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Golfdom

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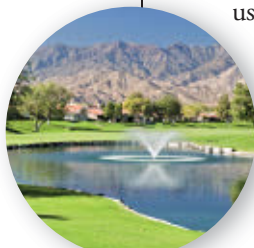
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We think this photograph by Mike Klemme fits our cover concept well.

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This month, *Golfdom's* practical research digest discusses a new native low-input turfgrass option called Danthonia. Also, Richard Hull writes about getting to the roots of nitrogen-use efficiency. **See pages 49-54.**

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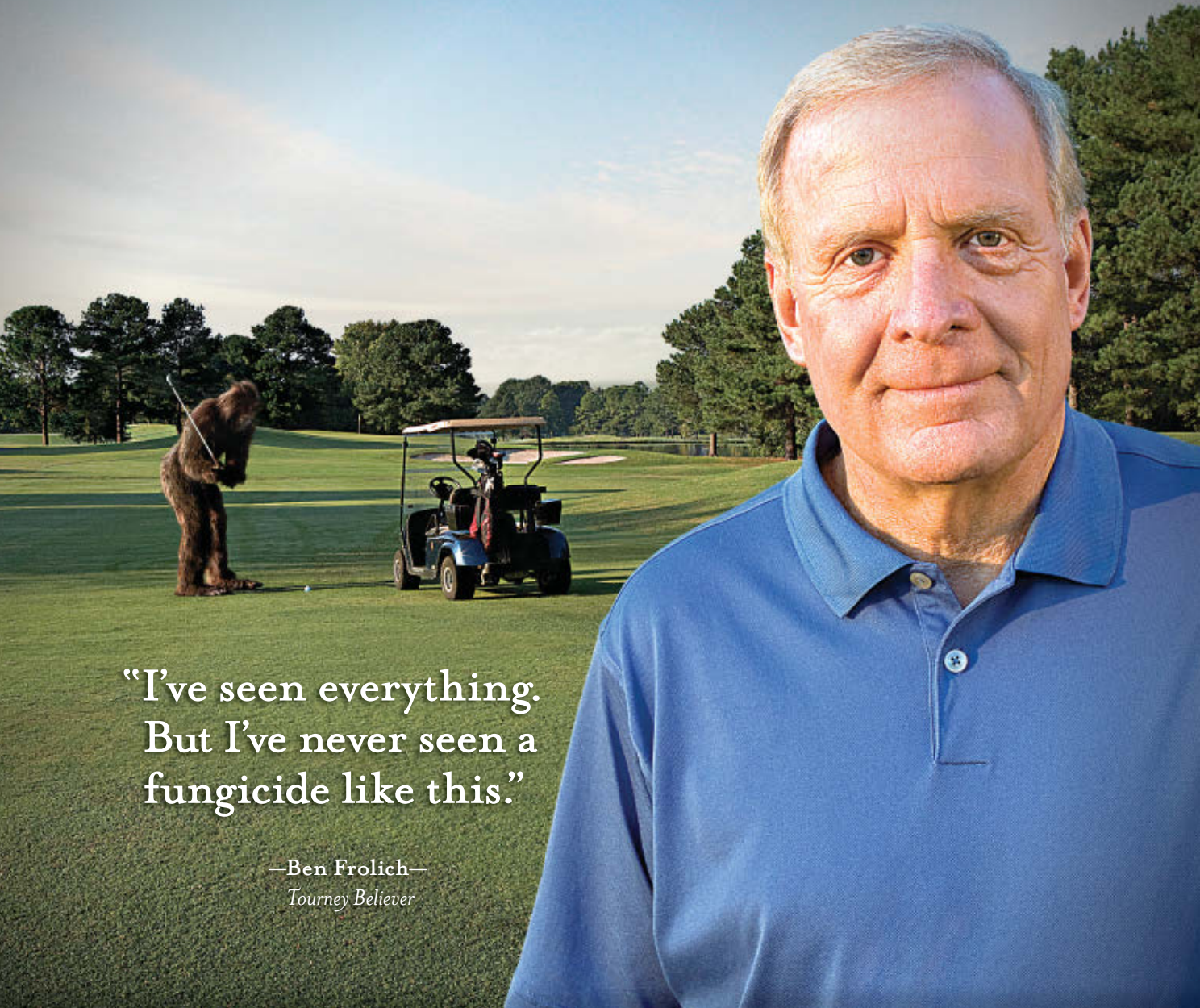
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The subject of the e-mail was “Checking In.” It was golf course architect Bobby Weed writing me. When I opened his e-mail and read it, I wondered what planet Weed was living on.

