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Off The Fringe

Business briefs

Golf Course Supply Falls For Second Straight Year

For the second year in a row, the National Golf Foundation has reported that net golf course openings — the combination of course openings minus course closures — were in the red in 2007. NGF has identified 113 golf courses, in 18-hole equivalents, that opened for business in the United States in 2007. During the same period, there were 121.5 golf course closures, resulting 8.5 fewer courses. NGF reported minus 26.5 net golf course openings in 2006, the first time the statistic was in the red in 60 years.

Joe Beditz, president and CEO of the NGF, recently told *Golfdom* he doesn't view the negative numbers as a negative situation. Beditz and others in the golf industry view waning supply as a much-needed correction in an industry that was overbuilt in the 1990s and early 2000s. It is basic economics — the supply of golf courses has exceeded demand.

"Over the last 15 years, the golf course industry has had more than 4,500 openings," Beditz says. "So if we're down a little against 4,500 up, this is not a major correction. This is like the Dow going to 18,000 and then dropping back to 17,500."

Looking at the past five years combined, the NGF reports there have been 678.5 openings vs. 491.5 closures for a net positive of 187 courses, or a modest 37.4 per year. That equates to less than three-tenths of a percent of total supply being added per year, and the overall number of golf courses is virtually unchanged from five years ago.

Briefs continue on page 18



International Irrigation Show Asks Scary Question

By Dan Jacobs

It's a question that golf superintendents don't want to ask. But if drought conditions in the Southeast persist or spread to other regions, what will they do when watering limits become outright bans and water is restricted for anything other than human consumption?

It's a question that wasn't asked too loudly at the International Irrigation (IA) Show in San Diego in December, but it was asked.

And it was answered.

"Bankruptcy is a pretty common word in Georgia business right now," said Andrew K. Smith, external affairs director for the Irrigation Association. "They weren't ready up front. When you start to deal with these things after the fact, you've got a problem."

What it boils down to, Smith continues, is that organizations, even those in non-drought areas (and maybe especially those) need to conserve water when they have it. Food, drinking and sanitation will always come first. And without water, land-

scaping and irrigation in particular will be "dead in the water."

That concern became the impetus for IA's new vision, mission and unifying statements. The statements and the plan to implement them were put together earlier last year and presented to the IA membership at the meeting.

Most companies and organizations have a vision and a mission statement — it's almost a requirement of doing business. The IA's entries for each of these statements are straightforward enough: The vision — "Be the recognized authority on irrigation," and the mission statement — "Promote efficient irrigation." But it's the unifying statement that separates the IA from other organizations.

The IA has more than 1,700 members and comprises several groups each with its own agenda, and they could not always agree on goals for the organization. They settled, instead, on a unifying statement — "Ensure water is available for irrigation for future generations." ■

Jacobs is managing editor of Golfdom's sister publication, Landscape Management.

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Off The Fringe

Active Ingredients and the Environment

DOW'S URBANOWSKI DISCUSSES ROLE ENVIRONMENT PLAYS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF NEW TECHNOLOGY



Mark Urbanowski

"GOLF AND THE ENVIRONMENT." You definitely hear those two subjects together in the same sentence more today than you did 20 years ago. And you'll continue to hear them even more in coming years. Pesticide manufacturers and marketers are obviously playing close attention to the latest environmental rules and regulations. *Golfdom* Editor in Chief Larry Aylward recently spent time with Mark Urbanowski, the senior marketing specialist for turf and ornamental and technical products at Dow AgroSciences, and discussed the role the environment plays in the development of new active ingredients in the turfgrass industry. Dow AgroSciences recently announced the registration of penoxsulam, which was accepted for review and registration and the Environmental Protection Agency's Reduced Risk Pesticide Initiative.

What does it take for a company to bring a new active ingredient to market under the Reduced Risk Pesticide Initiative? And what would be the motivation for a company like Dow AgroSciences to do so?

