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### ABOUT THE COVER

Holiday artist Jen Samerdyke has captured the fun of the Christmas season with this issue's cover, The Golf Course Christmas Tree. It is a Christmas card from those of us involved with The Grass Roots to all of our faithful readers.

"It is a good thing to observe Christmas Day. The mere marking of times and seasons,

*when men agree to stop work and make merry together, is a wise and wholesome custom. It reminds a man to set his own little watch, now and then, by the great clock of humanity, which runs on sun time."*

- Dr. Henry Van Dyke

## THE GRASS ROOTS

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# Changing Times

By David Brandenburg, Golf Course Superintendent, Rolling Meadows Golf Course

I have been at Rolling Meadows for six full golf seasons and the honeymoon period is definitely over as things change. I still enjoy what I do, and coming to work every day, but things have changed. The honeymoon officially ended last fall when I proposed some fee increases that did not go over too well with the season passholders. It was not what you would call a riot, but women cried and men anguished in loud voices.



As an enterprise fund, our goal at Rolling Meadows is to break even financially while providing good playing conditions. We have a small agronomic budget to begin with for 27 holes, so when the expenses increase the golfers fees have to increase. It was a disappointing time and I did receive some personal attacks from golfers I thought respected my work. In looking back, you learn who your supporters are from tough times.

Unfortunately, the rate increase was not enough; like many courses our rounds played decreased, and we will run a deficit this year. For me a deficit means extra public relations work to keep the county board members informed and comfortable with our operation. It also means extra work communicating to customers and staff. In the big picture, one deficit does not a disaster make and we have had a proven record of success, but I need to convey that message to the board and golfers.

A deficit also means budget cuts for next year as we come up with ways to make up lost ground. It is hard to cut labor because labor relates to course quality and customer satisfaction. Large cuts I made were to course repair projects, capital equipment and we will leave our second assistant position vacant for a second year. Cuts like these can only be made for the short term. Equipment wears out and annual improvements to the course are expected by the customers.

Golf is changing rapidly, changing as the game of golf becomes the business of golf. Changing, as we experience an economic and weather slump. Marketing is becoming more important as courses are running deals and specials all the time. For Rolling Meadows, we have a great layout, good conditions and the best "regular" prices around. However, with everyone else advertising deals we need to advertise more to keep up. What a waste of money that is. That 1976 Greensking II will need to last a couple more years because the money is going toward advertising.

I am not complaining so much as letting others know they are not alone as many courses are facing cuts and

staff layoffs. I wish I or the WGCSA Board had an answer or simple fix but this problem is bigger than we are. For the meantime, we can do a few things to help our courses and staffs get through this, besides praying for El Nino to bring an early spring.

Keep communicating with your staff, boards and golfers. Be clear but courteous when saying what cuts to staff or purchases will mean to the course conditions. Work as a team with your board and crew. As managers, we are looked at to lead, so give your board or ownership input into what can be done and what should not be done. As important as communicating with the board is staff input on what changes can be made to least affect them and the golfing experience. Until things improve, adapt and proceed the best you can with the skills God gave you.

The GCSAA Conference and Show in Atlanta is around the corner. Although budgets are tight, it is a great educational opportunity to better yourself and the golf course. If your club pays the way or you are trying to get them to, it is a good investment in the club's future. There is no other place to meet all our vendors and learn about educational topics from green speed to budgeting. Many of the nation's top professors and researchers are there to answer your questions.

If you're not so lucky to have your club pay the way, it is still a good investment in your future as a superintendent. This year we are lucky; the show is a one day drive away, so you can car pool and save some airfare. You may think that is easy for me to say, but for the second year in a row I will be paying my own way. Last year out-of-state travel was not allowed by my employer and this year I hope to go to another conference in spring. I cannot ask twice to leave the state.

