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For Sale:

The Old Tom Morris Award



The incredible story of how the late Byron Nelson's industry honor ended up on eBay, but later was returned to Nelson's wife **BY CHRISTOPHER S. GRAY SR.**

It started out so innocently. My son CJ wanted an iPod Touch for his birthday. So rather than paying the full price, I went to eBay to find a pre-owned iPod at half the price. After finding and paying for it, I decided to browse a bit. I looked for a shiny, new putter, but anything with Scotty Cameron's name on it was way out of my price range. Then, on a whim, I entered the search term, "GCSAA," more out of pure curiosity than anything else. There was only one listing, but what a listing it turned out to be. The title read:

"Byron Nelson The Old Tom Morris Award 1994 from GCSAA"

Huh? I *had* to be reading this wrong. There's no way our association's most prestigious honor could be up for grabs on the world's largest online auction site, alongside used Pez candy dispensers and a Ruffles potato chip shaped like the Virgin Mary. But there it was, accompanied with nine photos of the award,

including one of the brass plaque on the book's slipcase, which read:

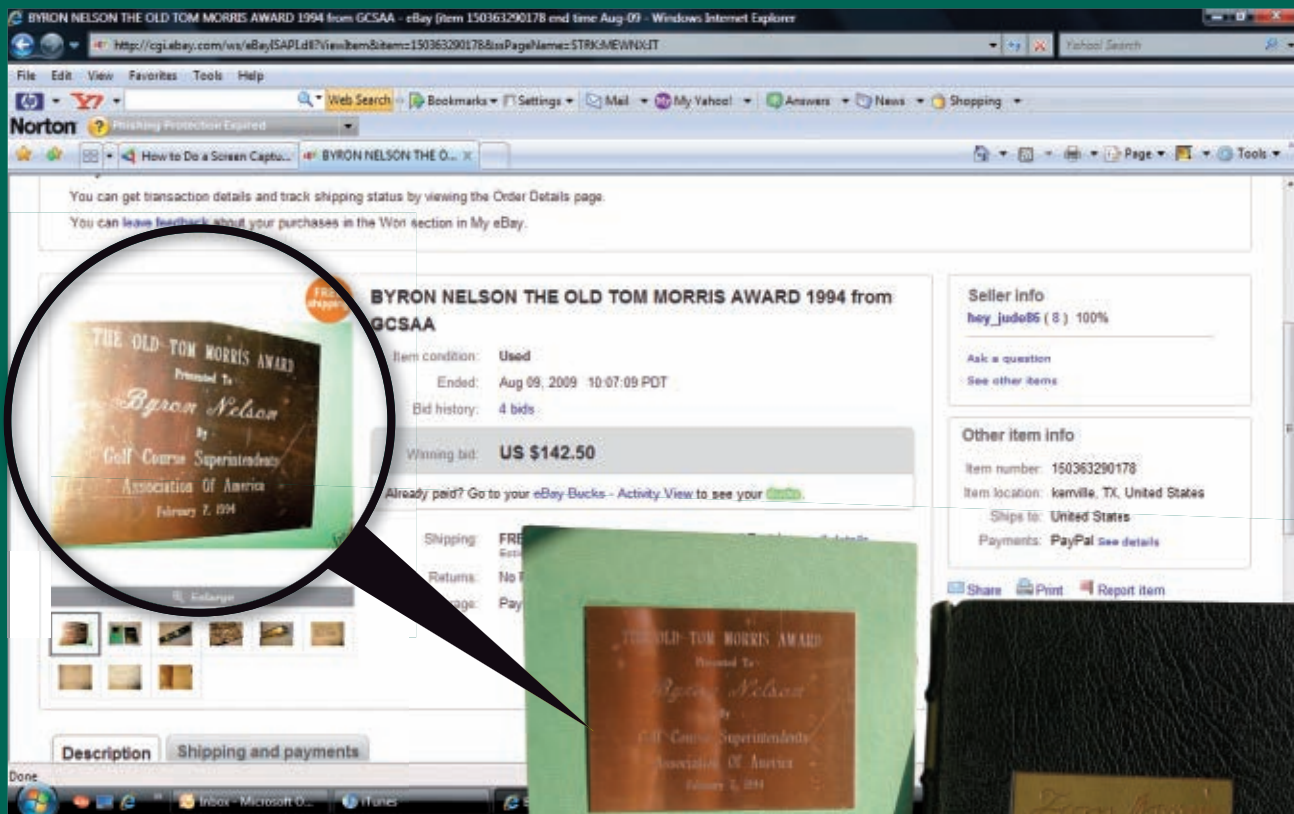
*"THE OLD TOM MORRIS AWARD
— Presented to Byron Nelson by the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America, February 7, 1994."*

With five days until the end of the auction and a starting bid of \$100, I watched and waited to see what type of interest the award/book would draw. It also gave me some time to investigate the book's authenticity.