We work a lot on bringing new solutions to the marketplaces we participate in. The Reduced Risk Pesticide Initiative was issued by the EPA as a challenge to manufacturers to come up with new solutions that might offer lower risk offerings. We have taken that on as part of our challenge at Dow AgroSciences.

A buzz phrase these days when one is talking about pesticides is "low use rates." How vital are low use-rate pesticides to people who work in the golf industry?

Low use rates tend to equate to lower-sensitive or safer products. But even products that have higher use rates can offer more safety than a low-use-rate product. Low use rate offers us the ability to package and ship products in much smaller containers. By lowering costs throughout the channel, it actually will make a more economical product for the end-user.

Dow AgroSciences recently introduced its EcoZome technology, a formulation system consisting of very small droplets of active ingredient dispersed in water and stabilized by a lamellar liquid crystal coating. This alternative formulation is environmentally friendly in that it reduces the use of aromatic solvents. I understand the company is willing to license this technology to other pesticide manufacturers. What environmental

Quotable

"It's still a bloody five-hour round. An outing on a golf course should not be an all-day affair."

— Jeff Shelley, editorial director for *Cybergolf* and *Golfconstructionnews.com*, on golf's time problem.

"That's unbelievable. Who comes out here and kills the state bird? Only me."

— Actor Rob Lowe, golfing at Glen Oaks Country Club in West Des Moines, Iowa, after striking a goldfinch in mid-flight with his approach shot to the fourth hole. (*Parade Magazine*)

"I started working on a golf course when I was about 12 or 13. I don't think I was even old enough to have a work permit."

— Allan Clemans, executive director of the Oregon Golf Course Superintendents Association.

impact could the EcoZome technology have on the golf industry?

The EcoZome technology reduces many of the solvents that can cause higher caution, warning or danger risk phrasing because it replaces those solvents with water. We think this new technology will lend itself well, not only to our active ingredients but to other active ingredients, and that's the purpose of offering it to other companies.

Does it bother you that there are politicians who want to get rid of pesticides, yet these pesticides have been proved safe by those politicians' peers who are the people making up the Environmental Protection Agency?

We find that based on education, as people understand what the EPA stands for and what an EPA registration stands for, they begin to understand the registration process. We're required to do some 200-plus tests. It can take eight to 10 years worth of work and more than \$200 million in researching every compound we sell in the marketplace. As politicians get more education on what it takes to bring a product to market, they tend to understand that and are a little more accepting of what our products bring to the market. ■

To listen to a short podcast of a similar interview with Urbanowski, visit www.golfdom.com/podcasts.



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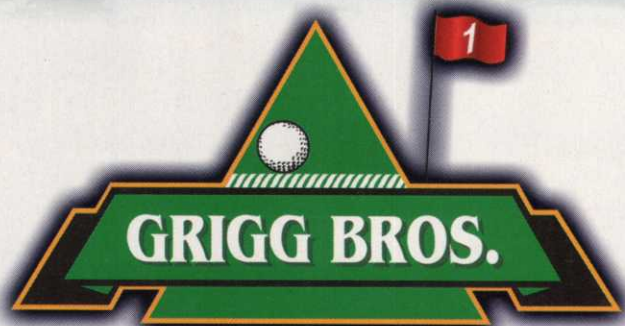
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Hole of the

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Month

Hole Stats

Distance: 601 yards

Par 5

The Turf

Green: A1 and A4 Bentgrass

Fairway: Pencross/Pennway Bentgrass

Certified superintendent Mark Wilson is familiar with the pressure of preparing his course to meet the PGA's high standards. After all, the PGA owns it. At the Valhalla Golf Club in Louisville, Ky., Wilson and his crew maintain 530 rolling acres to strict, top-tier playing conditions.

