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Off The Fringe

Farewell to the Fertilizer Business

PURSELL LEAVES INDUSTRY SEGMENT, WHICH WAS RICH IN HIS FAMILY'S HERITAGE

By Larry Aylward, Editor in Chief

David Pursell stopped by the *Golfdom* booth at the Golf Industry Show with some big news: He's getting out of the fertilizer business, which was his family's business for 103 years.

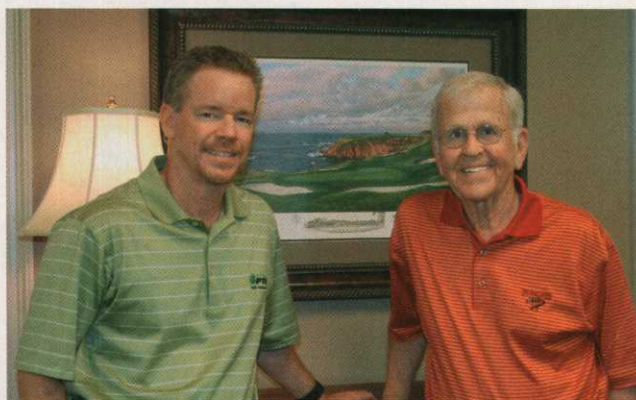
Pursell's last day with Agrium Advanced Technologies (AAT), the company he sold his family's business to in 2006, was March 1. But the 48-year-old Pursell also made it very clear he's not retiring to play more golf. He's leaving the fertilizer business to spend a lot of his time on his other family business, The Experience at FarmLinks, a research and demonstration venue and golf course in Sylacauga, Ala., that Pursell opened in 2001.

One might think Pursell would shed a tear or two about leaving the fertilizer business. But he's not sad at all. Of course, a lot of that has to do with the fact that he's still in the golf business with FarmLinks.

"I won't miss the fertilizer business," Pursell says. "But if I was walking away from [from the golf industry], I would be tearing up right now."

The Pursell family business started at the Sylacauga Fertilizer Co., co-founded by David's great-grandfather, DeWitt Parker, in 1904. Parker was the grandfather of Pursell's mother, Chris.

Parker passed the business to his son, Howard, when he died. Howard, subsequently passed the company to his son, Howard Jr., and his son-in-law, Jimmy Pursell (Chris's husband and David's dad), when he died in 1964. When Howard Jr. died unexpectedly in 1968, Jimmy Pursell was left at the helm.



David Pursell (left) and his father Jimmy headed up PTI for many years.

Quotable

"I swear, guys, I work at least eight and a half hours a day."

— Seth Strickland, superintendent at Miami Shores Country Club, after destroying the Independence Course at Reunion Resort in Orlando with three straight 4-under-par 68-stroke rounds to win the GCSAA tournament with a record-setting 12-under 204 total.

"High praise and extreme criticism are both exaggerations."

— Mark Wilson, certified superintendent of Valhalla Golf Club.

David joined the company in 1980 when it was still known as Parker Fertilizer. In 1992, the family changed the parent company name to Pursell Industries. In 1997, the Pursell family sold its consumer division and formed Pursell Technologies Inc. (PTI), and David became president and CEO, while Jimmy became chairman of the board.

In 2006, Pursell sold PTI to Agrium, a Calgary, Alberta-based global retailer, marketer and producer of crop inputs, specialty fertilizers and industrial products. Pursell has been vice president of marketing and new product development since that time.

Agrium paid \$74.5 million for PTI, best known for pioneering coating technologies with brands such as POLYON polymer-coated fertilizers, TriKote polymer/sulfur coated fertilizers and PRECISE controlled-release pesticide technology. At the time, Pursell said it wasn't a heart-wrenching decision to sell. And he says that AAT has done "a fantastic job" with the PTI business, which makes it even easier for him to walk away from it.

"[AAT] has a great strategic plan," Pursell says. "AAT can take the business to places that PTI could never have taken it."

Pursell has big plans for FarmLinks, of which AAT is a cornerstone partner along with The Toro Co. and BASF. He plans to add more amenities to the FarmLinks' experience.

Since last summer, Pursell had split his time between AAT and FarmLinks. Pursell says he's thankful for what the family business has provided him over the years, and he wants to give back to the golf industry.