I contacted the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America and asked who could answer some simple questions about the Old Tom Morris Award and its history. I was directed to Past President Mel Lucas, who championed the creation of the award back in 1981. When I contacted him, Lucas told me that, after the board of directors approved the establishment of the Old Tom Morris Award, he proposed the idea of presenting recipients with a special-edition, leather-bound copy of

"The Life of Tom Morris," by the famed author W.W. Tulloch. The board passed the proposal. Lucas recounted that Ellesborough Press in London printed 100 leather-bound editions with slipcases and 300 cloth-bound editions of the book — each hand-numbered and containing a special prologue on the GCSAA's history. J.H. Neill, the captain of The Royal and Ancient Golf Club of St. Andrews at that time, signed each of the leather-bound editions. The first 15 leather-bound copies were set-aside for the future recipients of the award, with the remaining books offered to the membership.

Armed with this vast treasure trove of knowledge from Lucas, I returned to eBay to see if this book was, indeed, the real thing. I enlarged one of the photos and it showed the signature of J.H. Neill clearly and a hand-numbered "14" on the limited-edition statement page. There was also a place for the GCSAA president's signature, yet oddly it was not signed. Other than that, everything else lined up perfectly. I was convinced



the book was the actual award Nelson received in Dallas more than 15 years ago from the GCSAA. I knew I had to win the auction.

The listing was scheduled to end on a Sunday morning. I arranged my work schedule so that, after setting up the course for play that morning, I could do some paperwork in my office. I logged into eBay with two hours remaining and discovered the book had garnered some interest, with bids up to \$140. Somewhat concerned that others had discovered this diamond in the rough, I decided to employ a sniper tactic, a commonly used eBay technique to be the last bidder so as not to run up the bidding needlessly before the auction ends. The only trick to this particular maneuver is to bid high enough to outsnipe other potential snipers, because you only get one shot at it.

With two minutes left in the auction, I refreshed the listing page and found no new bidding activity. As I watched the clock tick down, I had to determine the highest price I would spend for the book, hoping it was more than anyone else who

After studying the photos on eBay, the author was convinced the award was the real deal.

might also be contemplating the same thing. One minute left and my heart actually started beating faster with anticipation. I clicked on the bidding amount and entered my high bid — \$350. The clock ticked down to 15 seconds and I entered the bid. When I refreshed the page, the bidding was over. The book sold for the winning price of \$142.50 — to me!

I was so excited about winning that I called my wife, Colleen, and told her what I had just won on eBay. Being the wonderful pragmatist she is, she asked, “What are you going to do with it?”

Instinctively, I replied, “Give it back.”

Until I actually said the words, I really hadn’t given any thought to what I was going to do with it. All I knew is I wanted to win it. Initially, I was focused on finding out if the book was genuine. Now, after winning, I was more interested in learning how it went from being presented to Byron Nelson to being offered up for bid on the Internet’s largest garage sale. But after speaking to my wife, I realized the award didn’t belong to me, it belonged to Byron Nelson.

I paid for the book through PayPal and patiently waited for it to arrive from seller “hey_jude86.” When it did come, it was simply incredible and exactly as described. I spent the better part of

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For Sale

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an hour carefully flipping through the pages of the book, trying to decipher what journey this book had taken to find itself in my hands.

I e-mailed “hey_jude86” and thanked him for the book, commenting on its remarkable nature. I explained to him I wanted to establish the book’s provenance by connecting the dots between Nelson’s possession and my own and any information he had would be greatly appreciated. “Hey_jude86” replied he had purchased the book from Hospice Thrift Store a month earlier in Kerrville, Texas. He also said he thought Nelson use to own a home in Kerrville. I asked him what he paid for the book. One buck, he replied.

A thrift shop? A dollar? Unbelievable.

Well, at least part of the mystery was solved. A random person, treasure hunting in local second-hand stores, ran across a nice-looking book with Byron Nelson’s name all over it and decided he could likely sell it for more than a \$1 on eBay. Well done. But the real mystery to me was how the book ended up in the Hospice Thrift Store for “hey_jude86” to stumble upon in the first place.

