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RAIN BIRD

Speaking Naturally

Continued from page 30

get permits, the requirements put on you are so stringent that you have to have some competencies already in place."

Davies expects his superintendents to perform their environmental duties like other chores. He makes these responsibilities part of their performance evaluations.

Davies, who became a partner with CourseCo in 2001, spends many of his workdays driving around northern California to visit the courses' superintendents. His Hyundai Sonata has about 181,000 miles on it, and it's less than four years old. Davies also spends more time in the air these days. CourseCo recently struck deals to manage two more facilities — in Corona, Calif., and in Pullman, Wash. — and Davies has been flying to those locations often for planning meetings. The company plans more growth in 2007.

In good company

The superintendents who work under Davies share his environmental vision. Davies also seeks to hire superintendents he feels are good fits at particular courses. "Their strengths match up to the agronomic and management challenges posed by the golf courses," he says.

Davies believed certified superintendent Gary Ingram was a natural fit at the City of Oakland-owned Metropolitan Golf

Links because of Ingram's proficiency to tend turf grown on an inferior site, a former industrial garbage dump topped with salty soil that was dredged from the nearby Oakland bay's shipping channel. Davies also believed the gregarious Ingram was the perfect person to head the course's Oakland Turfgrass Education Initiative, a community service program for inner-city kids created to educate them about turfgrass management in the hope they will consider the field as a career someday.

Ingram says he's impressed with CourseCo because the company is not solely concerned with making money. CourseCo helps its clients manage their courses economically and environmentally. Ingram believes the two form a synergy. For instance, CourseCo's integrated pest-management program centers around an economic threshold, Ingram says.

"Economic threshold is the decision-making process we use to determine how bad we should let a problem get before we do something about it," Ingram adds.

If a turf disease gets so bad that it affects the playability of a few greens, then Ingram says he would take action. But Ingram stresses he would only spray the diseased greens. "There's no reason to spray all the greens," he adds. "We're not going to waste money or do things frivolously."

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Gary Ingram is one of several CourseCo superintendents who shares Davies' environmental vision.

PHOTO BY LARRY AYUWAPD

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Speaking Naturally

Signs on golf courses can educate golfers about environmental issues.



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Alan Andreasen, the certified superintendent of Green River Golf Club, the new CourseCo operation in Corona, has grasped the company's environmental strategy. But it took some prodding from Davies. When Davies hired Andreasen in 2001 to oversee Los Lagos Golf Course and Rancho del Pueblo Golf Course and Driving Range in San Jose, he had to convince him to pursue the Certified Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary designation at Los Lagos. Andreasen didn't like the formality of the process, and he figured he was an environmentally responsible superintendent anyway. But Andreasen eventually fulfilled Davies' request, and Los Lagos became a Fully Certified Cooperative Sanctuary in 2003.

"Part of our goal is to demonstrate that golf is not just for recreational value, but that it can exist in harmony with the environment and even enhance it," Andreasen says.

Earlier this year Andreasen was named the overall winner of the 2005 Golf Course Superintendents Association of America/Golf Digest Environmental Leaders in Golf Awards. It's one of the industry's top awards for environmental leadership.

The nature-loving Tim Powers, the certified superintendent at Crystal Springs Golf Course, is the perfect fit for his job. Powers, who joined Crystal Springs in 2001, beams when he talks about the wildlife he sees on the course, such as feeding fawns and soaring red-tailed hawks.

Because of the course's environmental sensitivity, the word is "spare" to describe fertilizer and pesticide use on the course.

"We're not going to have perfect con-

ditions here like at other golf courses," Powers says, although he recently received a Turfgrass Excellence Award from the Northern California Golf Course Superintendents Association.

Adam Schauer, superintendent of CourseCo's Deep Cliff Golf Course in Cupertino, Calif., also strives to meet the company's environmental goals. Schauer says golf courses in general are over-maintaining turf. He's glad not to be doing that at Deep Cliff. "If we have some weeds or disease, I don't get too worried about them until they get to be problems," he says.

They say imitation is the greatest form of flattery. If that's the case, Davies should be content in the direction he's taking CourseCo. The USGA's Gross says he's noticed other management companies are taking CourseCo's lead, right down to aligning with Audubon International.

