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Golfdom

JULY 2008 • VOLUME 64 • NO. 7

It's a Bear Market

The golf industry battles vicious price hikes and fierce economic pressures, but relief could be in sight.

BY DAVID FRABOTTA

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Turfgrass Trends

This month, *Golfdom's* practical research digest for turf managers discusses the hunting billbug, which has become an emerging pest in warm-season turfgrasses. Plus, transgenic technology transcends turfgrass. See pages 49-60.

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 Read this story only at www.golfdom.com/onlineexclusive.com:

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By Larry Aylward



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By Geoff Shackelford

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EDITORIAL STAFF

Larry Aylward EDITOR IN CHIEF 216-706-3737 laylward@questex.com
David Frabotta SENIOR EDITOR 216-706-3758 dfrabotta@questex.com
Kristen Morabito ART DIRECTOR 216-706-3776 kmorabito@questex.com
Geoff Shackelford CONTRIBUTING EDITOR 310-451-5877 geoffshackelford@aol.com
Joel Jackson CONTRIBUTING EDITOR 407-248-1971 figm@aol.com
Anthony Pioppi CONTRIBUTING EDITOR 860-344-8895 apioppi@earthlink.net
Mark Luce CONTRIBUTING EDITOR 816-943-1923 mLuce@sbcglobal.net
Jim Black CONTRIBUTING EDITOR greenkeeperjim@yahoo.com
Ron Furlong CONTRIBUTING EDITOR rfurlong5@gmail.com
Karl Danneberger SCIENCE EDITOR danneberger.1@osu.edu
Mike Klemme PHOTO EDITOR 580-234-8284 mike@golffoto.com

CLEVELAND HEADQUARTERS

600 SUPERIOR AVENUE, EAST
SUITE 1100
CLEVELAND, OH 44114

OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF



American Society of Irrigation Consultants P.O. BOX 426
ROCHESTER, MA 02770; 508-763-8140; WWW.ASIC.ORG

GOLFDOM ADVISORY STAFF

Jim Barrett, ASIC
JAMES BARRETT ASSOCIATES

Pat Blum
COLONIAL ACRES GC

Joe Boe
WINDERMERE GC

Terry Bonar, CGCS
CANTERBURY GC

David Davis, FASIC
DAVID D. DAVIS ASSOCIATES

Tripp Davis
ASGCA ASSOCIATE

Shawn Emerson
DESERT MOUNTAIN CLUB

Christopher S. Gray Sr.
MARVEL GOLF CLUB

John Gurke, CGCS
AURORA CC

Steve Hammon
TRAVERSE CITY G&CC

Jim Husting, CGCS
WOODBIDGE G&CC

Jim Loke, CGCS
BENT CREEK CC

Walter Mattison
(IN MEMORY)

Steve Merkel, CGCS
LANDSCAPES UNLIMITED

Jim Nicol, CGCS
HAZELTINE NATIONAL GC

James Simonini
ROBERT TRENT JONES II

Brit Stenson
IMG GOLF COURSE DESIGN

Bobby Weed, ASGCA
WEED GOLF COURSE DESIGN

ASSOCIATIONS



American Society of Golf Course Architects 125 N. EXECUTIVE DR.,
SUITE 106, BROOKFIELD, WI 53005; 262-786-5960; WWW.ASGCA.ORG



Golf Course Superintendents Association of America
1421 RESEARCH PARK DR., LAWRENCE, KS 66049-3859; 800-472-7878;
WWW.GCSAA.ORG



Golf Course Builders Association of America
727 "O" STREET, LINCOLN, NE 68508; 402-476-4444;
WWW.GCBAA.ORG



National Golf Course Owners Association 291 SEVEN FARMS DRIVE,
SECOND FLOOR, CHARLESTON, SC 29492; 843-881-9956;
WWW.NGCOA.ORG



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Dogs and fireworks don't mix. Protect your dog during the July 4th holiday. The sound of fireworks can terrify your dog and he might run away, perhaps into traffic. A dog's hearing is more sensitive than a human's hearing. Explosive noises can damage your dog's hearing, or a falling firecracker can injure the dog.