In order to find out for certain, I needed to go back to Byron Nelson himself and ask what happened to the book. Unfortunately, that wasn’t possible. Nelson died in 2006 after a life filled with accomplishments and good deeds that would take a warehouse full of paper to document. However, Nelson left behind his widow, Peggy, who now manages his estate.

After failed attempts to find Peggy Nelson’s contact information on the Internet, I was struck by a rare moment of genius. The Byron Nelson Championship continues to be a PGA staple tournament, and I remembered reading that Peggy Nelson is still involved with it. Who do I know who’s affiliated with the PGA Tour? Steve Mona, CEO of the World Golf Foundation and former CEO of the GCSAA.

I crafted a short e-mail to Mona,

explaining the situation, and asked for some assistance in finding any contact information for Peggy Nelson. In dependable Mona fashion, he responded in less than 15 minutes, saying he would inquire with the PGA and get back to me shortly. Less than an hour later, I had her phone number and address. Some people you can always count on. Thanks again, Steve.

Equipped with the information I needed, I threw caution to the wind, picked up the phone and dialed Peggy Nelson’s number. Seconds later, a sweet-sounding lady’s voice echoed from the earpiece. I started the conversation with an introduction and the statement, “I think I have something that belongs to you, or at least to your late husband.”

After going through the story of how I found the book on eBay, bought it, tracked its journey to the thrift store and searched for a way to contact her, I asked her, “Do you have any idea how the book might have ended up at the Hospice Thrift Store in Kerrville?”

“I really have no idea,” she said, “other than we used to have a vacation home in Kerrville that we sold in 2004. We donated a tremendous amount of furniture and books to Hospice when we left. It’s possible it was accidentally included with those donated items, but it certainly wasn’t intentional.”

I explained to Mrs. Nelson that I wanted to return the award to her be-

It made the author’s day to get this note from Peggy Nelson.

cause it rightfully belongs to Byron’s estate, and more importantly, his legacy.

“I’m tickled to death you feel that way,” she said. “I really appreciate you took all the time and effort to, not only secure the book, but also contact me to return it. Thank you so much!”

Mrs. Nelson continued our conversation by recanting stories of Byron’s uncanny ability to touch people’s lives. Forty-five minutes later, I hung up the phone filled with the sense of joy you can only get from doing a good deed.

I carefully packaged the book and mailed it to the address she gave me. I insured the packaged just to make sure it safely arrived in her hands. It did.

I received a note from Mrs. Nelson a week later thanking me again for returning the book. She still isn’t sure of the bizarre circumstances that led to the book ending up in a thrift store. Likely, we will never know for sure what exactly happened.

In a fitting conclusion, Mrs. Nelson loaned the book permanently to the new Byron Nelson High School in Trophy Club, Texas. There’s a display case at the school’s entrance that holds various memorabilia from Byron’s past for all the students and visitors to see.

Nelson’s Old Tom Morris Award took quite a journey, but it couldn’t have ended up in a better place. ■

Dear Chris,

9-14-09
As soon as I opened your package and saw the book, I recognized it & am so pleased you made the effort to return it & send it back to me. I know golf coach Larry Hawkins at the new Byron Nelson High School will be pleased to see it, and it will be on permanent display at the school as well. Sincerely,
Peggy Nelson

The Root of the Matter

To get the most out of a fertility program, superintendents consider several factors. Even so, it all comes down to nutrients

ABOUT THIS SERIES

Golfdom, in unison with AGROTAIN International and LebanonTurf, aims to educate golf course superintendents through this special three-part series.

Part two of the report focuses on the art and science of fertility. The two stories presented here discuss the reasons why fertilization does more to improve poor-quality turfgrass or maintain good-quality turfgrass than any other management practice. In **part three**, which runs in December, we'll peek into the not-too-distant future – 2025 – to see what golf course superintendents will use as fertilizer and how they'll be using it. **Part one**, which appeared in October, examined modern-day fertility management.

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Research Is More Important Than Ever, page 26

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The Right Stuff, page 28

Tournament Prep & Fertility, page 32

PHOTO BY: ISTOCK INTERNATIONAL INC.

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In These Times, Research Is More Important Than Ever

Bill Gates, surely the most successful college dropout ever, says he sometimes picks up *Time* magazine and reads every article from beginning to end, even the stories that don't interest him. "That way you can be certain to learn something you didn't know previously," says Gates, who left Harvard early to start Microsoft.