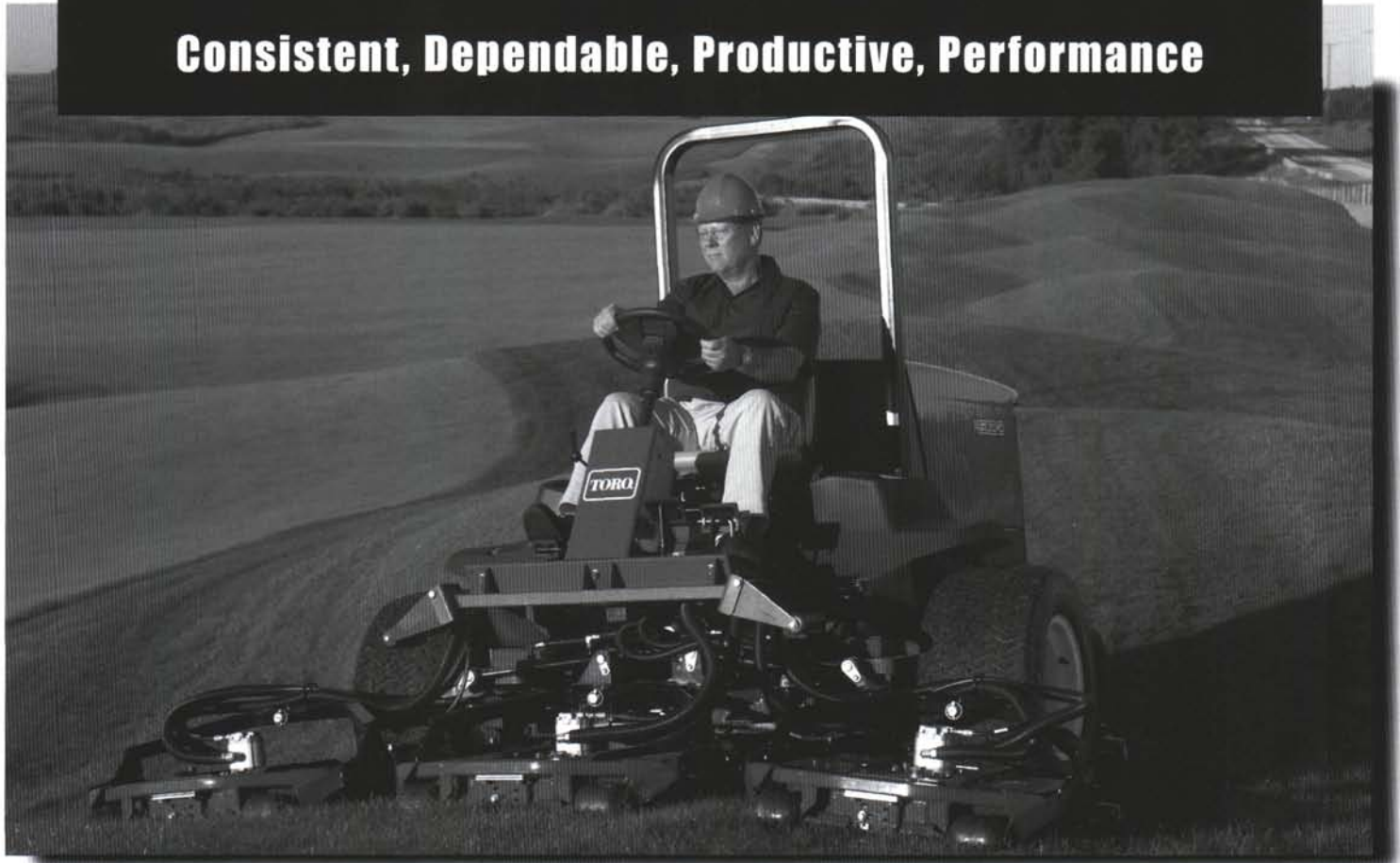
If you cannot make it to the GCSAA Conference and Show, we have some great educational opportunities right here in Wisconsin; the Symposium coming up November 12th and 13th in Kohler and GCSAA seminars December 11 and 12 in Fond du Lac, or the WTA Industry Expo January 9 and 10 in Madison. Do not miss these chances to better yourself and your club while supporting the industry.

Good luck putting your courses to bed this fall and have an enjoyable and relaxing holiday season. ♣



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# Hard Cider? Kill Some Weeds With It!

By Dr. John Stier, Department of Horticulture, University of Wisconsin-Madison

The buzz in the weed world this summer has been all about vinegar. Earlier this spring several scientists from the United States Dept. of Agriculture (USDA) in Beltsville, MD, published a report that vinegar could be used to kill weeds. The scientists tested "vinegar" concentrations ranging from 5 to 30% on weeds commonly found in corn fields: velvetleaf, pigweed, lambsquarters, foxtail, and Canada thistle. Both greenhouse and field trials were conducted.

The results showed that young weeds could be killed with "vinegar" concentrations as low as 5%. Older weeds required greater concentrations of "vinegar". Canada thistle, often difficult to control chemically due in part to the hairy leaf surface that prevents adsorption of chemicals, was especially easy to kill. And killing occurred quickly—just two hours to

kill the top growth.

And cost? The scientists calculated broadcast applications of 20% "vinegar" could cost as low as \$65 per acre. That's comparable to or even better than some conventional herbicides.

Vinegar can of course be made from fruits or grains. Apple cider vinegar is just one type. Vinegar is readily available from a number of sources. In some cases it is sold as an herbicide; other suppliers sell it for a variety of purposes.