Izzy. His owner is Dustin Peterson, the assistant superintendent at TPC Deere Run in Silvis, Ill. (Photo by: Dustin Peterson)



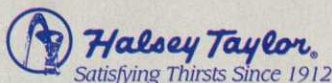
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BUSINESS STAFF

Patrick Roberts PUBLISHER 216-706-3736 proberts@questex.com
Petra Turko SALES ASSISTANT 216-706-3768 pturko@questex.com
Amber L. Terch PRODUCTION MANAGER 218-279-8835 aterch@questex.com
Rhonda Sande PRODUCTION DIRECTOR 218-279-8821 rsande@questex.com
Antoinette Sanchez-Perkins
 AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT 216-706-3750 asanchez-perkins@questex.com
Kevin Stoltman GROUP PUBLISHER kstoltman@questex.com
 216-706-3740 FAX: 216-706-3712

ADVERTISING STAFF

CLEVELAND HEADQUARTERS
 600 SUPERIOR AVENUE, EAST, SUITE 1100
 CLEVELAND, OH 44114
Gerry Bogdon NATIONAL ACCOUNT MANAGER gbogdon@questex.com
 407-302-2445 FAX: 407-322-1431
Dave Huisman REGIONAL SALES MANAGER dhuisman@questex.com
 732-493-4951 FAX: 732-493-4951
Annette McCoy ACCOUNT EXECUTIVE amccoy@questex.com
 216-706-3746 FAX: 216-706-3712
Kelli Velasquez ACCOUNT EXECUTIVE, CLASSIFIED kvelasquez@questex.com
 216-706-3767 FAX: 253-484-3080

MARKETING SERVICES

Reprints 800-290-5460 ext. 100 golfdom@reprintbuyer.com
Ilene Schwartz CIRC. LIST RENTAL 216-371-1667 ilene@krolldirect.com
Subscriber, Customer Service 847-763-9594 chatcher@questex.com
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CORPORATE



Kerry C. Gumas PRESIDENT & CEO
Tom Caridi EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT & CFO
Robert S. Ingraham EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT
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Jon Leibowitz EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT
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Seth Nichols VICE PRESIDENT, DIGITAL MEDIA
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Carl Wittenauer rose from his seat at the restaurant and headed to the men's room. He pushed open the "Gents" door, walked in and positioned himself in front of the urinal. Wittenauer stared straight ahead and scanned the USA Today sports section posted on the bathroom wall above the urinal. What a great idea, Wittenauer thought of the posting, to help a man pass the time while he goes about his business. Then the light flashed on in Wittenauer's noggin.

"I should do this at my golf course!" he said to himself.

Today, signs posted above the men's urinals at Brookside Golf & Country Club in Worthington, Ohio, where Wittenauer is the certified golf course superintendent, are all the rage and are used to inform golfers about various agronomic projects happening on the course. "It's a great way to communicate," Wittenauer says.

Ahh, "communicate." Sometimes that's a dreaded word in the golf course maintenance profession. Superintendents signed up to grow grass, not to explain to golfers why they must aerify and topdress. But what an important issue communication has become.

Many superintendents have learned that communicating with golfers about what they do and why they do it is one of the toughest parts of the job. Because when golfers get talking and complaining about something you're doing on the golf course that affects playability, there's nothing to spray on the turf to stop them. They'll keep grumbling, and soon they'll be questioning your decision-making skills. Then they'll question your credibility. And then they'll just plain bash you.

If you don't stop the madness, you'll be constantly defending yourself. And sooner or later something will give.

Wittenauer found himself in this predicament with his club's demanding 325 members. He realized he had to do a better job of communicating why he would make certain decisions, such as closing the greens on chilly spring mornings because of frost, which sometimes delayed tee times and infuriated golfers.

Wittenauer tried other communication methods, newsletters and e-mails among them,

Taking His Message to the Men's Room

BY LARRY AYLWARD



THE URINAL POSTING
HAS WORKED
SPLENDIDLY AND
MADE MEMBERS
MORE APPRECIATIVE
OF WITTENAUER'S
EFFORTS TO
COMMUNICATE

but nothing worked. But that night while standing in front of the urinal and reading the sports section, Wittenauer knew the urinal posting was a can't-miss communication tool. He knew the club's mostly male members might not read the club newsletter or e-mails updating them about course maintenance projects, but surely they would scan postings about such matters if they were placed in a strategic place.

And Wittenauer figured every man playing golf was bound to hit the head while at the club. And every man who did would position himself in front of the urinal and stare straight ahead until he was finished. That's just what men do — and they love to read while doing so.

Two years after debuting the urinal posting at Brookside, Wittenauer says it's working better than any other communication technique he has used in his 21-year career at the club. "Guys tell me, 'Hey, I read [such and such] above the urinal, and now I know what's going on,'" he says.

Wittenauer only posts memos that address important updates and hot issues so they carry a sense of urgency. He also says it's important to post memos that get to the point quickly. "They're not going to stand there forever," he adds.

The urinal posting has not only worked splendidly, it has made Brookside's members more appreciative of Wittenauer's efforts to communicate with them.

"Communication is key," Wittenauer says. "Members want to know where their money is going and what you're doing with their course."

