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HAPPY FIVE-OH, Turfco

The company that brought the first topdresser to the industry celebrates its golden anniversary as a family and a team.

BY SETH JONES

IT MIGHT SEEM hard to imagine today, but 50 years ago, topdressing was done by a laborer armed with a shovel. He'd start off on one green and pitch sand all day until all 18 greens and a practice green had received a layer of sand.

By the 18th green, the consistency of topdressing was, well... lacking. And pity the laborer who worked at a 36-hole facility.

Enter the mechanical topdresser. The first mechanical topdresser — it had wooden slats and a wooden hopper — was shipped by Turfco on Sept. 29, 1961.

That topdresser was called the Mete-R-Matic, just like Turfco calls their topdresser series

today. But a lot has changed in 50 years. Turfco's patented Chevron belt promises consistent topdressing of all materials, both dry and wet. The company offers small walking topdressers to spinner topdressers all the way up to the big boy CR-10 fairway topdresser and its 4-cubic-yard hopper capacity.

But that doesn't mean the 1961 Mete-R-Matic, invented by superintendent Herb and Arthur Cohrs from Minneapolis Golf Club, is totally out of style.

"We still get calls for the old wooden machines wanting to know if we have replacement parts," laughs Scott Kinkead, executive vice president.

"That's our biggest problem," adds John Kinkead, 81 years young and the CEO of the company. "They last too long!"

The warranty pool

Turfco Manufacturing (Blaine, Minn) is a family-owned and operated company. John Kinkead's father, Robert Stanard Kinkead, founded National Mower in 1919. John, who is now mostly retired, jokes that he recalls getting involved in the family business "somewhere around age two." His two sons, George, president and Scott, executive vice president, have been working with the company 26 and 20 years, respectively.

"Family companies can

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"The people in the golf business are a pretty good crew of guys. It's not like you're in the junk business," says John Kinkead, CEO of Turfco, left. "They like what they're doing or they wouldn't be doing it."

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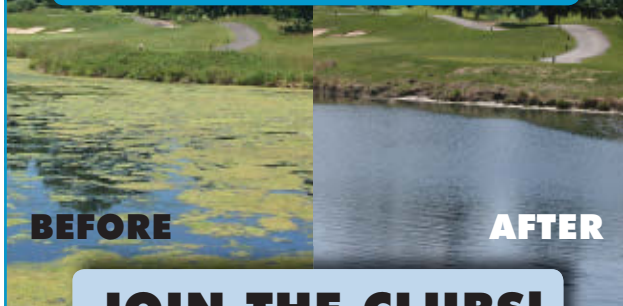
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Matt Ceplo, Superintendent, Rockland Country Club, Sparkill, NY

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Michael J. Rohwer, Superintendent, Shadowridge Country Club, Vista, CA

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Gonzalo Vargas, Coco Beach Golf Resort, Rio Grande, Puerto Rico

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Bob Gibson, Snow Creek Golf Course, Mammoth Lakes, CA

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Phillip J. White, Crofton Country Club, Crofton, MD

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Fifty and Fabulous



Continued from page 32

be the worst thing in the world or the best thing,” Scott Kinkead says. “We’re fortunate, John’s been great. He may be even more hands-off than we want him to be. My brother and I get along great, so it’s enjoyable. We’ve both made a commitment to get out there in the field to help superintendents problem solve. I don’t think I’d be here for 20 years if it wasn’t a fun job.”

The family atmosphere transforms into a team atmosphere from the front office to the shop on the backside of the building. That’s because employees at the facility are focused on making machines that won’t break down. The better the machines, the better the employees’ bank accounts.

Every year the company establishes what they call “the warranty pool.” The pool is a large amount of money dedicated to repairing equipment still under the company’s three-year warranty.

At the end of each year, the money that isn’t spent from the warranty pool gets distributed to the staff in the factory. So the fewer machines that are returned for service, the bigger the warranty pool check for each factory worker.

“That check can be pretty substantial,” Scott Kinkead says. “Like John always says, those are the best checks we write every year.”

Most of Turfco’s product line is built on-site, with the exception of parts they buy from the outside, like engines, tires and rubber grips. And don’t let the phrase “family-owned and operated” fool you, the company uses the latest in CNC equipment, plasma cutters and robotic welders.

“Quality is important – superintendents expect this equipment to last,” Scott Kinkead says.



The first powered topdresser in the industry was sold by Turfco. This Mete-R-Matic was bought by Christina Lakes Golf Course near Grand Forks, British Columbia, in 1962.



“The fun part is getting the superintendents engaged,” Scott Kinkead says. “They tell us, ‘Hey, you could make my life so much easier if your equipment could just do this.’”

Easier, efficient equipment

Scott Kinkead takes a stroll through the factory and greets employees as he sees them. He used to work here in the summers when he was in high school and college. He even worked one year in the factory after college – not something he planned on doing with his shiny new economics degree.

“I’ve been here for 20 years now,” he says. “John said, ‘We just need help for a few years.’”

