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Makes Sens-ors

Continued from page 50

and manufacturer of soil sensors for the agriculture industry, is Advanced Soil Technology based in King of Prussia, Pa., and Minneapolis-based Toro, which purchased Turf Guard wireless technology in December. Turf Guard will remain based in California.

While the industry might be small and in its infancy, it is not without acrimony — AST has sued Toro for theft of intellectual property and patent infringement, to which Toro responded by denying the accusations and countersuing.

The technology works this way: sensors, about 1-foot long, are placed somewhere between 2 inches to 4 inches underground on various areas of the golf course to measure soil

moisture, temperature and salinity at a variety of levels.

The information is relayed back to a base unit via repeaters mounted on irrigation control boxes, allowing the superintendent to monitor each unit and the three categories of information it is sending back.

Since each sensor has multiple nodes, there is a multitude of information. The AST and Toro models are wireless and battery-powered and, therefore, can be repositioned. The Golflix model is wired into an irrigation pedestal and AC-powered.

Perhaps fewer than 100 courses around the country use sensor technology, but the superintendents at those courses say the information they are

Continued on page 54

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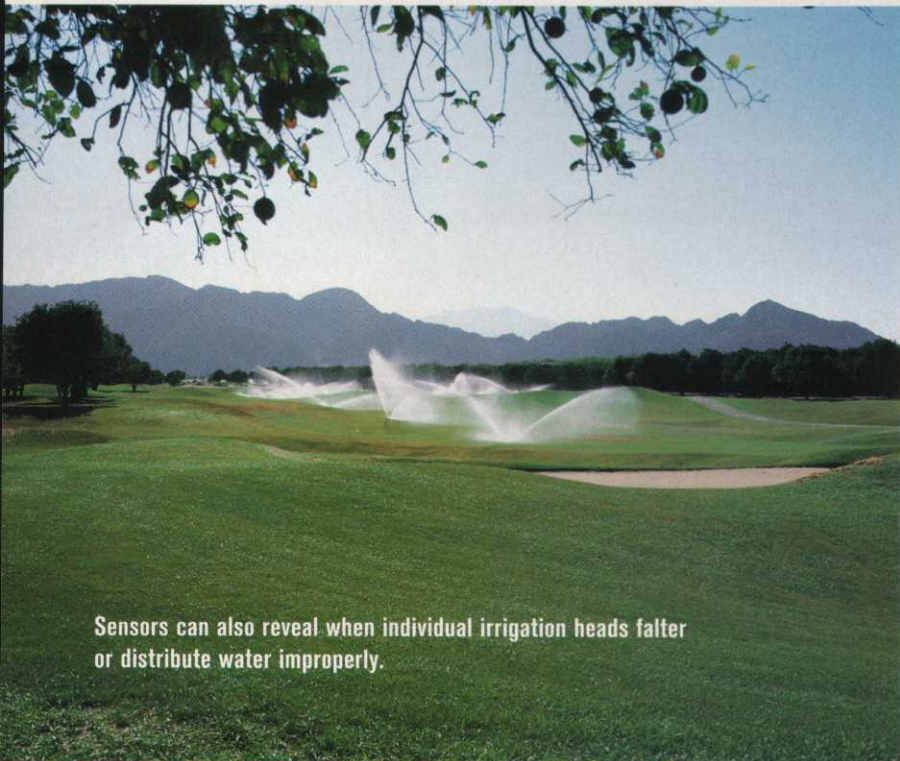
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Makes Sens-ors



Sensors can also reveal when individual irrigation heads falter or distribute water improperly.

Continued from page 52

getting has led to substantial water savings and healthier turf.

David Major, the certified superintendent at Shady Canyon Golf Club in Irvine, Calif., has been using soil sensors for almost three years, acting as a test site for Turf Guard products (now Toro). The Tom Fazio-design, which sees more than 30,000 rounds a year, is built on poorly draining soil and is irrigated with effluent water.

“That’s our biggest challenge in Southern California — reclaimed water and tight soil,” Major says.

He has probes, 90 in all, placed in greens, tees and landing areas as well as a few unexpected locations. Major uses one probe to monitor the soil around a newly planted palm tree, and another floats in a holding pond to monitor water quality.

