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JACOBSEN

A: Here in the southwestern United States, where I live, I've just proven a theory that the industry has been struggling with for a few years, and that is, "Brown is not the new green."

Let's go back several years when a high-ranking industry official commented to the media that "Brown is the new green." I believe his intent was to support sustainable environmental practices on golf courses, which all superintendents do, but the comment was interpreted wrong and naturally the media latched onto it and took it to another unintended level. This comment made quite a stir in the golf industry at the time and eventually the interpretation of the words was changed to "Firm and Fast."

I had totally forgotten about this phrase until the other day, when I was flying from Phoenix to San Diego on Southwest Airlines. I never read the airline magazine in the pouch in front of me, but I didn't have my iPod and had nothing else to read. So, I reached down and pulled out the airline's *Spirit* magazine and began flipping through it. Lo and behold on page 71 there was an interesting article about Pinehurst. As I was reading it, I turned the page a couple of times. Then, on page 75, there it was at the top right corner of the page: "Brown is the new green." The author called it the catchphrase of the USGA.

I was fortunate enough to be involved in working very closely with my friends at the USGA in prepping for the 2008 United States Open Golf Championship, and the concept of "Firm and Fast" is what we strived for and accomplished. It truly was a team effort, and the golf course (Torrey Pines) was far from being brown.

Now back to the southwestern United States. During September and into October most superintendents there (and throughout the South) are busy overseeding their golf courses with winter ryegrasses and other cool-season turf varieties, prepping for the region's peak golf season.

Typically, one of the main steps in the overseeding process is to scalp the leaf blade off the summer turf and take it down to the stubble prior to seeding. Guess what happens? It turns everything brown. Most golf courses close for

Q: Was Brown Ever the New Green?

BY MARK WOODWARD, CGCS



MOST MEMBERS

AT COUNTRY CLUBS

THAT I'M FAMILIAR

WITH WOULDN'T

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BEING BROWN. YET

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a short period of time while they complete the overseeding process for two reasons: 1) They don't want golfers getting wet as they run the irrigation germinating the grass seeds and 2) Golfers don't like to play on brown turf.

The odd thing about growing turfgrass in some southern states is that cool-season grasses are grown for close to nine months while warm-season grasses are only grown for three months. To the layperson, this may seem counterintuitive, but we do it because golfers want to play golf on nice, green turf.

On top of this, most members at country clubs I'm familiar with wouldn't tolerate brown turf. Yet just last month, I saw that the phrase "brown is the new green" is still being thrown about in discussions.

How many thousands of people who fly Southwest Airlines read the same article I did? It doesn't matter if they're golfers or not, it seems to me that we need to get this phrase out of our vocabulary and take every opportunity to correct people when it is used. It's obvious the phrase is easily misinterpreted, and I personally don't think it does the industry any good.

When I was with the GCSAA, we talked a lot about how superintendents manage all of their resources responsibly with the thought of continuously improving to make golf courses sustainable businesses. Under normal circumstances, golf courses do not need to be brown. Facilities should focus on playability and being good stewards of the environment.

So in my view, "Brown is still not the new green."

Mark Woodward is president of Mark Woodward and Associates, principal of DaMarCo Golf, CEO of MasterStep Golf Management Group and a contributing editor for Golfdom.

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P R O V E N S O L U T I O N S

Autumn is the time of year when northern superintendents check snow tarp inventories and their southern cousins watch for signs of migrating snowbird flocks.

The circle of golf course maintenance life rolls on, and it's always unpredictable.

Up North, folks are breaking out the Ouija boards and *Farmer's Almanacs*, trying to figure out when to drain the irrigation lines and put the system to bed, as well as the best time to drag out the tarps and position them while accommodating late-season golfers to keep revenue flowing in.

Down South, it's time to wrap up the renovation cycles and stop aerifying, verticutting and topdressing. It's time to start grooming the putting surfaces so the snowbirds won't be too disappointed they're putting on bermudagrass instead of bentgrass.