The Wisconsin DNR conducted a test using vinegar this summer for controlling creeping charlie (*Glechoma hederacea*) [sic] and Canada thistle (*Cirsium arvense*) at Lake Wissota State Park. The project used 12% vinegar. Like the USDA project, thistle and creeping charlie leaves turned brown within 2 hours (nettles were unaffected). Six days after application the smaller thistles were dead along with the creeping charlie. The only "visible problem" associated with the vinegar was that it also affected non-target plants such as the grass. However, turf managers familiar with glyphosate and other non-selective herbicides should not have a problem as long as selectivity is not expected or desired.

Best of all vinegar is relatively safe for humans and the environment. This spring the EPA invited summary comments on use of acetic acid and salts and listed a preliminary report on toxicity (safety) of the product. Ultimately vinegar could be viewed by the EPA and other agencies or groups as a replacement for conventional herbicides.

If you are by now thinking this is too good to be true just bear with me and maintain an open mind. As with many things that go to popular press without peer review and full disclosure there are considerations that may not at first be evident.

Canada thistle, creeping charlie, and almost all other turf weeds are perennials. The vinegar is essentially acting as a non-selective contact herbicide. The top growth may be killed but new growth is likely to occur from structures such as creeping rootstocks, stolons, and rhizomes. Repeat applications may sufficiently weaken the weed to the point that it dies, but multiple applications of non-selective herbicides eventually denudes the ground of all vegetation. Erosion and associated problems may result.

Another oversight is the reporting of the rate of vinegar concentrations. In reality it is not the concen-



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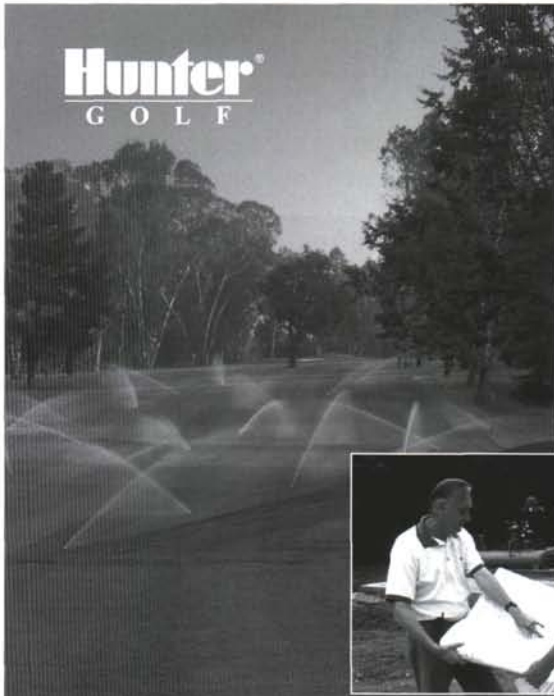
tration of vinegar that was tested so much as it was the concentration of acetic acid. Acetic acid (or more correctly the acetate ion) is the "active ingredient" in vinegar. Somehow, though, "acetic acid" does not sound as safe as "vinegar", so people desirous of a "natural" herbicide call it vinegar. I suggest consumers be extremely wary of any product that relies on "doublepeak" to sell itself.

There is more to the story than simply raiding the food pantry at home for weed control products. Vinegar purchased in the grocery store contains approximately 5% acetic acid. Vinegar with greater concentrations of acetic acid must be purchased through special suppliers. When I did a quick calculation of vinegar costs based on the retail price of a gallon of vinegar containing 20% acetic acid the actual cost ranged from \$500 to \$1000 per acre depending on if a spray rate of 1 or 2 gallons per thousand square feet was used. Since the DNR study sprayed the weeds to the point of runoff even the 2 gallon rate may be insufficient.

Like all pesticides, vinegar has a Material Safety Data Sheet (MSDS). The MSDS gives the boiling point

(244 F), autoignition temperature (427 C for acetic acid), and other technical data. Listed on the MSDS under Unusual Fire and Explosion Hazards was the following: "Toxic gasses and vapors may be released in a fire involving concentrated vinegar". The short term exposure limit was described as "15 ppm for 15 minutes". The document stated the vapors could irritate the respiratory tract and to "avoid inhalation". Skin contact could result in mild injury and burns when vinegar contained 11% acetic acid or greater, and that some individuals could suffer dermatitis even from dilute solutions. Even more worrisome was the statement "Eye contact: May cause severe burns and permanent corneal injury from concentrated vinegars. May be followed by blindness. High vapor concentrations may result in conjunctivitis." Another part of the label stated "Do not flush to streams or sewers." Sounds like a MSDS for a "toxic" pesticide.

I'm not trying to make light of the safety hazards of vinegar; on the contrary, it could have a useful role in weed control. The point is that nothing is absolutely and inherently without hazards (read the MSDS for water). Consider the following situation: in September



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mass media in Wisconsin reported a UW-Madison study found ultra-low levels of a conventional broadleaf herbicide fed to mice reduced the litter size (interestingly enough, higher doses did not affect reproduction). In interviews the researcher stated that people should use vinegar and ammonia to kill lawn weeds instead of conventional herbicides. Simply telling people to use alternative compounds for weed control is too simplistic. There are no valid techniques nor do sufficient information exist to make a general recommendation for many if not all alternative products.

