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It has been a record-setting miserably hot summer here at Lake Omigosh Golf Club in central Florida. Following the coldest, wettest winter in 50 years, golf course superintendent Duffy McDuffy says this year is turning out to be Mother Nature's way of saying, "I told you so!"

Amid abnormal weather patterns and a constantly shrinking maintenance budget, Duffy has been playing Russian roulette with his maintenance program while trying to stretch those dollars as much as possible. Delayed purchases of equipment, and canceled pre-emergent weed and insect-control applications are slowly but surely detracting from overall course conditioning.

The greens and tees are OK, and the fairways are respectable. The roughs have a few more weeds popping up than we're accustomed to seeing. Duffy is scrambling to spot-treat nematode and mole cricket hot spots since those preventive applications were cancelled.

But Duffy needed to give Lake Omigosh members a wakeup call, considering they've cut the equipment, labor, chemical and fertilizer line items. So Duffy showed them a spreadsheet comparing the current and past budgets. They get it now — you end up doing less with less.

However, a few vocal members have been criticizing Duffy's competence. They've forgotten what the course looked like before he got here, and how he overhauled the whole maintenance program. I've talked to a few of them, but they're totally clueless about what it takes to maintain a golf course, and say every explanation is an excuse.

I don't think Duffy will become a scapegoat, but folks are so bummed out by the economy and onerous political campaigns and shenanigans that they may take their frustrations out on something they think they can control, like the superintendent's employment. I know Duffy and his fellow superintendents must be walking on eggshells. It's up to the board members to stifle such talk and, if need be, accept the resignation of a few bad apples and not let the vocal minorities run the club.

But Duffy refuses to be a gloomy Gus; in

A Reality Check at Lake Omigosh GC

BY JOEL JACKSON



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fact he has tried to embrace the changes in his programs brought on by the fall off in club revenues. Using computer software, he has created slide shows that depict how certain out-of-play areas could be naturalized to eliminate irrigation, mowing and the need for regular weed control. They would still need some occasional maintenance, but he could save significant dollars.

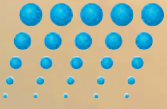
He also showed how we could improve perennial trouble spots on greens by selective tree pruning or even removal if necessary. He admitted some traditional cultural programs and mowing schedules had remained essentially unchanged over the years because they worked as is. But having been forced to cut labor, he saw many ways he could reduce the frequency, in some cases, without noticeably affecting playing conditions. He also told the board that new products were also helping to control many pest problems more effectively at lower rates and with fewer applications.

Duffy also made a point to show the general manager, club president and green chairman some of the articles in trade magazines that forecasted several years of slow economic recovery and the changing habits of the golfing public. He also made sure they were very aware of the increasing regulatory focus on overall water use and policies dealing with water quality and spray drift. These laws could further restrict how all golf courses are maintained, especially if they aren't based on sound and realistic science and research.

So long from Lake Omigosh, where the superintendent is learning how to adapt, the crew is praying for cooler weather, and the members are getting a reality check.

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

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More than 30 years of environmental research funded by the United States Golf Association, the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America and the U.S. Department of Agriculture, as well as state and regional turf organizations has determined that golf courses worldwide can have a positive impact on the environment. The story of environmental stewardship by those involved in golf is compelling and a great testament to those involved.

However, public perception does not always follow what is published scientifically or otherwise. In 2002, English golfers and non-golfers were surveyed about their perceptions of golf courses. They were asked the question, “Are golf courses good for the environment?” More than 80 percent of golfers said “yes,” while only about 30 percent of non-golfers said the same.

When asked about habitat preservation, golfers cited this as the most beneficial reason for golf courses — that courses preserve natural habitat. But non-golfers said golf courses were detrimental to habitat preservation and could destroy them.

In the United States, given that only one of 10 people plays golf, the industry is attempting to be perceived as more environmentally friendly by publicizing practices to help reduce inputs associated with green turf.