Considering what he wrote — “I, for one, have never been more excited about the business!” — I figured Weed had moved to Mars. Heck, there’s more golf course design going on there than here. More golf courses have closed in America than have opened in the past five years. This isn’t a good time to be in the golf course building business in the United States.

But the phone number Weed left me to call him back to discuss his elation was a Florida exchange. So, no, Weed wasn’t designing courses on another planet.

Now, I’m one of those people who doesn’t view the cup as half full or half empty. To me, it’s just half. But I couldn’t wait to talk to Weed to find out why he was on cloud nine — or cloud 10, in his case.

And after speaking with Weed, I realized he’s not a space cadet at all. Weed is actually well-grounded when it comes to knowing what the golf course industry needs to do to whip itself into shape. And his attitude toward getting it into a better state is one we should all take.

“I don’t know if the business has ever been any tougher,” Weed told me. “But at the same time, I want to be part of the solution, not part of the problem.”

Weed says the golf business is speaking to us — all of us — and we’d better dang well listen. Hundreds of golf courses have closed in the past five years and more will follow. What does that tell you?

It’s a strong statement that a golf course has to be run like a business. And that’s not happening, according to Weed.

Last winter, I heard Henry DeLozier of Global Golf Advisors, an international consultancy service, give a talk on business plans. But according to DeLozier, only 3 percent of golf course operations have any kind of business plan at all.

Welcome to Weed’s World

BY LARRY AYLWARD



“I, FOR ONE, HAVE NEVER BEEN MORE EXCITED ABOUT THE BUSINESS!” GOLF ARCHITECT SAYS

Three percent? That’s downright absurd, not to mention mind-boggling.

To Weed’s point, the many phases of the golf industry — design, construction, operations and maintenance — have to be scrutinized. “We have to peel back the layers and take a hard look at each level,” Weed says.

It’s time to find out where business is going wrong and where money is being wasted.

If you ask Weed, what the golf world needs now is more short, fast-playing and affordable courses (many of them nine holes) with a variety of holes (and plenty of half-par holes) that golfers of every caliber can play and enjoy. And the maintenance on all of these courses must be streamlined with less emphasis on the rough and out-of-play areas to reduce costs.

This is the way Weed is going because he believes it’s the way that will help save the industry. And he’s excited about it — and rightfully so!

“Frugality will be the norm going forward,” Weed says, noting that courses shouldn’t carry any debt unless that debt is helping to grow the business. “We can’t continue to build golf courses that don’t make business sense.”

Weed is insistent that the golf industry get off its behind and do something to help itself. That’s why Weed wrote me an e-mail. He wanted to use me as a conduit to get his message to golf course superintendents and others.

By writing this column, it’s clear what I think of Weed and his ideas. He’s spot on. We *need* to listen to him. We *need* to be part of the solution. And we *need* to be excited like Weed that we’re part of the solution.

The world needs more people like Weed — specifically the golf world.

Aylward can be reached at larryward@questex.com.

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It has been a long, cold and wet winter here at the Lake Omigosh Golf Club in central Florida. Spring began arriving in late March with weekly rainstorms and cool snaps. I was out playing a quick nine holes before retreating to my office to work on my new book, “Doing Less with Less in a Globally Cooling Economy!”

Halfway through my round, I ran into our golf course superintendent Duffy McDuffy, who was setting cups, moving the tee markers and emptying trash cans, a job he inherited since he had to lay off several crew members due to budget cutbacks. When he saw me on the fifth hole, he came over to greet me like he does with most members.

“How are the greens rolling,” he asked? “Too fast for this old hacker,” I replied. He laughed and said, “Well, one thing is for sure about this cold weather, we can give you guys some fast greens.”

He said he would love to be mowing more grass instead of moving traffic-control ropes. Duffy also said, “Environmental stewardship aside, golf courses in Florida in March were meant to be green and not brown and gray. At least that’s what the snowbirds from up North tell me as they top their fairway shots off these tight lies.”