Learning is also an essential ingredient of any business, no matter how established or successful. For more than 60 years, LebanonTurf has been an active research participant, continuing to learn about innovative ways to improve our products, manufacturing capabilities and service. Short- and

long-term projects conducted in cooperation with many of the nation's leading academic research institutions, including Arkansas, Auburn, Cornell, Nebraska and Rutgers, help us make the care and management of turfgrass more efficient and cost-effective for golf course superintendents and lawn-care professionals.



By Mike Sisti

As expectations for pristine conditions continue to escalate at the same time that economic forces and regulatory restrictions add new challenges for the turfgrass industry, research has never been more vital. Research also provides the classic win-win-win situation for manufacturers, universities and end-users.

Fertilizer manufacturers turn to the nation's most respected turf programs and researchers to test new ingredients or products, or even to confirm theories on which they may have based decisions for years. What we learn through research helps us go to the market with more confidence and information, and as a result help our customers make better purchasing decisions.

Funding these projects, as well as providing equipment and other resources, help the universities' turf science programs continue to grow in size and stature. One of our longstanding research relationships is with Rutgers University. We recently presented a check for \$280,556 to the

school's Center for Turfgrass Science as royalty payment for its help in turfgrass research. Bruce Clarke, Ph.D., and director of the school's Turfgrass Center, said support from LebanonTurf and other manufacturers has been "critical in helping us develop the best turfgrass varieties to bring to the market." Royalties from its partnership with LebanonTurf and other private sector firms support the center's grassseed breeding program and encourage additional faculty research, Clarke says.

The symbiotic relationship between manufacturers and researchers also provides the assurance that end-users rely on for decision-making and purchasing.

A recent project we undertook to support our Green-Smart technology provides an example of the research process working to all parties' benefits. With the help of our research partners, we ran trials with different fertilizer formulations to see if we could squeeze more efficiency out of the manufacturing process. Based on the outcome of those tests, we were able to develop a better formula that was easier for our manufacturing plant to process. Ultimately, the improved efficiency will help end-users because it adds to our economies of scale, which makes products created with Green-Smart even more price competitive.

When it comes to research, if you never stop learning, you never stop seeing the possibilities. ■

Mike Sisti is marketing manager for LebanonTurf, a division of privately held Lebanon Seaboard Corp.



Finding the Right Products in a Tough Economy

Both at home and at work, the condition of today's economy has each of us seeking ways to cut back without compromising quality. Not only are we looking at ways to stretch the family budget, we're also making adjustments to our business practices to accomplish more with less.

These incremental changes — some small, others major — help to increase efficiency while positively impacting the bottom line with little or no negative effects. This cost-cutting, uncompromising formula can certainly be applied to changes in your turf program.

Although changing to cheaper products or fewer applications can create negative impacts on turf health, transitioning to "smarter" products represents creative solutions that allow you to do more with less. This is most definitely the case with fertilizer.

Fertility options are seemingly endless because superintendents can choose between granular or spray; slow release versus stabilized, or even quick release; their desired number of applications and the amount applied per application; and the preferred timing for each application. All of these options are necessary because not every fertility program works for every soil type, in all climates, every year.

Finding the right product to complement your fertility program that fits into your budget and yields the expected results of healthy vigorous turf is why we at AGROTAIN International are so proud of our products. Nitrogen efficiency, value and versatility are all qualities of UMAXX, UFLEXX and HYDREXX.

Nitrogen efficiency and value

When it comes to performance and return on investment, no other urea-based product compares to UMAXX. It's the most efficient nitrogen source you can find for the money, and delivers more usable nitrogen than other sources. Even better, UMAXX delivers high performance at a significantly lower cost than the competition and can be used in either soluble or granular form.

Coupling urea with proprietary enzyme inhibitors, UMAXX delivers improved nitrogen efficiency, increases plant utilization and minimizes environmental loss.

And because it does not rely on temperature, moisture or microbial activity for release, you stay in complete control of your nitrogen program and performance. UMAXX stays

in the available ammonium form ready for the plant to take it up as needed. This stabilized form reduces nitrogen loss, making it a nitrogen management tool for those geographies with water-quality guidelines. In addition, this results in reduced grass clippings, maximum visual color and an environmentally responsible product.

Fertilizer versatility

Versatility of application is a unique feature for UMAXX when compared to other sources of nitrogen. UMAXX is available in a granular form either in straight 50-pound bags designed for soluble applications or as the nitrogen source in a blend. Soluble applicators pour UMAXX into the spray tank strainer cavity while water is filled. It readily melts into solution and does not settle out. It can be mixed with other plant nutrients, fungicides, growth regulators or insecticides.