One of the first attempts to incorporate a more environmentally friendly aspect in the United States occurred with Golf Digest’s ranking of “America’s 100 Greatest Golf Courses 2009/2010.” The rankings are based on seven categories, one of which is course condition. Prior ratings asked panelists the question, “How would you rate the playing quality of the tees, fairways and greens on the day you last played the course?” However, the new question or definition for the panelists for the 2009/2010 rankings was, “How firm, fast and rolling were the fairways, and how firm, yet receptive, were the greens on the day you played the course?”

The intent of the definition change was to

From What I See, We Need Change

BY KARL DANNEBERGER



HOW ABOUT A
RULE STATING THAT
GREEN SPEED CAN'T
EXCEED 8 FEET?

encourage environmentally sound practices like water conservation by rewarding courses that don't overwater fairways and greens. It was also hoped the new definition would discourage golf courses from overseeding dormant bermudagrass in the winter.

When the rankings came out, Augusta National Golf Club moved from third in the previous rankings to first. But, as far as I know, Augusta National is still lush green and overseeds.

Actually, if the golf industry was serious about being perceived as more environmentally friendly — reducing water, chemicals, fertilizer, costs, etc. — it could start by inserting into the rules of golf (in the definitions section?) or maybe under local rules that green speed shouldn't exceed 8 feet, and tees and fairways should be adjusted accordingly.

Outside of regions where water is limited, the most important factor that drives cultural intensity is mowing height. But managing turf under low heights of cut is economically and environmentally costly — and risky. This rule addition would increase mowing heights substantially and reduce the premium put on achieving maximum green speed in an attempt to mimic conditions of major golf championships.

Before you think I am totally crazy, I must admit I really don't like my idea because it levels the playing surface and doesn't reward innovation or excellence. It would most likely promote mediocrity within the superintendent profession.

However, from what I saw from golf courses this year, and from watching the golf's major tournaments, something needs to change.

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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Hole of the Month

HOLE NO.

13

THE CLUB AT EAGLEBROOKE
▶ LAKELAND, FL

Thousands of vacationers flock to Central Florida each year for the magical theme parks, lush gardens and dazzling beaches. Many golf enthusiasts are drawn there for a different reason – a peaceful, oak-lined oasis known as The Club at Eaglebrooke. From the rolling fairways to the expertly manicured greens, it's easy to see why Golf Digest has named this vibrant course one of the "Best Places to Play" for the past nine years.

Designed by renowned course architect Ron Garl, Eaglebrooke plays host to Florida southern colleges Women's Division 2 Championship. Scenic lakes and Garl's signature beach bunkers make all 7,030 yards of Eaglebrooke both a challenge and a delight.

Take Hole #13, for instance. The water in front of an island fairway and trees to the right of the green make for beautiful scenery, but precision off the tee is necessary to position oneself for a tight approach shot.

Charged with caring for one of Florida's most acclaimed championship courses is Alan Puckett, Golf Course Superintendent at The Club at Eaglebrooke. To help maintain Eaglebrooke's sterling reputation, Puckett's crew uses Solitare® herbicide from FMC Professional Solutions on troublesome weeds like torpedograss, crabgrass, and signalgrass. "I used another product with some degree of success, but I have achieved much better results since starting to use Solitare," says Puckett.

And because Solitare delivers fast-acting, long-lasting control of multiple weeds in a single application, it has become a staple in Mr. Puckett's arsenal. "Solitare has been a great addition to our herbicide program, and we are looking to expand its use within our future spray plans." Puckett also uses other FMC products such as Dismiss® on several different weed varieties, helping to keep Eaglebrooke a standout attraction, even in beautiful Central Florida.