At the six-course Desert Mountain Golf Club near Scottsdale, Ariz., director

Continued on page 58

PHOTO BY: MIKE KLEMM

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4. Damaged putting greens



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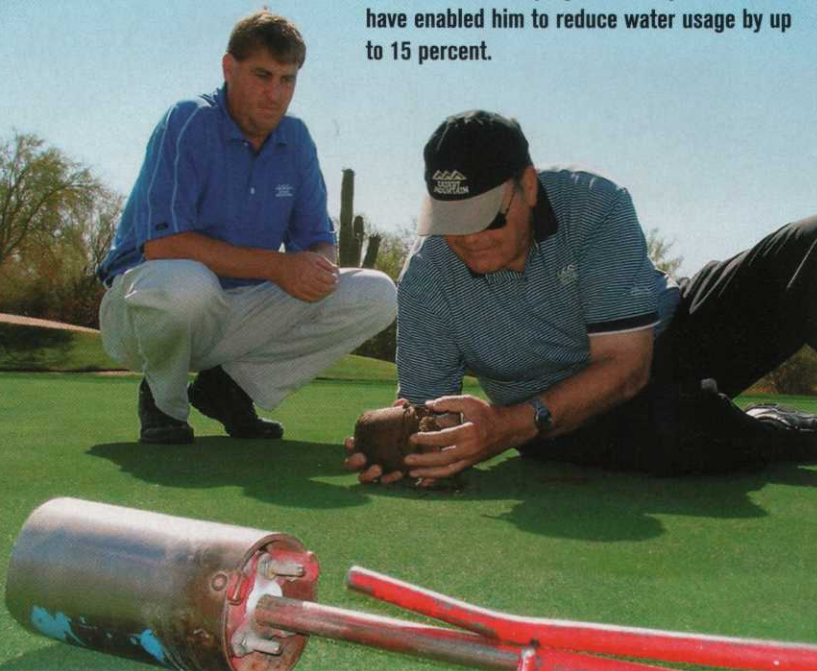
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Makes Sens-ors

Shawn Emerson, watching while Dr. James Beard examines a plug of turf, says sensors have enabled him to reduce water usage by up to 15 percent.



Continued from page 54

of agronomy Shawn Emerson has AST sensors in place on his Geronimo Course. Since installing them, he says he has cut down on his water usage by 10 percent to 15 percent. Much of the savings has come from his reduction in water used for flushing of greens.

According to Emerson, because of the poor quality of his effluent, flushing greens to keep salts and other impurities from building up is vitally important for healthy turf.

Prior to the sensors, Emerson made sure to err on the side of too much water rather than too little when flushing his greens. The sensors, he says, not only allow him to monitor the accumulation of salt and let him know when to flush greens, but also let him know when the salt level has been reduced enough for him to stop the process.