UMAXX can also be added to your fertigation tank. It's a 47 percent nitrogen product that can be added to any granular blend as well, and provides the same integrity and performance regardless of the application type.

We've found success stories from superintendents from Washington to New York, from California to Florida, and from Minnesota to Texas. These superintendents have unique stories to tell regarding the application type and timing, but all have seen the benefits to their budget and turf vigor and appearance. To read more UMAXX secrets or to share your story, go to www.WhatsHisSecret.com. ■

Stegmann is president of Lange-Stegmann Company and AGROTAIN International.

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By Mike Stegmann



The **Right** **Stuff**

BY JOHN WALSH, CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

Soil conditions, turf type and location are a few factors that determine a proper-functioning fertility program

PHOTO COURTESY: SYNGENTA PROFESSIONAL PRODUCTS





F THE THREE MOST significant aspects of managing turfgrass — mowing, irrigation and fertility —

superintendents have the most control over the latter. They concede mowing control to members and irrigation control to Mother Nature.

But more control doesn't necessarily make fertility easier. If not done properly, it'll cause pest problems. Fertility also affects other cultural practices.

"You won't get the most out of other cultural practices if the fertility isn't right," says Mike Richardson, Ph.D., professor of turfgrass management and physiology in the department of horticulture at the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville.

And because of member expectations, Charles Peacock, Ph.D., professor and extension turfgrass specialist in the department of crop science at North Carolina State University in Raleigh, is concerned superintendents are keeping turf a little too lean.

"I understand trying to limit inputs because of the environment and budget constraints, but you can't starve turf during critical times," Peacock says. "There has to be a balance between being too lean and overfeeding. Superintendents need to make sure the plant gets what it needs."

"The vast majority of superinten-

dents are malnourishing greens in pursuit of ball-roll distance," says Cale Bigelow, Ph.D., associate professor of agronomy at Purdue University in West Lafayette, Ind.

"Superintendents tend to starve putting greens for speed," says Frank Rossi, Ph.D., associate professor of turfgrass science in the department of horticulture at Cornell University in Ithaca, N.Y. "That's where you get into trouble."

And turf needs, which are affected by weather, vary annually.

"You don't need the same amount of nitrogen every year," Peacock says. "There's often a 2x range based on climate conditions. No year is exactly on average."

With more aggressive fertility comes more aggressive mowing and potential thatch issues. Presently, many superintendents are thinking about using more plant growth regulators instead of using lower fertility rates to control growth.

"Once you lower fertilizer rates (and the turf gets damaged), it takes longer to bring back the turf," Bigelow says. "So ensuring the turf is actively growing will benefit overall performance."

To get the most out of a fertility program, superintendents usually consider three big macrofactors: geographic location, soil conditions and type of facility. Even so, it all comes down to nutrients.

I've got needs

Turfgrass plants need 16 essential nutrients, three of which come from air and water and the rest from soil. So a balanced nutritional program is most important, fundamentally, because no element can substitute for another. Superintendents need to focus on nitrogen, an essential macronutrient, and iron for color, Rossi says.

"There's a need for the others, but I can't find too many reasonable people who say we're underapplying other nutrients," Rossi says. "Other than nitro-

gen, we don't have soil tests that say how much other nutrients we should add. I don't think there's a justification for a lot of the fertility that's done."

Others question the quantity of other nutrients.

"Calcium is overused and over-sprayed," Richardson says. "It can't be translocated down into the plant. Superintendents should know how all the different nutrients move into the plant."

On fairways and tees, the range of nitrogen per year is 3 to 4 pounds. On bentgrass greens, that range can go from as low as 1 pound up to 10, Bigelow says.

"Ten pounds was not uncommon 15 years ago," he says. "Four pounds is more appropriate nowadays."

Richardson says 99 percent of superintendents use historical data to determine the nitrogen needs of a plant.

"Some day, units of nitrogen will be applied based on the months of growth," he says.

Soil's importance

Any fertility program should be based on soil type, which will dictate the nutrient-holding capacity of a fertility system. A sound soil-testing program provides a historical perspective to see what's been done to help provide a baseline to start.

"Some superintendents don't use soil testing programs properly to see how fertility is changing the soil," Richardson says. "Superintendents need to ask themselves, 'Is what I'm doing increasing, decreasing or saving the nutrients in the soil.'"

Every year is different. One year 25 inches of rain might fall; the next year there could be 50 inches. Some nutrients could leach through the soil.