Alan Puckett, Golf Course Superintendent

HOLE STATS

Distance: 386 yards, Par 4



THE TURF

Greens: Tifdwarf Bermudagrass

Tees and Fairways:
GN-1 Bermudagrass



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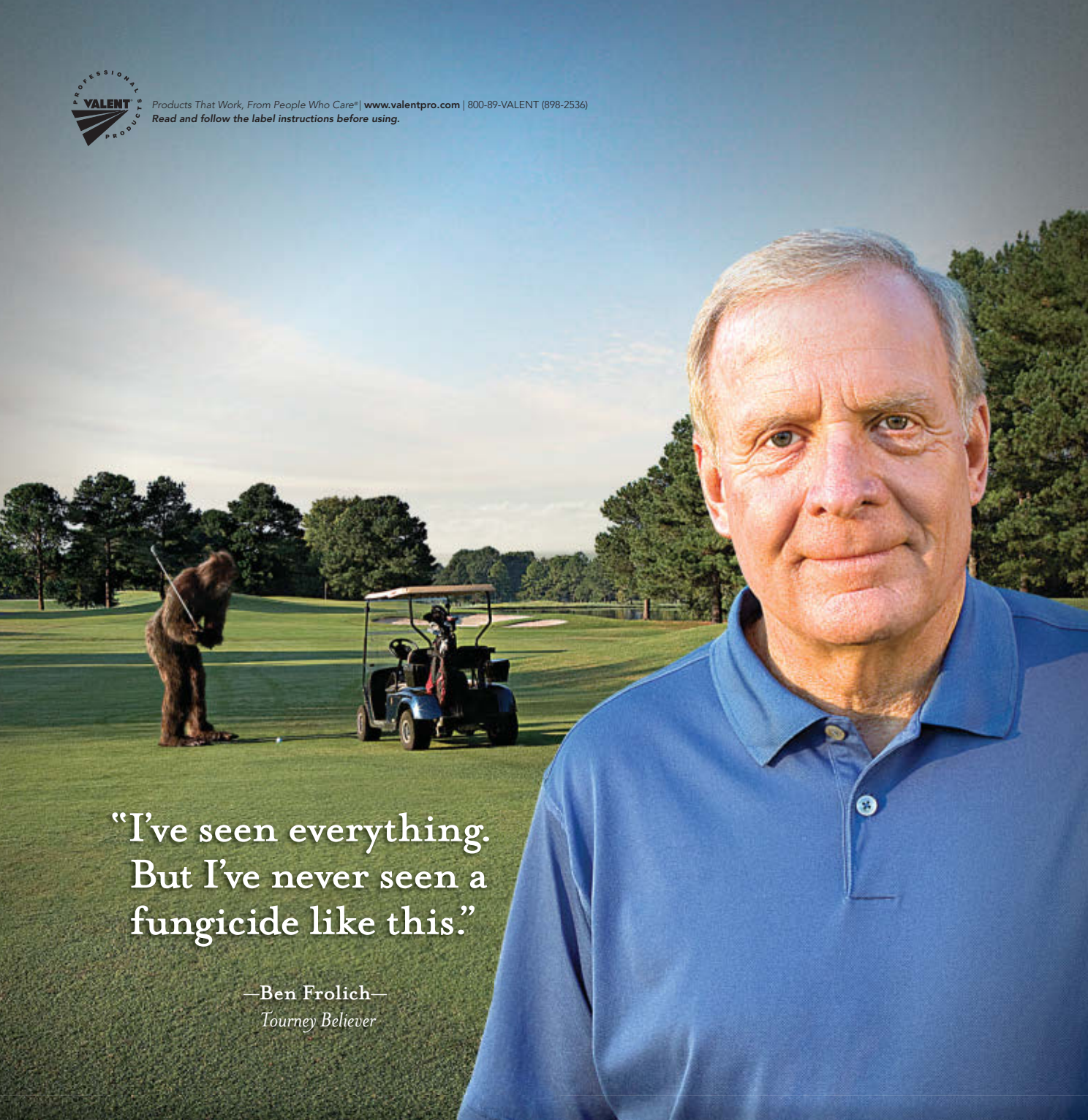


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WATER WISE [PART ONE]

SUPERINTENDENTS
REVEAL THAT THEY
FEEL UNDER MUCH
SCRUTINY FOR THEIR
WATER USE

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ABOUT THIS SERIES

Welcome to the third year of "Water Wise," our special series sponsored by Rain Bird and Aquatrols. As it was in the past two years, our goal in this three-part series, which runs through December, is to examine the fresh-water crisis while educating golf course superintendents and other industry personnel on several fronts of irrigation.