Continued on page 61

PHOTO BY: STUART BUCK

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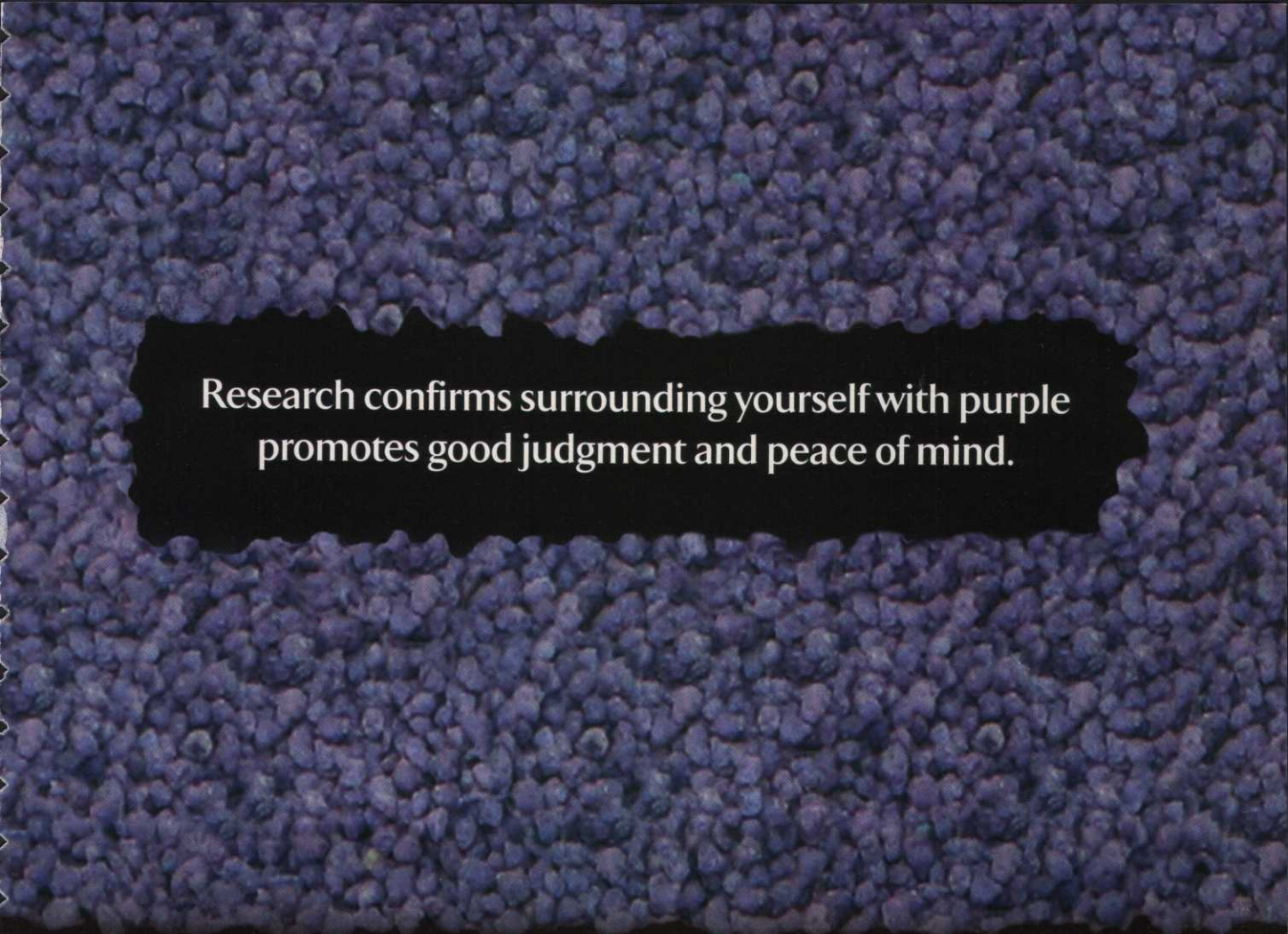
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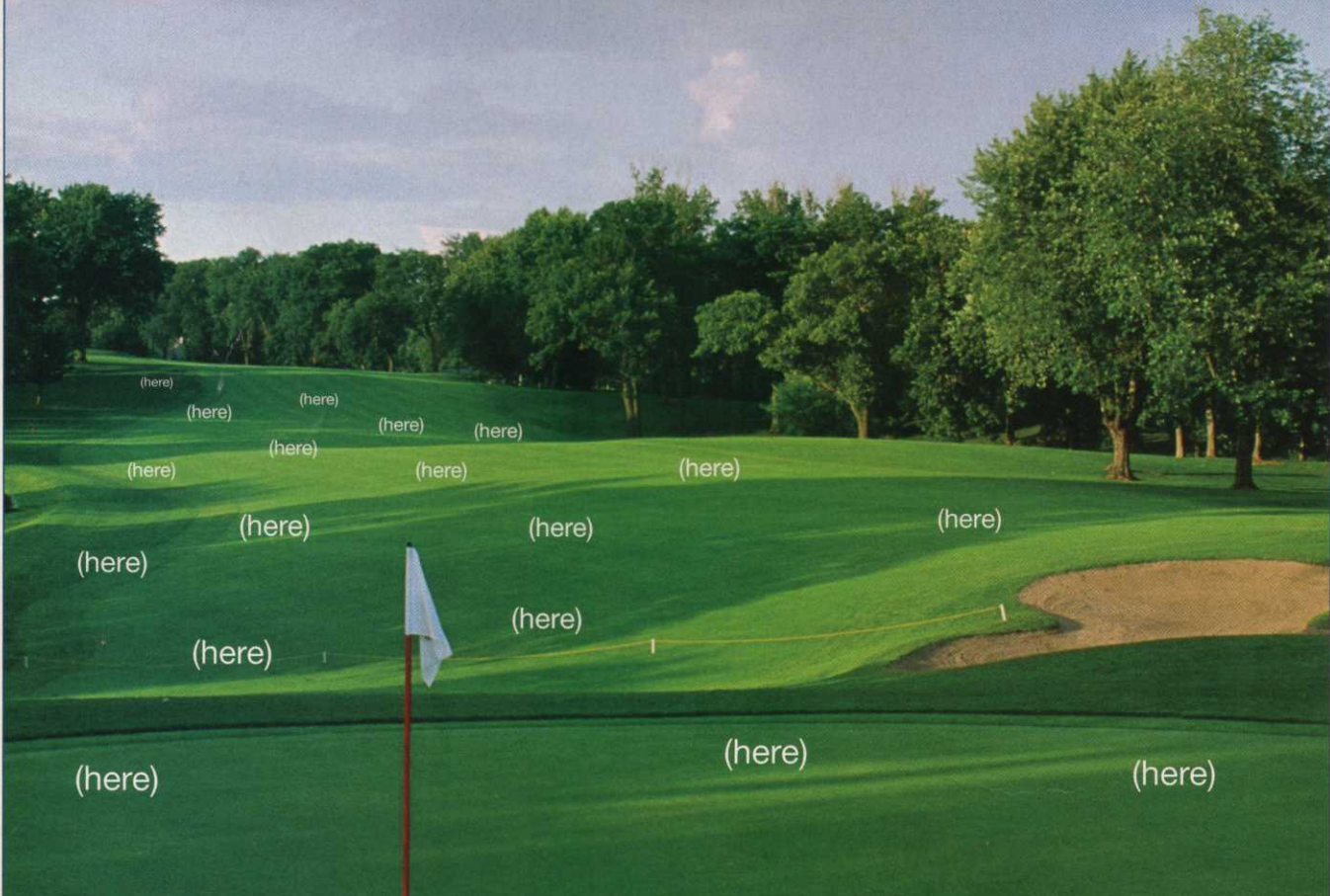
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