"[I] have a fiduciary responsibility to give back to what made [me] successful," he says. "I love the golf business. I'm absolutely not sad [about leaving the fertilizer business] because I have a lot to look forward to." ■



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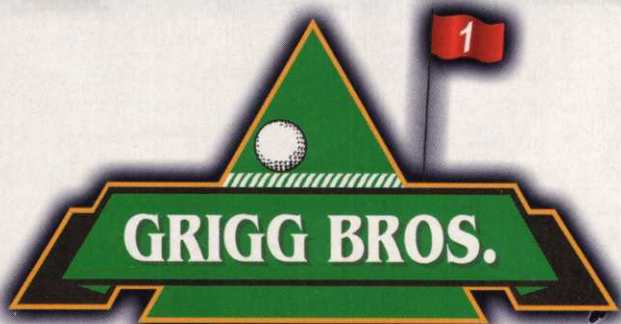
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REHABBING NEFARIOUS SOIL AND WATER

Editor's note: Golfdom is partnering with the American Society of Irrigation Consultants (ASIC) to publish a quarterly column on irrigation success stories in the golf industry on behalf of its members.



Last year, Dave Davis earned the task of adding a new 18-hole golf course irrigation system to an existing 18-hole golf course in Southern California. Each golf course has its own water source. The existing course is situated on one landfill; the new course is located on a separate landfill and some old, worn farmland. The landfill portion of the new course is elevated 90 feet to 100 feet above the old farmland portion.

The veteran irrigation designer would battle intense environmental regulation and monitoring, poor quality soil (for obvious reasons), poor quality water (for the same obvious reasons), developing a new water conveyance system for considerably greater output, multiple stages of water filtering, variable elevation, wind, and dynamic water pressure.

Davis, the proprietor of David D. Davis and Associates in Crestline, Calif., and an irrigation consultant who specializes in hydraulics, was up to the task. The project would require everything from intense water studies and master planning to the complete design of a new irrigation system.

The site

An existing municipal golf course was doubling in size and would be bordered by high-end tract housing and a diversion channel. The 18-hole addition would require 100-plus acres of irrigation; about half being 90 feet to 100 feet higher than the rest of the course — and its water sources.



Dave Davis

Because of the coastal orientation and elevation differences, wind levels on the upper holes are completely different from those on the lower. Intense agency monitoring and oversight meant that sprinkler specification had to be precise, with no over-spacing of sprinklers (a 70-foot sprinkler radius on 65-foot spacing), a design technique used to compensate for wind, etc.

Soil specifications required that more than a million cubic yards of new soil be brought in to adequately cover the landfill portions of the new course. Unfortunately, the imported soil came from a coastal source loaded with salts.

Initially, water studies were conducted to determine the project's overall need (volume), and quality of existing well water. According to Davis, the well water was high in mineral content, making it tough to sustain turfgrass. The initial irrigation system used both well water for primary irrigation and potable water for leaching the greens.

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The solution

To address the differences in elevation, Davis divided the courses hydraulically into two parts: a high-pressure zone that covers about 65 percent of the course requiring 1,500 gallons per minute (GPM) at about 145 pounds per square inch to operate; and a 2,500-GPM, low-pressure zone that operates at about 120 psi. These zones would be required to accomplish a full irrigation set in six to eight hours.

The challenging site conditions and

environmental sensitivity required a continual educating of policymakers. Davis had to develop and sell a middle ground of policy that considered irrigation timing and scheduling needs but was consistent with environmental and political goals.

Water and soil quality

Pouring poor-quality water over it would only exacerbate already-compromised soil quality. Davis designed a fresh-water system for the greens to leach excess minerals and salts through the root zone, and he incorporated a fertigation system for a customized cocktail of deficient elements.

The new lake water sources are ozonated to maintain lake health and minimize algae growth. A sulfur burner was added to help stabilize water pH. A series of automatic, self-flushing, fine-screen filters grab debris before water leaves the pump station. A stainless-steel screen helps eliminate large debris at the intake tube. Another ozone injector was placed on the discharge side of the pump station and downstream of filters and fertigation system. This ozone is intended to assist water infiltration of the soils.