Bill Davidson, CGCS, superintendent at the Country Club of Naples, calls his summer/fall renovation time "The Hundred Day War." It's an appropriate name for the three deep-tine aerifying and verticutting regimen he puts in place every June, July and August to control thatch on bermudagrass.

Once the irrigation systems on courses in the Snow Belt are put to bed for the winter, it's time to rehab, repair and repaint the equipment inventories. It's a nice break for the rolling stock as the equipment gets new parts and an annual facelift. That's one leg up the northern courses have on courses in the South, where equipment is on the go all year long.

I wish golfers understood that difference when they review capital equipment budgets and try to understand why equipment is replaced more frequently in the Sun Belt. There's a logical reason: Courses in the Sun Belt are in use year-round, while courses elsewhere see six months of use.

To a certain extent, I have always envied the northern superintendent who could "take a break" from the hustle and bustle of the daily routine during the winter grass-growing hiatus. I know extreme weather can be a concern in all regions of the country. But it seems that in the

Fall Season Greetings

BY JOEL JACKSON



I'VE ALWAYS ENVIED
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DAILY ROUTINE
IN WINTER.

heart of a "routine" winter, the folks from the Snow Belt I see at conferences aren't usually the ones talking on their phones during breaks.

I can always tell when fall is approaching, not by shorter days or falling leaves, but by the presidents' messages appearing in the chapter newsletters I receive when swapping publications with fellow editors throughout the country. Beginning in September or October, and as late as November, the messages read something like: "Thank God, the golf season is almost over."

For us down South, however, after a hot, miserable summer of projects and renovations, the golf season begins to crank up. But, as I have gradually learned, the ebb and flow of year-round golf operations had its origins in the stop-and-start routines up North, where die-hard golfers wanted to delay fall closing dates and pushed for earlier spring opening dates.

I'm sure fighting those political-agricultural battles was not easy in those times. And no doubt there were other challenges, such as tree trimming and snow management projects during the winter. However, those one-, two- or three-month breaks in routine sure sounded tempting to a Floridian such as me.

Seasonal changes remind me that superintendents and golf courses throughout the country are unique in their own ways and similar in others. It's those similarities that bind us together and those differences that allow us to share and learn from each other — so we can be better stewards of our properties and of our clubs' financial resources.

Until next time, fellow sodbusters, keep the green side up — or covered up, depending on where you are.

Certified superintendent Joel Jackson is Executive Director of the Florida GCSA.

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Traveling to the Idaho Golf Course Superintendents Association meeting in Salmon, Idaho, last month was enjoyable because of the attendees and scenery, as well as the time I

spent with David Kopec, Ph.D., from the University of Arizona. The three-hour journey from Missoula, Mont., to Salmon followed a portion of the trail traversed by Lewis and Clark.

The beautiful but sometimes smokey trip, thanks to a forest fire burning close by, provided a picturesque backdrop for our nonsensical conversation. For a brief moment, our discussion became more circumspect.

The question was raised: “What would you consider to be the most significant piece of published research that has contributed to a better understanding of turf in the past 10 or 20 years?”

We agreed on the paper “Instability of the Greens-Type Phenotype in *Poa annua* L.” by Jonathan M. La Mantia and David R. Huff of Penn State University, published in *Crop Science* in 2011.

Now, everyone has biases when faced with such a question, and the assumption is made we keep up with current literature. Additionally, Dr. Kopec and I don’t always agree, so to come to an agreement, we focused on something we both have spent our careers trying to kill or manage, *Poa annua*.

I haven’t documented the number, but it would be reasonable to think that since the first golf ball was struck at St. Andrews, the most discussed and written agronomic topic is *Poa annua*.

Regardless of what continent you’re on — and *Poa annua* has been found on all seven of them — you’ve faced the decision to control or manage it.