Part one, titled "Supers Under Scrutiny," examines what's behind the increased scrutiny of water use on golf courses and what golf course superintendents can do to quell the emotions of the scrutinizers.

Part two of the series will analyze how superintendents can be "green," as in environmental, and still provide golfers with green and healthy golf courses. Veteran superintendent Christopher S. Gray Sr. will offer superintendents tips on how to sustain healthy turfgrass without using too much water.

Part three looks at future government regulation of water use. What can superintendents expect in the next 10 years from lawmakers and regulators in regard to their use? California has already instituted a mandated 10-percent reduction of potable water use throughout the state by 2020. They say trends begin in California. Will that trend head east?

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A Call to Action

BY DEMIE MOORE

Let's face it, a lot of water is used on and around golf courses. So, in light of today's climate of concern over economic and environmental issues as well as growing concern about enough water for the future, it's not really surprising there's growing scrutiny of the water use on golf courses — by both supporters of the game and its detractors.



Regardless of whether the scrutinizers you face now or in the future have favorable or negative opinions toward golf's use of water, what's needed for productive discussion is accurate information and evidence of action. There's ample evidence that becoming defensive (about most anything) accomplishes little and can even make things worse. In contrast, defending one's position with objective information, solid evidence and consideration of the concern of the scrutinizers has the potential for further discussion and building new solutions.

As various groups become increasingly concerned and vocal about water use, superintendents must speak up by using information on the environmental and economic value of golf. They should also provide objective information about actual water-management practices in order to protect their courses' water rights and gain equal time and consideration from water regulators as water restrictions or conservation measures and mandates are being developed. The question is: How do you do this?

The first step is to make sure our own houses are in order, by showing a commitment to water and environmental stewardship through voluntarily implementing as many water conservation practices as possible — and integrating a focus on “as little as possible as efficiently as possible” into daily operations. With increased demands on water at many levels and no new readily available water sources, it just makes sense — practically and politically — to find ways to use less water. And it's good for not only your water image, but also for the agronomics of your course and your facility's budget.

Getting out the word about the commitment to

efficient water use at your facility is also important for showing that you share the concerns of state regulatory agencies and the general public — and are putting your concern into action. When you enhance your reputation as a conscious water-use expert and communicate that message internally and externally, you increase your chances of having an equal seat at the table when water policy discussions arise.

However, no matter how conscientious, proactive and objective you are about conserving water on your course and communicating that along with golf's positive impacts, golf courses are likely targets for criticism, particularly during periods of drought when neighbors are being cautioned or required to restrict water use, and they see (lots of) water continuing to be applied across your course. If enough complaints reach legislators, the legislators can't help but listen. And if the complainants' voices are louder and clearer than the golf industry's, chances of negotiating a fair deal on water regulations, or any other political mandates for that matter, are much lower. This is where working together is important and powerful.

Don't be afraid to ask for help. Solicit the involvement of your colleagues at your golf course and in the industry to develop a strategy for addressing negative perceptions. Again, objective information and evidence is vital, and good communication is the best tool you have for diffusing any problems that may arise with local governments or community members.

No one knows for sure what the future holds, but there's no time like the present to re-evaluate the water management and cultural practices on your golf course with the goal of being able to demonstrate responsible water use while providing quality playing conditions. ■

Moore is an Aquatrols' director, involved with corporate relations, education and training.