"[They realize] it not only makes good environmental practice, but it makes good business practice," Gross says.

Interestingly, Davies once worked for a private country club whose members didn't want him wasting time performing environmental duties on the golf course.

"They just wanted fast greens," Davies says. "If they thought I was spending time on the birds and the bees and the flowers, they wouldn't have appreciated it very much."

But Davies' peers appreciate his time spent tending to nature. He has proved that golf courses can be friends, not foes, to the environment, and his efforts have benefitted the entire industry.

And Davies loves to talk about it. Just ask him his opinion. ■



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Burgeoning Biofungicides

Some products could prove to be valuable preventives

BY ANTHONY PIOPPI
Contributing Editor

The superintendents' arsenal in the ongoing war against turf fungus continues to shrink because of federal regulations of synthetic pesticides. But a new generation of biofungicides could supply reinforcements.

Companies have been seeking research from a number of universities for at least five years to show biofungicides are a formidable opponent to a variety of turf diseases.

University researchers report that biofungicides are an effective way to reduce synthetic fungicide use in some cases, but some have proven impotent against existing diseases.

Bruce Clarke, director of turfgrass science at Rutgers University, said he and others in his department have been testing biofungicides for a number of years on diseases of cool-season grasses, including brown patch. He said research shows they are ineffective on their own or in a curative role. But when used preventively, they show the ability to hold off fungus when tank mixed with the most popular synthetic fungicides and slightly less effective when used in rotation with synthetic fungicide applications. He said when biofungicides

are used as part of a program and sprayed preventively, synthetic fungicide use can be reduced anywhere from 25 to 50 percent.

"As a group they would allow people to use reduced rates of synthetic fertilizers and still get control. It has to be applied prior to disease outbreak," Clarke said. "Yes, they can reduce disease pressure alone, but under high pressure, the best use is when tank mixed. They are not effective on a curable basis."

Lane Tredway, an assistant professor of plant pathology and an extension specialist in the department of plant pathology at North Carolina State University, conducted studies testing the effectiveness of a biofungicide in holding off dollar spot on SR 1119 creeping bentgrass.