But there’s one question that has never been thoroughly explained, and that is: How does *Poa annua* evolve from an annual type that initially invades a creeping bentgrass putting green to one that exhibits perennial type characteristics?

The reason for the rise in perennial types has been speculated on for decades. Environmental

The Evolution of *Poa Annua*

BY KARL DANNEBERGER



“HOW DOES *POA ANNUA* EVOLVE FROM AN ANNUAL TYPE THAT INITIALLY INVADES A CREEPING BENTGRASS PUTTING GREEN TO ONE THAT EXHIBITS PERENNIAL TYPE CHARACTERISTICS?”

causes and cultural practices are believed to be the primary reasons for the change from annual to perennial biotypes.

To better understand the perennial nature of *Poa annua* on greens, La Mantia and Huff characterized the annual and perennial type of phenotypes in their *Poa* collection. Focusing on inflorescence differences, they found that the subsequent progeny didn’t follow expected Mendelian ratios that would be expected with single gene characteristics when crossing green type by annual type.

Furthermore, when green types by green type *Poa annua* crosses were conducted, subsequent generations past the first generation resulted in annual type of *Poa annua* progeny.

Thus, the green type or perennial *Poa annua* is unstable, meaning the perennial type of *Poa annua* found on greens will revert back to annual types. The authors hypothesized that that’s because close mowing induces an epigenetic effect on gene regulation.

This means that the functionality of the DNA might be affected (in this case by mowing), resulting in perennial biotypes. However, the underlying DNA, or the genetics, isn’t changed. As long as the mowing stress is present, *Poa annua* on greens will tend to exhibit the perennial traits. But once mowing is removed, it eventually reverts to an annual.

It’s fascinating stuff.

Entering the town of Salmon, we began to discuss other important research. But our attention shifted to a yellow 1963 Dodge Power Wagon that was for sale along the road.

I guess discussing research will have to wait for a future road trip.

Karl Danneberger, Ph.D., is Golfdom’s science editor and a professor at The Ohio State University.