Given that our migrating snowbirds and the rest of their flock up North had endured record blizzards and flooding this past winter, you’d think just being able to be outside playing golf at all would be a plus. But I’ve found over the years as green chairman at Lake Omigosh that too often golfers have short-term memories and forget that Southern courses also had the worst winter in decades.

Bad weather and a bad economy are a one-two punch for most golf clubs these days. Frills need to be put on the shelf in favor of the basics, and Mother Nature will let the turfgrass know when it can grow again.

Members of Congress could learn from superintendents about how to cut spending and still get the job done and keep the customers reasonably satisfied. Of course, the customers also need to understand that there’s less money to spend for the extra flower beds, cart

Livin’ in the Real Golf World

BY JOEL JACKSON



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ABOUT HOW TO CUT

SPENDING AND STILL

GET THE JOB DONE

path edging and all those other things that are pretty but have nothing to do with playing the game.

By the way, all you golfers out there that like to carp about current course conditions, you need to remember that fixing ball marks, raking bunkers and filling divots is your responsibility — regardless of membership dues, greens fees or your Dunn & Bradstreet rating. It’s been part and parcel of the etiquette and traditions of golf, just like not talking during someone’s backswing or playing the away ball first.

Then there’s the club down the street where one official wants to cut expenses and another can’t understand why the course isn’t perfect every day. They both talk to the superintendent and tell them what they want, but they don’t talk to each other. The result is a frustrated superintendent who is caught in the middle. Good, clear communication is more critical now as “Golf Normal” is being redefined by factors often beyond the club’s control.

Being caught in the middle isn’t new to superintendents, but it’s an impossible position if the club’s leadership can’t even agree on a common goal, direction or maintenance standard that fits a facility’s current financial situation.

Superintendents can give a club a list of options based on the resources provided, but smaller crews, old equipment, and fewer fertilizer and chemical applications can’t produce the same results as before.

Those unwilling to adjust their demands into reasonable expectations under the circumstances are only destined to make life miserable for themselves and others.

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



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On Feb. 1, the first Kikuyu-grass Excellence Summit was held at Mission Viejo Country Club in Mission Viejo, Calif. More than 25 golf course superintendents attended the conference, led by Mission Viejo superintendent Kevin Hutchins, to discuss how to manage kikuyugrass in Southern California.

Kikuyugrass is a warm-season turfgrass species that's limited for the most part to Southern California. However, in parts of Latin America, Africa, South America and Australia, kikuyugrass is the predominant turfgrass species on golf courses. Given its limited use in the United States, information on how to manage it is sparse.

The superintendents shared their successes, failures and ideas on how to manage kikuyugrass turf at the summit. Pat Gross, director of the Southwest Region for the United States Golf Association's Green Section, served as the recorder at the event and logged many ideas and suggestions.

The point of this column isn't to talk about kikuyugrass management (even though it would be a lively topic), but how we've progressed as a profession. For more than 100 years, golf course superintendents have met either at monthly chapter meetings, conferences, lunch, happy hour or by phone to discuss problems or ideas for managing turf. This camaraderie is unique, given that some of the superintendents who share helpful information with each other are in direct competition.

But over the last few years, I've heard some superintendents mention that the personal exchange of suggestions and ideas has slowed — or in other words, superintendents aren't sharing as much information as they used to. I'm not sure if this is true or if the mechanism of communication has just changed.

As in the past, the unwillingness to share information often involves one's own insecurities or there's an employer/corporation restriction on information flow. But I think the reason is more likely that the means of communication is changing. A plethora of information is now available at one's fingertips

Using Every Means of Communication

BY KARL DANNEBERGER



A PLETHORA OF
INFORMATION IS
NOW AVAILABLE
AT ONE'S FINGER-
TIPS. SO IF YOU FIND
YOURSELF IN A JAM
THIS SUMMER, USE
YOUR RESOURCES

through Google and data bases such as the Turfgrass Information File (TGIF). However, not all turfgrass cures can be found online.

This past March, many of the golf courses in the Detroit area suffered severe winter injury. Several Detroit superintendents are experimenting with various practices to minimize winter injury that can't be found in a book or online, but only through personal interaction.