“The golf and lawn care industry are great industries. You see a lot of people who get into it never leave,” he says. “There are probably easier ways to make money. (Superintendents) have got to love what they’re doing. It’s a lot of fun working with guys who love their jobs.”

John Kinkead says they didn’t realize it at the time, but the superintendents with the wooden topdressers 50 years ago had it easier because expectations at their golf courses were lower.

“This industry, like all industries, has changed a lot,” he says. “My father said the toughest and the most gambling guys in

the world are the farmers because they only ‘get’ one out of three. Now, the superintendents better not get one out of three! But they’re still working with the weather and grass. You can lose a green in a day, so they’ve got to be there.”

What it all comes down to for the company is the desire to help people do their jobs better.

“The fun part is getting the superintendents engaged,” Scott Kinkead says. “... We enjoy working with superintendents to make their jobs easier and more efficient.”

Now, if they could just do like John asks, and stop making the equipment last so darn long. ■

50 Anniversary Giveaway

In honor of their 50th anniversary, Turfco is giving away ball mark repair tools, 10 Apple iPads and a grand prize of a WideSpin 1540 EC. To enter the drawings, visit www.turfco.com/50years.

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Worth More than Money

What is it that really inspires employees?
You might be surprised that oftentimes, recognition
is worth its weight in gold. BY STEVEN TINGLE

It's 5:45 a.m. and Mark Rogers is waiting in line. He's impatient. There's a lot to do. He needs to get going. Rogers is the superintendent at the Grove Park Inn Resort in Asheville, N.C. He's fairly new to the job, coming in November from a private club one county over. His plate is full. He's got a crew of 17, a tight budget, a corporate command chain and a 7-year-old daughter. He's got members and outings to keep happy, not to mention the hundreds of resort guests, many of whom have dropped a buck-forty to play the course. But it's all about priorities, so he waits.

When it's finally his turn Rogers pulls forward, rolls down the window and yells, "18 sausage biscuits please."

Like most superintendents these days, Rogers' budget and

staffing has been cut and he and his crew are being asked to do more with less. "Bringing the guys biscuits once a week is a little thing," Rogers tells me later that day, "but the little things make a difference. It goes a long way in keeping my staff happy." Continuing with the "through the stomach" approach, Rogers recently used his "early order program" points to acquire a grill for the shop. "We cook out on Fridays," Rogers says. "It's something the guys look forward to. It keeps them motivated."

As a former certified golf course superintendent, I found motivating staff a constant challenge. My maintenance crew ran the gamut from a fairway-mowing Archie Bunker to a guy who looked, and acted, like a roadie for the Doobie Brothers. How do you consistently motivate such a diverse crew? It's got

to be money, right?

But in report after report money falls surprisingly short of praise, status and freedom in motivation effectiveness. Money may talk the talk but when it comes to morale, emotional needs are much more important. For example, recent studies by executive coach David Rock and neuroscientist Jeffrey Schwartz found autonomy to be a highly effective motivator. Employees who perceive they are making their own decisions without someone constantly looking over their shoulder feel more in control of their jobs and in turn more motivated to do them well.

One superintendent at a private course I'm not allowed to name — it stays on the radar by consistently flying under it — puts each maintenance employee in charge of three holes. Each maintenance employee, therefore, hand-mows the three greens and tees, rakes the bunkers, weed-eats the creek banks, edges the cart paths along his or her holes and so on.

From tee to green those three holes belong to that employee, and it's the employee's responsibility

to take proper care. In return, the employees get autonomy and a feeling of ownership; the superintendent gets quality work and low turnover from a proud and motivated staff.

The power of recognition

Recognition is another powerful motivator. Consistent praise for a job well done enhances an employee's perception of status and has a lasting positive effect. From a simple pat on the back to a "way to go," praise increases morale and builds respect.

Jim Alwine, superintendent at Stockton Golf and Country Club in Stockton, Calif., takes the "fist pump" approach to praise.

"I learned it from a guy named Mickey when I was at Morris Park," Alwine says. "When Mickey rode by on his mower he would pump his fist in the air or give you a thumb's-up. It was his way of saying 'good job.' I've used it at every course I've worked at since."

At first his current staff thought he was crazy, but now they all do it. They're a team and they show their support for one another. "It does have a downside though," Alwine admits. Recent damage to a John

Deere 3245C was caused by an overly enthusias-

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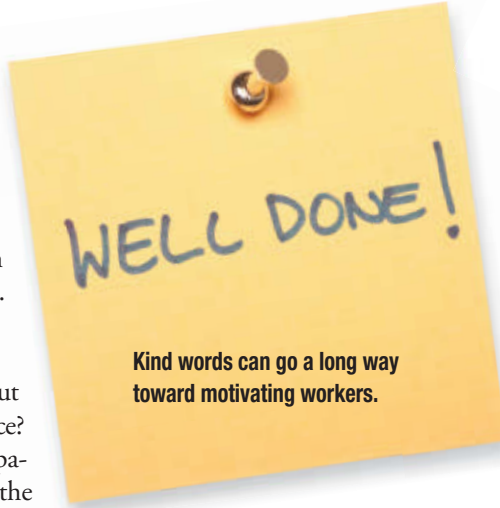
A simple fist pump can improve morale.