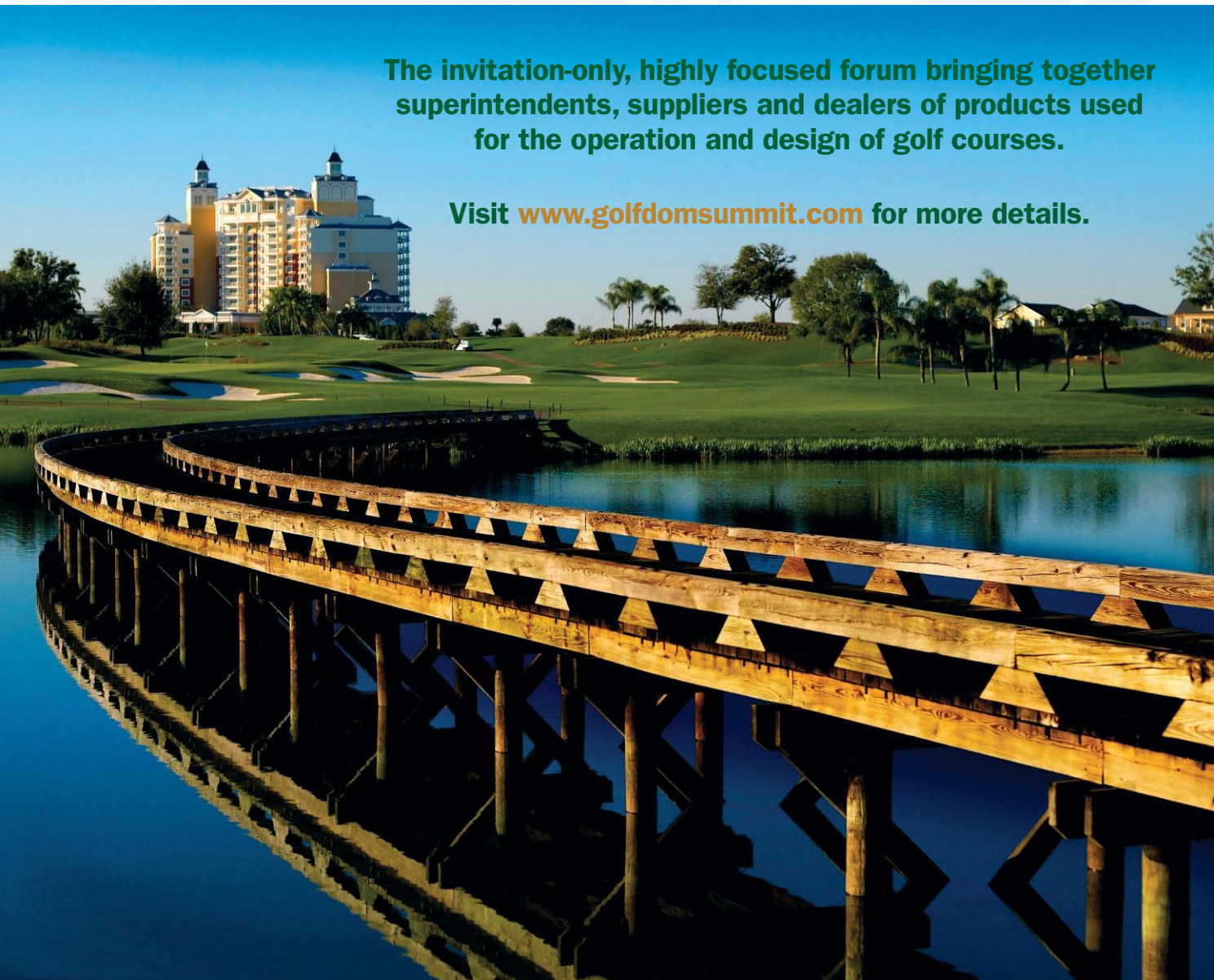
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SG EXPRESS STREAMLINES CUSTOMER SERVICE

IT'S ABOUT A 3 IRON from the front door of the Standard Golf Company offices to the far end of the factory. Lying in-between are typical office things like cubicles, computers and pictures of smiling family members posted up on bulletin boards. Past those are typical factory things, like endless rows of shelving units, forklifts zipping down aisles of branded boxes, sparks flying off welders and a line of metal objects disappearing into a misty cloud of powder coating paint.

There are no off-limit areas in the entire complex. The office door of President Peter Voorhees is wide open at all times. Pass the office of the product development manager and you'll see him fiddling with the "next big thing," making no effort whatsoever to hide his latest course-changing product. Enter the art department and watch the art director working on custom flags for an upcoming charity event in Destin, Fla., or maybe Boulder, Colo.

Indeed, it all looks pretty cutting-edge, just

like the facilities of a leading golf course accessories provider should. At least until you cross into the customer service department. That's when your eyebrows rise a bit. You begin to wonder: Why is it here? Not in the sense that it's on the west side of the building when it should be on the east side. Rather, why is it in the building at all?

It's the 21st century, the age of e-commerce sites and overseas call centers. So how is it that an innovative company like Standard Golf has real customer service professionals taking calls, when they could easily pass those duties along to an international call center? It all seems pretty old-fashioned. And that's the point.

Standard Golf has paired a cutting-edge e-commerce site with SG Express — a personalized customer service program that provides live support via phone and online. According to Marketing Director Jim Nygren, SG Express representatives are the missing link in modern customer service.

"We believe when it comes to service, you can't put a price on people and experience," Nygren said. "And that's the principal reason for SG Express. Basically, it's real people, real service. We have experienced professionals ready to take calls, fill orders, answer questions and immediately address the customer's needs. It's a great way to streamline communication between us, our distributors and our customers."