In September, Wilson will be in the spotlight as host of the 2008 Ryder Cup and its 45,000 enthusiastic spectators. As any superintendent who's hosted a major tournament

knows, these multi-million-dollar events challenge every aspect of the course, from creating hospitality tent cities on the grounds to making holes more challenging.

Last year, Valhalla transformed its par-five seventh hole from a dry quarry into a flowing pond, which further challenged golfers when trying to reach the green.

"We have three, 1,600-gallon-per-minute pumps that circulate water up to the green and back," Wilson said.

The hole's dual fairways confront players with a risk-reward decision. Gamblers can hit to the left, but this shorter route may leave them scrambling for par because of its ball-catching rough. Cautious players will take the longer right fairway, but need more time to reach the elevated green.

The seventh hole makeover has not been Wilson's only challenge.

"For us, dollar spot is the most irritating disease," Wilson said. "It's a constant threat during growing season."

To combat dollar spot, Wilson applies Curalan® fungicide.

"I've been a super for 28 years and it just works," Wilson said. "Sometimes I'll even use it in the roughs. It's a good spray for the money."

Wilson balances his own risk-reward when it comes to using fungicides, incorporating frequent applications at low rates, following the product labeling.

To see past Holes of the Month, download a desktop image and more, visit www.betterturf.com.

Curalan fungicide offers economical control of a wide range of key turf diseases. For more information, contact your distributor or BASF at www.betterturf.com.



GOLFDOM'S HOLE OF THE MONTH IS MADE POSSIBLE BY:

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Off The Fringe

Business briefs

Briefs continued from page 12

Deere, LESCO Complete Merger

Almost a year after it was announced, the merger between John Deere and LESCO has been completed.

"We are excited our plans have come to fruition, and we now have a more robust, in-house offering for golf industry professionals," said Gregg Breningmeyer, director of sales and marketing for John Deere Golf, in a press release.

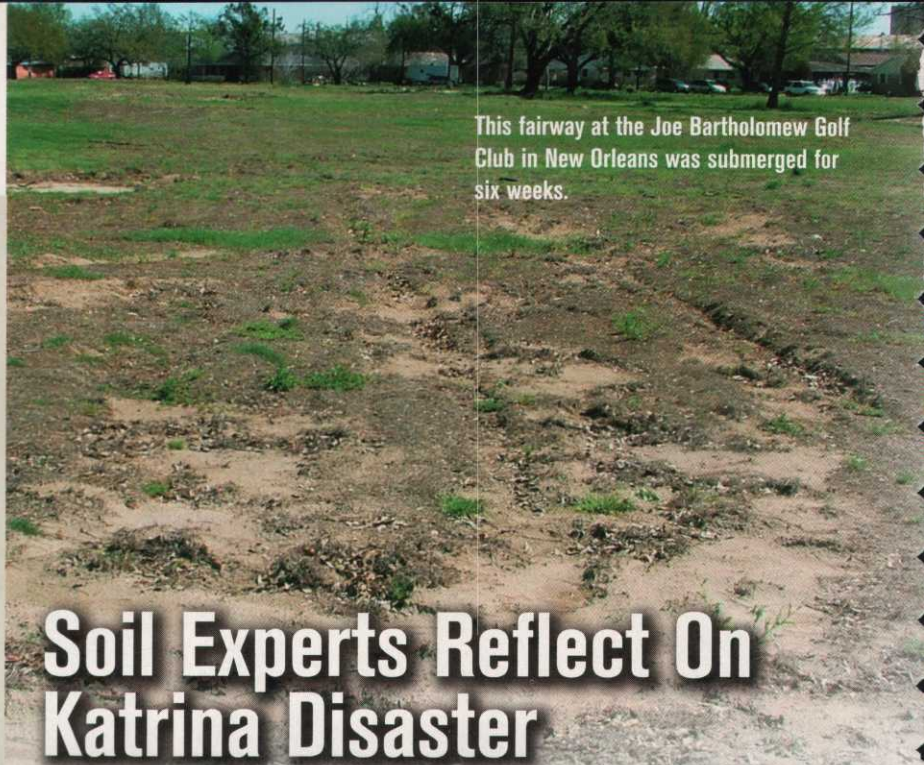
With the merger, John Deere Golf has added about 150 agronomic experts to its sales and support organization, including golf sales representatives and the Stores-on-Wheels (which will be co-branded John Deere and LESCO in the near future). A John Deere spokesperson said there were no layoffs among LESCO's golf sales reps and Stores-on-Wheels employees, and the goal is to grow the business.