"It's good for superintendents to look back at the year and determine what conditions forced them to change nutrition," Richardson says. "It's always critical to

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« **"The vast amount of superintendents are malnourishing greens in pursuit of ball-roll distance."**

— CALE BIGELOW

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add needed fertility based on soils.”

Soil tests should be conducted at least once a year or twice a year for greens, Richardson says. “In Florida, for example, I’d sample more frequently because the growing season is 12 months,” he adds.

Soil tests can save superintendents money in tight economic times. “If you don’t need something, don’t put it down,” Richardson says. “Before, it used to be, ‘Well, I’ll put it down anyway just to be on the safe side.’”

For sand-based greens, there’s no need to test the soil for nutrients because there’s no buffering or holding capacity in those sand systems, Rossi says.

“In soil-based systems, we’re finding we’re overestimating the need for nutrients, i.e., phosphorus,” he says. “Now it’s 20 pounds per acre. It was 40 pounds per acre five years ago.”

Soil tests, which aren’t expensive, are a necessity because without them superintendents are just guessing. “Sometimes superintendents don’t follow through after the test,” Peacock says. “They need to follow the recommendations closely.”

Generally, sandy soils tend to lack iron and manganese. With highly reactive soils (heavy clay soils with high aluminum), superintendents have to keep up with pH levels to prevent aluminum from becoming toxic to root systems, Peacock says.

Before implementing a fertility program, a soil test needs to be conducted because superintendents need to get an idea of what the soil is like and nutrient availability. Is there a potential pH problem? Could there be problems with aluminum toxicity or nutrient availability? Are soil amendments needed?

For example, soil in the rural Midwest is generally uniform if it hasn’t moved, says Rich Gaussoin, Ph.D., professor and extension turfgrass specialist in weed science at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. On newer golf

courses, where a lot of soil has been moved for mounding, the soil isn’t uniform because the subsoil was brought to the surface. In cases like these, the pH level can range from 5.5 to 9.

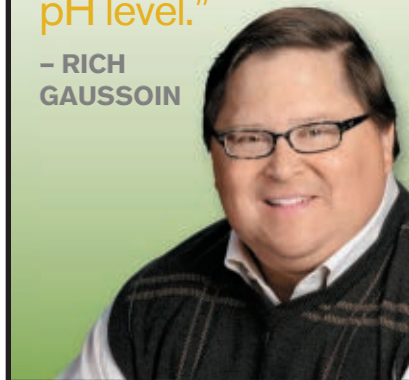
“Did the location have deep soil or shallow soil when building the course?” Gaussoin asks. “When you bring it all to the surface and get grass growing, the grass tempers the soil. Generally, soil is only a problem during grow-in and three to four years after that. The plant, through the addition of organic matter, often buffers a problematic pH level.”

Different needs

Obviously, geographic differences — arid or cool, wet areas, for example — will affect fertility programs, too, as well as the intended use of the area: greens, tees, fairways, rough and the clubhouse lawn.

“Generally, soil is only a problem during grow-in and three to four years after that. The plant, through the addition of organic matter, often buffers a problematic pH level.”

— RICH GAUSSOIN



“Superintendents look for places to reduce fertility,” Bigelow says. “Maybe they won’t fertilize an entire fairway each time, and just fertilize landing areas.”

Because greens are the most noticed piece of real estate, most fertility tweaking is done there, Gaussoin says, adding there’s less fertility tweaking in fairways unless problems arise.

“It’s not that big of an expense to spend money on foliar products for greens,” he says. (See sidebar about liquid vs. granular products.) “The tweaking on greens isn’t with N-P-K, the macronutrients — it’s the micronutrients. It’s all about timing and shifting to a different program during stressful summer conditions where foliar products provide not only nutritional value but have documented stress relief if the products contain constituents such as amino acids and cytokinins.”

Rough areas, where inputs are decreasing, are often left alone. In some cases, more attention is being paid to tees than fairways. Some superintendents are treating tees with foliar products, and others are using a modified form of liquid on fairways and greens.

“Because of the economy, superintendents are carefully looking at fertility programs, sticking with protecting greens and green surrounds and cutting back in the rough,” Bigelow says.

Additionally, some superintendents are being more precise with nitrogen applications — going out more frequently at lower amounts — on fairways and tees.

Cost and timing

There are times when missed opportunities are almost impossible to correct, Peacock says, citing construction as the most important time to fertilize.

“You need lime and phosphorus,” he says. “It takes years to correct those deficiencies with surface applications because they’re slow to react when applied that way. Still, some people get it