges from \$12,500 to \$25,000. Yearly dues range from \$5,200 to \$6,200. In addition, Bergstol has provided Club Max members with 50-percent-off discounts from green fees dur-

ing nonpeak periods for other clubs in his portfolio. This bonus program includes renowned public courses in the Garden State, such as Twisted Dune near Atlantic City and Pine Hill. There is also a Florida course option in the greater West Palm Beach area.

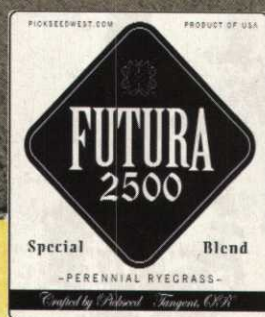
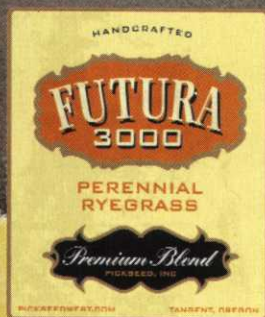
“We expect Club Max to appeal to a broader range of golfers than a stand-alone private membership,” Bergstol says. A sixth course, the new Hollow Brook Golf Club in Westchester County, will join the Club Max portfolio when it opens in the spring.

Less is more

A fine example of the fun and value strategy is the Rustic Canyon Golf Course in Moorpark, Calif. Building the fun aspect is central to understanding the fanfare

Continued on page 56

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Bill Fountain

The co-owner of Majestic at Lake Walden is never short on promotional ideas to drive business

Bill Fountain is co-owner of the Majestic at Lake

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Matthews design in Hart-

land, Mich. In a

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takes more

than scenic lakeside vistas

and a first-class layout to en-

terce players to his 27-hole

facility an hour northwest of

Detroit. His promotional ideas have benefited and delighted his partners, players and community.

Among the more intriguing events hosted along the shores of Lake Walden:

■ A golf ball drop for a local girl battling cancer — The club sold 1,000 golf

balls at \$25 each. All 1,000 tickets sold in about two weeks. Each ball was marked with a number

between one and 1,000 with a corresponding ticket displaying the purchaser's name. While more than 200 people looked on, a helicopter flew over the practice range and dropped the balls from a height of 300 feet to a target green. The five closest balls to the pin won \$1,000 apiece. The young girl drove out to the green and helped decide the winners before climbing aboard the helicopter for a ride over her house.

"It was a truly special day," Fountain says. "The generosity displayed at that

event still amazes me."

■ Turkey Day — The Sunday before Thanksgiving the past several years, anyone bringing a frozen turkey weighing 20 pounds or more to the course receives 18 holes of golf and a cart. The turkeys are donated to a local food bank. Fountain has contacted a number of local courses about expanding the event to their facilities as well.

■ Banana Day — The entire staff dresses in yellow and gives out bananas to guests.

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GOING BANANAS: One of Fountain's wacky promotions is Banana Day.