"We've looked at where additional support is needed, and we've put in place a two-year plan to reach out to many customers who've previously not had access to our agronomic products," Breningmeyer said.

In 2008 John Deere plans to add resources in several underserved regions of the country, Breningmeyer said.

TyraTech, Arysta Team Up

TyraTech, which manufactures natural pesticide products, announced it has achieved development and financial milestones from Arysta LifeScience as part of its 2006 exclusive global licensing and co-development agreement to manufacture and market a number of insecticide products. TyraTech develops proprietary compounds that target receptors found on insects and other invertebrates, but are not found on humans or animals. These compounds, called TyraTech Naturals, are derived from plants and can kill insects with the potency of chemical pesticides but without the same toxicity. The partnership with Arysta is to develop products based on the TyraTech compounds for the control of insects. The partnership has different progressive development stages, which result in milestone payments to TyraTech when reached. ■



This fairway at the Joe Bartholomew Golf Club in New Orleans was submerged for six weeks.

Soil Experts Reflect On Katrina Disaster

By Curt Harler

Two years after Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans and the Gulf Coast, soil scientists and conservation leaders swapped ideas and lessons learned from the disaster during the International Annual Meetings of the American Society of Agronomy (ASA), Crop Science Society of America (CSSA) and Soil Science Society of America (SSSA) held recently in New Orleans.

"Hurricane Katrina provided the scientific community with an unparalleled opportunity to guide both ecosystem restoration and the design of measures to protect lives and properties from violent natural events," said Charles Groat, founding director of the public policy center at The University of Texas at Austin.

William Jenkins, president emeritus at Louisiana State University System, said rapid degradation of the Mississippi River delta and climate change has placed the physical and socioeconomic sustainability of coastal Louisiana in doubt.

"We must pursue aggressive coastal restoration or face the daunting implications of inaction," he added.

The seminar went well beyond golf to include issues of crop and

fiber production and even human life. Yet there could well be positive outcomes for both superintendents and other turf managers.

Speakers from the U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service noted the importance of generating interpretative maps with soil suitability data and training response personnel to properly interpret soil information related to the disaster.

Steven Hamburg, associate professor of environmental studies at Brown University, discussed the impact of a storm's frequency and intensity on ecosystem resistance and resilience.

Chris Renschler, associate professor of geography at the University of Buffalo, N.Y., addressed the potential of using integrated natural resources management as a tool for managing natural disasters.

"Field studies, remote sensing, geographic information systems and process-based environmental models are increasingly used in combination to support decision- and policy-making in natural resources or natural hazards management," he said. "Communication is key among all of these areas." ■

Harler is managing editor of *Turfgrass Trends*.