Nearly a decade has gone toward the development of SG Express. While many companies began emphasizing more cost-effective models of customer service, many times at the expense of the ser-

vice part, the focus at Standard Golf became how to better support distributors and meet the needs of customers. The company decided it was willing to invest in real people, if it enabled them to streamline communications and speed up delivery times.

Here's how SG Express works: Customers can call either their preferred distributor or SG Express to place an order. When they call SG Express, Standard Golf ships the product straight to the customer and awards the sale to their preferred distributor. For custom items, the Standard Golf art department works one-on-one with the customer, and again, the sale is awarded to their pre-

"SG EXPRESS IS A GREAT WAY TO STREAMLINE COMMUNICATION BETWEEN US, OUR DISTRIBUTORS AND OUR CUSTOMERS."

— Jim Nygren, director of marketing at Standard Golf

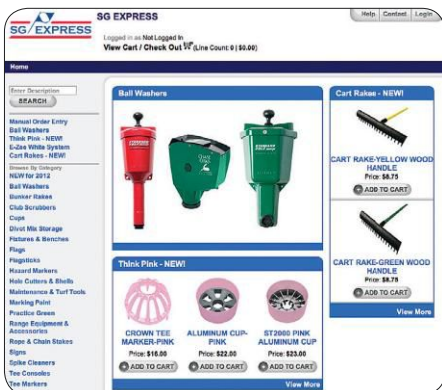




LONGTIME VETERANS JOANIE CHRISTENSEN AND BONNIE MENNENGA are considered not just the face, but also the drivers of SG Express, a highly successful order support system for distributors and superintendents alike.



FAST. EFFICIENT. SEAMLESS. The SG Express System streamlines fulfillment, particularly for specially branded products that generally require more time, details and touchpoints throughout the process.



SG EXPRESS SCREEN SHOT. Customers also get timely reminders on seasonal or repeat purchase items, which eliminates last minute rushes and extra costs.

ferred distributor.

Providing that one-on-one support are people like Joanie Christensen and Bonnie Mennenga. Nygren calls them “the backbone of SG Express,” and when you speak with either of them, you quickly realize why SG Express works. There’s warmth in their voices that automated systems or overseas call centers simply cannot match.

Christensen, an SG Express administrator who has been with the company 16 years, says SG Express is particularly helpful for customized product orders.

“SG Express eliminates the need for distributors to relay messages and art files between the customer and our art directors,” Christensen said. “The customer can now work one-on-one with our people, which really streamlines the process for everyone.”

Mennenga, an SG Express order specialist who’s been with the company eight years, echoed Christensen’s point, saying SG Express benefits everyone involved.

“It’s a win-win-win, there’s no doubt about it,” Mennenga said. “The customer gets a great product in a timely manner, the distributor gets credit for the sale, and Standard Golf gets another happy customer and distributor.”

According to Nygren, SG Express has allowed

Standard Golf distributors to become more efficient with their inventory holdings. Distributors can carry the products their customers are most likely to order, and refer them to SG Express for custom items and other products.

“It’s changed how many of our distributors execute their business,” Nygren said. “They no longer have to stock products just in case a customer places an order for it. Now they can focus on carrying only the products they know their customers are going to order. For everything else, they can refer them to SG Express. It makes our distributors leaner, more efficient and ultimately more profitable.”

Superintendents can utilize SG Express by calling 866-743-9773 or accessing *SG Express ONLINE* by clicking the SG Express logo on the company’s updated home page at www.standardgolf.com. Nygren said the program also alerts users about special offers and new products before they’re even announced or advertised.

“Our hope is that those who use SG Express for the first time realize it’s reflective of our culture as a company,” Nygren said. “Being responsive and helpful is in the DNA of Standard Golf, and it’s the kind of approach that has made our company successful over the last 102 years.”



**YOU'VE GOT
QUESTIONS**

*By Seth Jones,
Beth Geraci,
Steven Tingle,
John Walsh &
Anthony Williams*

**WE'VE GOT
ANSWERS**

Our staff takes on
the industry's most
enticing questions.