“Electronic treatment of the water to help control bicarbonates was probably the most unique design element of this project,” Davis asserts. “Fortunately, the superintendent and golf course architect are really topnotch, and we were able to work together to design the system to meet everyone’s needs while fulfilling myriad site requirements.” ■

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Off The Fringe

Jumping Into the Fray

HUSTLER TURF'S PAUL MULLET
DISCUSSES HIS COMPANY'S ENTRY
INTO THE GOLF MARKET

There was a new mower manufacturer — and a new color — on the Orange County Convention Center exhibit floor at the Golf Industry Show in February.

Hustler Turf Equipment, a Hesston, Kan.-based company that has made a name for itself in the lawn care market, recently announced a partner-

ship with Japan's IHI Shibaura Machinery to develop mowing products for the golf market.

Golfdom caught up with Hustler President Paul Mullet recently to discuss the company's entry into the golf market.



Paul Mullet



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THE LEADER. SINCE 1961.

While business is not bad in the golf market, some people will tell you it's a challenging time, with course construction down and rounds being flat. That said, why did Hustler decide to get into the golf market?

Mullet: About 15 months ago, IHI Shibaura came to us. IHI Shibaura has been manufacturing golf course equipment in Japan for close to 30 years. The company was looking for somebody in the United States to help market its products. IHI Shibaura has the reel technology, the four-wheel drive technology and the experience. So it was an opportunity for us, since we were in that market (about 30 years ago), to get back into it.

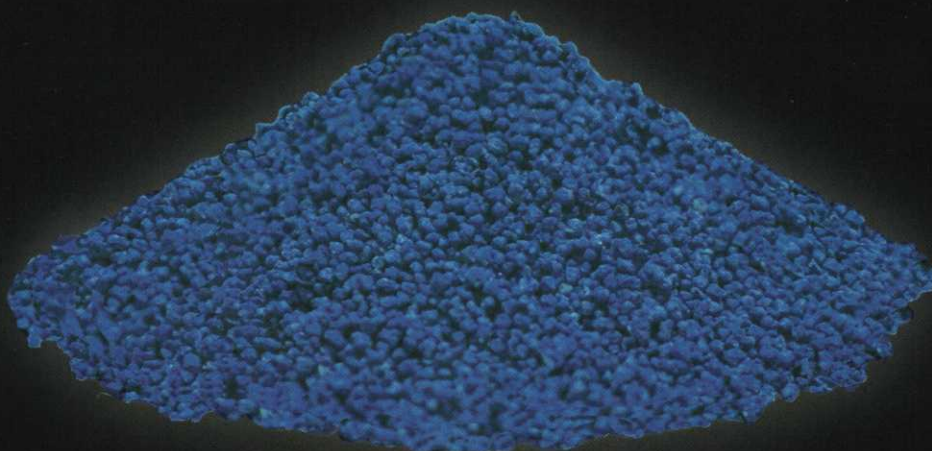
Let's talk about your audience — golf course superintendents. What do you know about their needs when it comes to mowing?

Mullet: We have a lot of rotary mower experience for the roughs and those applications. And now with our relationship with IHI Shibaura, which brings the reel-mowing segment to greens and fairways, we have a combination to make products we hope will help superintendents.

Hustler Turf Equipment will face some stiff competition from some reputable mower manufacturers — Toro, Jacobsen and John Deere. How do you plan to distinguish itself?

Mullet: We've competed before with John Deere, Toro and Jacobsen. They do a great job, but we think we can do some things [to distinguish ourselves]. We're a smaller company, and we're more responsive. We're also open to learning what we need to do. ■

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Hole of the

▶ Hole No. 18 | Ghost Creek Course, Pumpkin Ridge Golf Club



PHOTO BY: D2 PRODUCTIONS

Month

North Plains, Ore.

Hole Stats

Distance: 454 yards

Par 4

The Turf

Green: Bentgrass/*Poa annua* mixed

Fairway: Bentgrass/*Poa annua* mixed

Ghost Creek's Robert Cupp-designed layout took little time establishing itself as one of the nation's premier semi-private golf courses. Nestled next to its sister course, Witch Hollow, the two courses make up Pumpkin Ridge Golf Club, which opened for play in 1992.

Both courses were carved into a mature, forested site, giving the serene impression that they've been a part of the landscape as long as the surrounding 100-year-old oak trees. Native grass plantings complement this natural setting by adding both scenic depth and playing difficulty.

Among other accolades, Ghost Creek was chosen to host the NIKE TOUR Championships in 1993 and 1994 and was rated among Golf Magazine's Top 100 Places You Can Play in 2005.