Dollars and Biscuits

Continued from page 37
tic fist-pumping operator and an unfortunately placed pecan tree.

The daily huddle

So how does a superintendent put personal motivators into practice? Take a trick Fortune 500 companies have used for years called the



“daily huddle.” A 15-minute meeting each morning, the “daily huddle” gives managers an opportunity to take the pulse of their staffs and start conversations.

It’s the perfect time to share news, ask for input and offer kudos. Most superintendents meet with their staffs each morning to assign the day’s work, but unfortunately it’s often more monologue than dialogue. The huddle should be one part oration and three parts discussion:

“Archie, how’s Edith? I want you to supervise the walk bridge project on 15, any ideas? Doobie Brother, nice job with those creek banks last week. I told a group of members yesterday you were a hard worker. Keep it up.”

Simple, effective people skills.

Proud to be the first to ever quote Mary Kay, the pink Cadillac makeup magnate, in a golf trade magazine, I’ll let her sum up the art of motivation in one simple line: “Everyone has an invisible sign hanging from their neck saying, ‘Make me feel important.’”

Whether your staff members are selling makeup, washing dishes or cutting grass, give them some freedom and ownership in their work and make them feel important, needed and part of the process.

A paycheck elevates our bank accounts, but praise, independence and value elevate our sense of self worth, and that’s really what drives us.

Well, that and biscuits. ■

Steven Tingle is a former certified superintendent, general manager and golf pro. Now a consultant, Tingle owns and operates Golf Efficiency Experts Inc., based in Asheville, N.C. He can be reached at tingle@steventingle.com.

The author, Steven Tingle, an efficiency consultant, says to give employees ownership of their work to make them feel important.



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■ TIMELY TURF ADVICE



→ Localized Dry Spots – A Sure Sign of Summer

Doug Karcher is an associate professor of turfgrass science at the University of Arkansas. Research on localized dry spots, wetting agents and putting green rootzone moisture distribution has been an emphasis of Karcher's research program. Doug shares his experience managing localized dry spots.

Q Let's start with a tough situation. Localized dry spots are just starting to show up now on the greens and the superintendent hasn't applied a wetting agent all season. What now? My experience has shown that many commonly used wetting agents, like Revolution, Cascade and TriCure (and several others), that are labeled for preventive management of localized dry spots are also effective for curative management of localized dry spots. If localized dry spots are starting to be a problem, apply a wetting agent now and it will help.

Q Is phytotoxicity a concern with summer application of wetting agents? Definitely. Precautions and common sense need to prevail when applying wetting agents in summer. Apply the wetting agent in 2 gallons of water per 1,000 square feet, water in the wetting agent immediately after application and apply the wetting agent in the early morning hours when temperatures are cooler.

Q What does your research show about preventive use of wetting agents? Preventive use of wetting

agents is an effective strategy. In Arkansas, we suggest the first wetting agent application be made in late April or early May and continue throughout the summer until cooler temperatures arrive in September. Each product has specific directions.

Q I know you've spent much time and effort trying to get a handle on soil moisture distribution within the putting green rootzone. What impact do wetting agents have on soil moisture distribution? Wetting agents are great at increasing the uniformity of soil moisture distribution both vertically and horizontally in the rootzone. The benefit of this is the interval between irrigations can be increased because the green is drying out more uniformly and there are fewer hot spots. Increasing the intervals leads to a drier playing surface, healthier turf and better conditions.

Q What causes local dry spots to develop? Sand particles are coated with organic acids. The organic acids have a hydrophobic end. The first time the rootzone dries out, the hydrophobic ends of all the organic acid molecules orient outward toward the pore spaces. This creates a hydrophobic area that we see as a localized dry spot. The sources of the organic acids are likely a combination of root exudates, basidiomycetes in the rootzone, organic compounds washed off the leaves and decomposition of thatch.

Q Are there products that will "strip" the organic acids off the sand particles? Products have been developed that make that claim, but to date I have not seen any research that fully supports it. The concept is good; the products need more development before I can recommend them. We're currently conducting research with such products.

Q How does soil moisture management increase or decrease the incidence of localized dry spots? The current hypothesis is that localized dry spots appear when the soil moisture falls below a critical threshold level. Keeping the soil moisture content of the rootzone above that critical level will prevent their appearance.

The threshold moisture level varies from course to course and in some cases, green to green. The critical soil moisture level depends on many factors including the particle size distribution of the sand in the rootzone, the age of the green and the organic matter content of the green.

Q Anything else that you want to share? Two observations that intrigue me but I can't explain: The first is that I consistently see fewer localized dry spots on research greens that are treated with Primo prior to the start of the dry weather of summer. The second is that greens that are underfertilized with nitrogen have more localized dry spots than greens that receive a sufficient amount of nitrogen. Explaining these will keep me busy for a while. ■

Clark Throssell, Ph.D., loves to talk turf. He can be reached at clarkthrossell@bresnan.net.