Andrew Rankin was the first to patent the urinal in the United States in 1866. We'd like to thank him for his invention. We're not sure who invented the urinal posting, which became popular in the early 1990s, but a free round of golf at Brookside and a drink at the 19th hole on Wittenauer await the person who did.

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Off The Fringe

Business briefs

TOCA Honors Colorado Associations

The allied golf associations of Colorado have been selected as the recipient of the 2008 Turf & Ornamental Communicators Association (TOCA) Environmental Communicator of the Year award for their campaign on the self-funded study: *Golf in Colorado — An Independent Study of the Economic Impact and Environmental Aspects of Golf in Colorado*.

The allied associations were among the first groups to communicate the positive attributes of golf, according to TOCA. The award was sponsored by Project EverGreen, and the honor was presented at the TOCA annual meeting in Minneapolis in May.

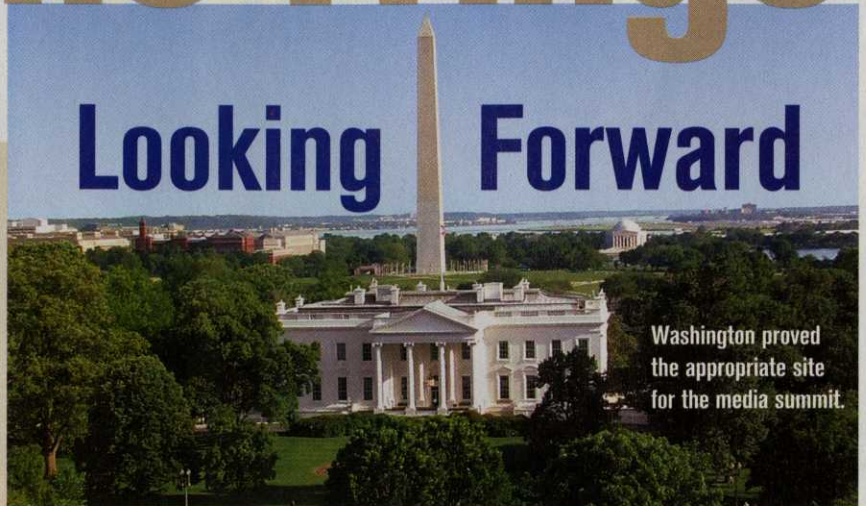
The study was executed by Colorado State University and THK Consulting at the direction of the Rocky Mountain Golf Course Superintendents Association, Colorado Golf Association, Colorado Women's Golf Association, Colorado Section of the PGA, Colorado Chapter of the Club Managers Association of America and the Colorado Chapter of the National Golf Course Owners Association. Joe McCleary, certified golf course superintendent at Saddle Rock Golf Course in Aurora, Colo., was the project leader.

Golfdom Wins Awards

In the 2008 Turf and Ornamental Communicators Association's (TOCA) Writing and Design Contest, *Golfdom* won more awards — nine — than any other turf and ornamental magazine, including golf course maintenance business magazines.

One of the awards was a best of show award for writing — the Gardner Award — given to the *Golfdom* staff for its "Growing the Game" series. ■

Looking Forward



Washington proved the appropriate site for the media summit.

'WHEN YOU TALK ABOUT INNOVATION, YOU TALK ABOUT THE FUTURE.' THAT'S THE MESSAGE BROUGHT HOME AT THE BASF MEDIA SUMMIT

By Larry Aylward, Editor in Chief

I recently returned from the BASF Media Summit in Washington. Boy, do I feel dumb.

But that will happen after you spend a day listening to incredibly smart people wax about global agricultural trends, plant biotechnology and other vital plant science issues.

BASF's top brass held court in Washington on May 23 for the company's media summit, titled "Innovate '08: From Research to Reality." The Germany-based company's top leaders, including Peter Eckes, senior vice president of global research and development for the company's crop

protection division; Markus Heldt, group vice president of the North America crop protection division; and Hans Kast, president and CEO of the BASF Plant Science Holding GmbH, were on hand among others on May 13 to discuss research and development in the agricultural sector, as well as the turf and ornamental areas.

Two things struck me while I listened to these people speak: First, they are extremely intelligent people (while I have wasted too much brain space on storing Major League Baseball batting averages and classic-rock song lyrics). Second, I feel pretty darn good about the people leading the chemical segment of the turf industry. They know what they're doing.

"When you talk about innovation, you talk about the future," said Stefan Marcinowski, a member of BASF's board of executive directors. "And everybody knows that the future is hard to predict. But there's one thing for sure — the future is the time zone where we will all spend the rest of our lives."

Continued on page 12