Pros and amateurs alike consider hole No. 18 a great finishing hole due to its difficulty and wide range of scores. The tee shot is critical as it plays to a downhill landing area guarded on both sides by firs, oaks and maples. The landing area is flanked by a stream running on the right side adjacent to the fairway and a deep sloping rough on the left.

Golf course senior superintendent Bill Webster keeps the course lean and dry with a focus on thatch removal and sand topdressing. Ghost Creek is prone to typical Northwest disease problems, often precipitated by short spurts of extreme weather. Webster incorporates seasonal preventive programs to control snow molds, dollar spot and summer stress diseases.

Webster integrated Insignia® fungicide into his program last winter to tackle snow molds and continued with applications in July and August to control pythium blight, anthracnose and leaf spot. Webster used a range of preventive and curative rates based on the conditions of each green.

"Insignia helps prevent and cure a broad scope of diseases, and has a long length of control," said Webster. "In the summer, we see two to three weeks of control whereas other products may only cover up to a week or two at most. Insignia helps us overlap coverage and protection for the course."

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

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

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■ OPINION

I remember my first GCSAA Conference and Show back in 1985 in Washington, D.C. The show has long since retreated to the Sun Belt to minimize winter travel hiccups at northern airports. However, many of us extra-nighters in Anaheim last year realized that Southern latitudes are still no guarantee of hassle-free travel in January or February. Getting to the Golf Industry Show is half the adventure.

I Had a Mona Moment ...

I literally welcomed about 100 people gathered within earshot of the bandstand at the outdoor pool-side Welcoming Reception on behalf of the Florida GCSA. This was my first face-to-face meeting with Steve Mona since his announced resignation from GCSAA. Besides the usual “atta boys” and thank you’s, Steve told me how much he enjoyed, admired and respected superintendents and the opportunity he had to work at GCSAA. The best part for me was when he pledged to make sure that superintendents’ issues, concerns and contributions to the golf industry were given proper notice during his administration of the World Golf Foundation. I have no doubt he will deliver on that promise.

Oh, the Shark bites with such teeth, dear ...

As chairman of the GCSAA’s EIFG Advisory Council, Greg Norman took a big bite out of the Augusta Syndrome when he told the opening session audience during this year’s Old Tom Morris Award speech that indeed, “brown can be beautiful.” I read where he delivered basically the same message in a Jupiter, Fla., newspaper interview recently. The message is, of course, that golf should focus on being playable, and lush-green color should not be the primary driver. I think most of us in the industry get it. It will take some creative messaging to get golfers, country club members and real-estate developers to buy into that concept. Recent water restrictions in many parts of the country are forcing golfers to face that off-color reality as fairways and roughs brown-out.

GIS Offers Matchless Networking Options

BY JOEL JACKSON



IF YOU DIDN'T LEARN
SOMETHING NEW OR
MEET NEW FRIENDS,
THEN YOU MUST
HAVE BEEN IN A
DIFFERENT PLACE

He had me at chicken manure ...

Norman sealed the deal when I realized we shared a common hands-on experience early in our golf careers; we both spread chicken manure on golf greens. I can respect a guy who isn't afraid to get his hands dirty now and then. Norman's hard-charging style during his tour years hasn't mellowed as he now pursues environmentally friendly course designs. I also liked his inspirational comment, “Your dreams are the blueprints for your reality.”

Miles of aisles on the trade show floor ...

I loved the easy Wi-Fi access in the convention center. I was able to delete spam and answer e-mails with ease during my wanderings. I heard some folks still complaining about the “lost identity” of the show with all those dishes and tray displays. Hey, GCSAA is still the 800-pound gorilla at this shindig. I consulted the trade show floor plan, and if my map reading skills as an ex-Coast Guard navigator haven't completely vanished, aisles from 100 to 1300 were devoted to clubhouse goods and services. The rest, up to the 5700 block, housed superintendent stuff! Oh, sure there were some dual-interest products in the 2000 zone, like golf cars and utility vehicles, but that's why we merged the three shows in the first place.

If you didn't reconnect with an old friend, make a new friend or a new business contact, learn something that will help you personally or professionally, you weren't in the same place I was.

I hope to see you in the Big Easy next year, even if it isn't easy getting there.

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