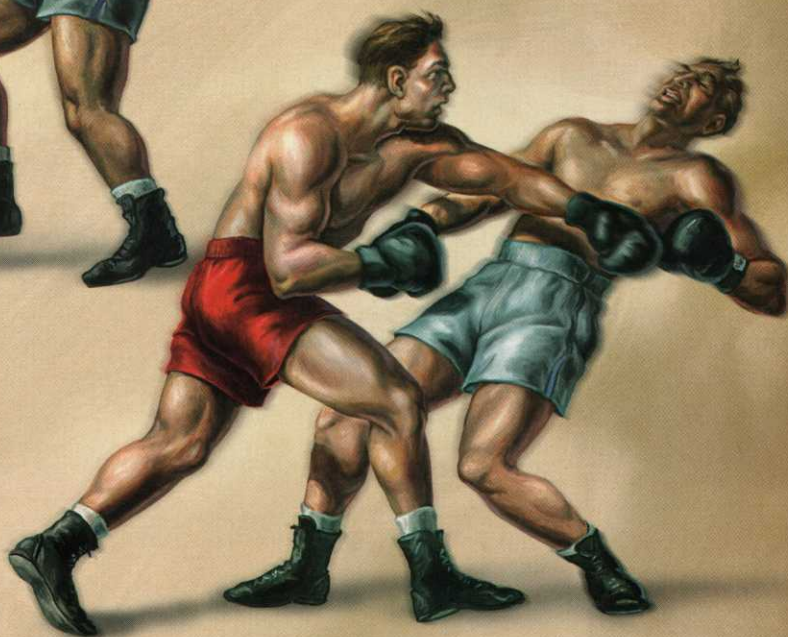
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■ OPINION

It's been 10 years since I hung up my superintendent's hat and began a new career in association management. In some ways not much has changed.

I'm still an advocate for healthy turf, but government regulations on chemicals and water drastically change the way superintendents conduct their business.

But change is inevitable, and how we handle it measures our success. Change must also be embraced by the rest of the golf industry, especially by the golfers who expect so much and often don't give much back to the game itself.

Our volunteer superintendent members and association executives from all levels engage in the endless debates with regulators, politicians and the media on water restrictions, fertilizer bans and pesticide cancellations, and we need help.

It amazes me that golf course superintendents have inherited the mantle of responsibility to fight for and preserve all the resources a golf course needs to remain competitive and profitable in today's tight market.

We raise our voices, serve on task forces and attend commission and council meetings. Where are the golf course architects, owners, builders, general managers and influential golfers, including the superstars? We appreciate the few that have taken responsibility for the growth and preservation of the game, but not very many have stepped up.

It is ironic that superintendents, whose job security is often the most fragile, are the ones charged with defending and negotiating water-use permits and initiating environmental stewardship programs. Is it only the superintendents who see the changing world in which we live?

Doing more with less and learning to live with occasional brown patches in the deep rough and yellowing fairway mounds is going to be a way of life during prolonged droughts and fewer pest-control products, which brings me to turfgrass research.

The advances in turfgrass management are mainly the result of research across the whole industry, including broad technical advancements in equipment and products from the R&D labs of large companies. But the successful local turf

Are Vendor-backed Studies Spoiled?

BY JOEL JACKSON



ACADEMIC RESEARCH
WOULD HAVE MORE
VALIDITY IF IT WAS
FUNDED BY WORKING
PROFESSIONALS LIKE
YOU AND ME

management advancements come from your state university turf science programs. They are well-suited to test and evaluate the best ways to grow and manage the typical turf varieties under your regional conditions.

How is this research funded? In many cases the researchers must seek funding from product manufacturers. State budgets don't provide much direct money for applied problem-solving research, much less long-range basic research. And university presidents aren't too keen on spending very much on turfgrass either.

The problem with companies funding research, especially in the use of pesticides or even water use, is that the activists then claim the results are slanted in favor of the donor (even though they can't seem to see that the same rigor should apply in their own studies).

The point is that golfers must give funds for golf course turfgrass and environmental research. If every golfer annually donated 25 cents a round and every golf club budgeted a modest line item of at least \$500, our universities would have significant funding to conduct important studies that would benefit not only the enjoyment of the game but would also help protect the environment.

We must be ready to accept the results of the research and make adjustments to our expectations of what a golf course should look like in the future. Color should become of secondary importance to playability. Through well-funded peer-reviewed research, golf courses might be able to have both, but more important is that they be considered community assets instead of targets for skeptics.

Certified superintendent Joel Jackson is executive director of the Florida GCSA.