Increasingly, more interactive exchanges between superintendents online occur through e-mail list servers. For example, several central Ohio superintendents interacted online through an e-mail list server recently to discuss issues such as rainfall totals, and when and how much plant growth regulators to use for *Poa annua* seedhead control.

Social networks such as Facebook and Twitter will continue to grow in importance and relevance for superintendents to help them stay in touch with colleagues and get up-to-date information. Electronic communication provides an outlet to share immediate information when time is at a premium.

I'm not ready to throw personal interaction into the Dumpster. Voice reflection and body language provide a better feel or reliability of an answer to a question or in a discussion than a written answer.

So this summer, when growing turf becomes stressful, use every means of communication you can with your peers, including attending chapter meetings to help you through the period.

Nobody can maintain turf in a vacuum.

Karl Danneberger, Ph.D., Golfdom's science editor and a turfgrass professor from The Ohio State University, can be reached at danneberger.1@osu.edu.

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Anybody want *free* integrated pest management and best management practices documents? Yes, I did say *free*.

Our industry's sense of brotherhood is one of its most defining attributes. There aren't many businesses where you can call up your competition when you have a problem and ask for help in handling it. I'm pretty sure that Microsoft doesn't call up Apple when its people can't figure out a technical glitch. But with our industry, that's exactly what we do. We help each other in order to protect and advance our profession.

It's with this same sense of camaraderie that the sponsor-supported Web site www.GreenGolfUSA.com was launched, assisting superintendent in their efforts of environmental stewardship. The cornerstone of the program is the IPM and BMP generator tools, which enable anyone to create and print their own customized IPM program and BMP documentation — *free* of charge.

GreenGolfUSA.com is the culmination of a collaboration between EnviroLogic Resources, the Oregon Golf Course Superintendents Association, the Western Washington GCSA and the Northwest Turfgrass Association that began in 2006 to make these essential environmental tools available to superintendents at no expense.

Early in my environmental infancy, I attempted to write an IPM plan and BMP documents for a course I managed. When finished, quite frankly, they were rather useless and incomplete in several key areas. So I contracted out the project to "experts" to make sure the documents were both viable and complete.

I remember paying several thousand dollars for the 18-page document that, at the time, seemed to cover all the environmental bases. I also remember thinking that smaller-budget courses couldn't really afford access to these critically important guidelines for environmental stewardship.

It's nice to see times have changed.

Out of pure curiosity, and never being one to take things at face value, I went and registered with GreenGolfUSA.com so I could test-drive these online tools for myself and provide a

Get IPM and BMPs on Paper — for Free

BY CHRISTOPHER S. GRAY SR.



I APPLAUD THE
WE'RE-ALL-IN-THIS-
TOGETHER TYPE OF
MENTALITY SHOWN
BY THE GROUPS
INVOLVED WITH
THIS PROJECT

sort of a Consumer Reports-type of report you.

It took me less than two hours total to enter all of my course's information, which was incredibly detailed, but fairly easy to enter because of the format of drop-down menus and checking boxes that the program utilizes. The meticulous program walked me through each area asking for relevant information about the particular practices of my operation. Believe me, it missed nothing.

The areas covered included specific areas of maintained turf, natural and aquatic areas, cultural practices, specific types of pests present, action thresholds, pesticide-use specifications, all the way to detailed descriptions of the maintenance facility. When I finished, the Web site generated a PDF document of my customized plan and e-mailed it to me within minutes. The 30-plus page document is unbelievably comprehensive and just as good, if not better, than what I'm currently using. And it's *free*.

What's great is I can go back into the site, call up my program, and make changes in accordance with any conditions and practices that change within my operation. Then I can get a new PDF copy of my plans sent to me. And that's *free*, too.

I applaud the we're-all-in-this-together type of mentality shown by the groups involved with this project, especially the sponsors. It's refreshing to see them support a real-world project that has a direct impact on superintendents, regardless of their facility type and budget size, by offering tangible and needed results. From this superintendent, I say thank you.

By the way, it's *free*.

Gray Sr. is superintendent and general manager of Marvel Golf Club in Benton, Ky. His column specializes in environmental issues.