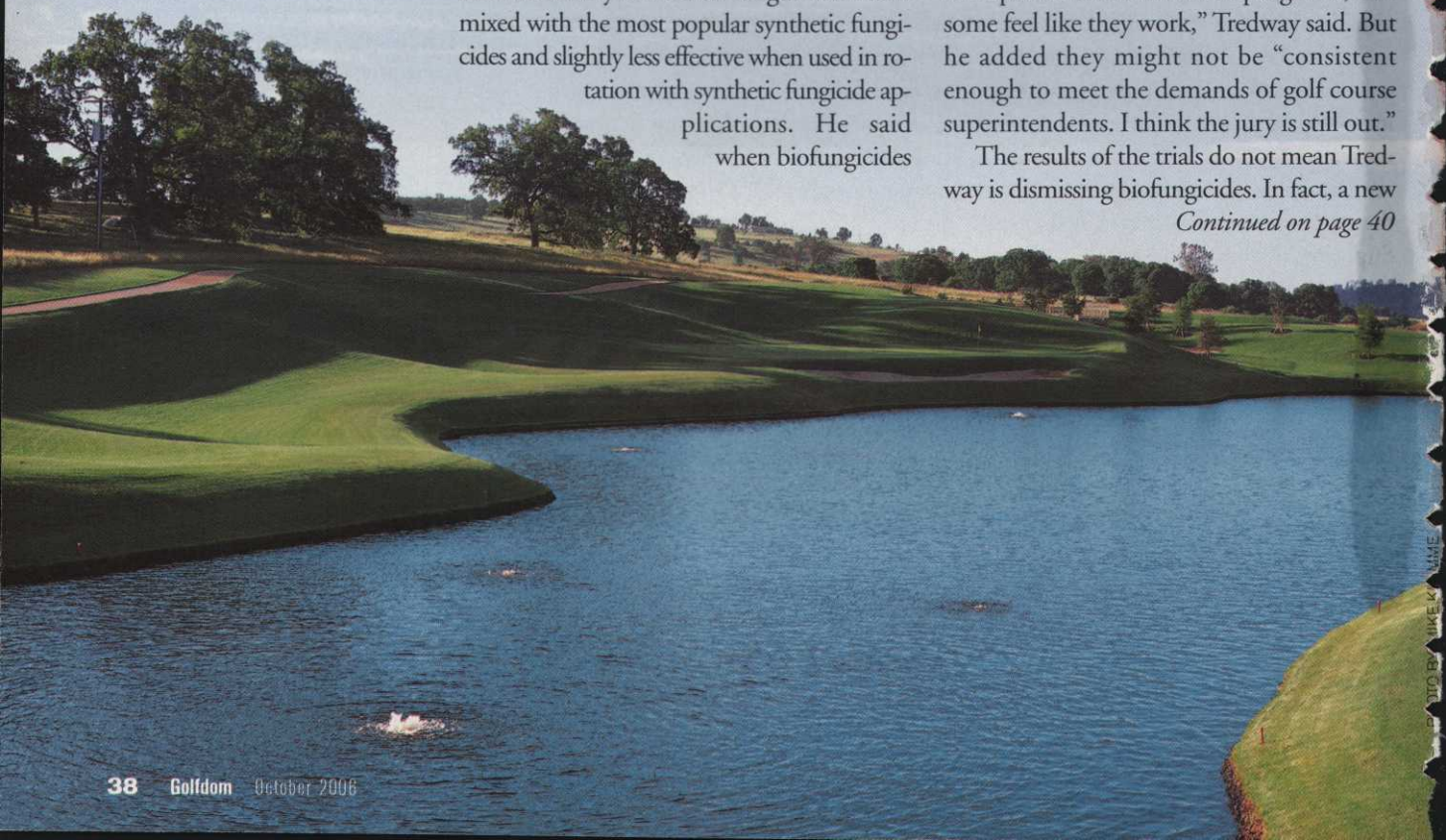
"It's not something we're comfortable recommending yet (to treat dollar spot)," he said.

However, some turf managers have found biofungicides helpful.

"I know many superintendents chose to incorporate them into their programs, and some feel like they work," Tredway said. But he added they might not be "consistent enough to meet the demands of golf course superintendents. I think the jury is still out."

The results of the trials do not mean Tredway is dismissing biofungicides. In fact, a new

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Burgeoning Biofungicides

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round of tests are being conducted after it was found that although it didn't hold off dollar spot, AgraQuest's Rhapsody biofungicide appeared to increase the overall health of the turf.

"I do believe there is a place for these products," Tredway said.

At Mississippi State University, Maria Tomaso-Peterson, assistant research professor in the plant pathology department, has been testing a number of nonsynthetic-based pesticides, including EcoGuard, a bacterium; ZeroTol, a fungicide/bactericide/viricide; and Turf Shield, a biological.

"What we see is they are best used preventively," echoes Tomaso-Peterson. "Once disease pressure gets high, they are not as effective."

Even with nonsynthetic-based products showing promise, Tomaso-Peterson said many superintendents are understandably hesitant to try them because of a history of biological products that failed.

"Biologicals have so many snake oil connotations to them," she said.

That is why Tomaso-Person said getting the information out to superintendents and making sure they know how to properly use the legitimate products are vital steps to the success of biologicals.

"We have to educate the users on how to incorporate them



Biofungicide use would reduce rates of synthetic fungicide.

BRUCE CLARKE, RUTGERS UNIVERSITY

into conventional spray programs," she said. "The biggest thing is they have to be used properly."

Smashing stereotypes

AgraQuest, the maker of Rhapsody, was founded in 1995 with the specific goal of creating nonsynthetic pesticides. ROOTS Plant Care Group, an offshoot of Novozymes Biologicals, is the maker of EcoGuard. Novozymes was a well-established "white" biotech company that produced microbial-based formulas for the septic and cleaning industries. It also produced the microbial formula that was used to degrade and breakup the Exxon Valdez oil spill.

The company hired Dave Drahos, who had worked developing Roundup for Monsanto, to spearhead its biofungicide research. Representatives from both companies said the turf indus-

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