The purpose of the USDA research was ultimately to develop products for weed control in organic farming. Its important to keep this fact in mind: growing row crops for yield is different than maintaining a permanent turf for quality. In row crop production it is usually most important to control weeds early in the life cycle of the crop. Once the crop has grown sufficiently for leaves to cover the soil surface, weed germination and competition with the crop is minimized. The USDA scientists have a valid approach to developing a product useful for organic farmers. Does that mean vinegar is appropriate and useful for weed control in all settings? Not at all. The problem is that the EPA, through the Food Quality Protection

Act, and groups against conventional pesticides view vinegar as a safe and logical alternative for weed control. Hopefully reason will prevail and vinegar can take its place on the herbicide lists without replacing conventional products. I just wouldn't want to bet on it.

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# Golf Course Experience Led Him into Turf Product Sales

By Lori Ward Bocher

When he retires from the sales business in 20 years, John Turner would like to work as an assistant superintendent at a private golf course. Then he will have come full circle in his profession. For the past 22 years John has been managing a Midwest sales territory selling turf fungicides and insecticides to golf course superintendents through distributors and formulators.

Now as he rounds a corner in his career path that takes him further away from golf courses - he was recently promoted to "formulator account manager/lawn care operations" with the Bayer Corporation - John takes a moment to reflect on his career. It all began because, like so many others in the industry (see sidebar article), he had the fortune of growing up near and working on a golf course.

John was born in Fort Wayne, Indiana, in 1956 where his father was an engineer for General Electric and his mother was a homemaker. Lo and behold, his childhood home was four blocks from a golf course. "I played golf there as a kid, and I was offered a job there at the age of 11. I still have the first dollar I made at the golf course," John recalls. "I started by working three or four hours a day on the course raking sand traps and mowing tees. As the years passed I became more involved with the course and its operations. When I turned 16, I started with a full-time wage of about \$1.75 an hour. For a 16-year-old working 50 to 60 hours a week, that was pretty good."

## **Wanted to be a teacher...**

John graduated from Fort Wayne's Wayne High School in 1974 and enrolled at Purdue University. "Ironically, I started out to be an industrial arts teacher," he says. "I had always enjoyed woodworking and working with machinery and tools. I had the aspiration to be an industrial arts teacher from September through June, and then work on a golf course during the summer months.

"I got all the way through to the point of doing my student teaching when it finally dawned on me: This was not my calling," John explains. "So I went back to my second love, the golf course, and began to talk to various golf course superintendents. I changed my major from education to turf management and continued for another two and one-half years at Purdue. I graduated in 1980 with a BS degree in agronomy with a minor in turfgrass management."

While in college, John continued to work at golf



John Turner and his wife, Pam, say farewell to Wisconsin.

courses - the public course (Fairview Golf Club, a Donald Ross course) he had worked on since a child and a private course (Orchard Ridge Country Club) where he was a second assistant. "I decided that was my new calling - to be a golf course superintendent," John says. "But in 1979 my professor at Purdue encouraged me to alter my direction by pursuing a sales position in turf. I actually took his advice and talked to various trades people from turf equipment to fertilizer and chemical companies. I started interviewing for various sales positions right out of college.

"Then, the day of my final exam in 1980, I was offered a job with TUCO, or the Upjohn Company. I accepted," John continues. "They wanted a manufacturer's rep to travel eight states in the Midwest to sell turf products through suppliers and to represent their fungicides and insecticides to the golf course industry. Don Maske, now retired, was the one who hired me, and he has been my mentor. Don previously held this sales position for 10 years until he was promoted to district manager."

## **Begins in sales...**

So he graduated in May of 1980, moved to Chicago, and began his new job on June 2. John worked for the Upjohn Company and its various "derivatives" from 1980 to 1997. Through three company mergers his territory shrank and his product line expanded, but his role was basically the same.

When John started with Upjohn in 1980, his territory included eight states: Wisconsin, Minnesota, Illinois, Indiana, Missouri, Iowa, Nebraska and Kansas. In 1985, the TUCO division of Upjohn was sold to NOR-AM Chemical Company; his territory was reduced to five states (he no longer had Minnesota, Nebraska and Kansas), but he now had more products to represent, including a slow-release nitrogen source called Nitroform.

In 1995, NOR-AM Chemical merged with Hoechst-Roussel and formed a newly named company, AgrEvo USA. His territory was reduced to Wisconsin, Illinois and Indiana. Once again, he was selling additional products from the Hoechst-Roussel side of the merger. "Through the mergers I was able to keep the same customers (in the remaining territory) and to sell more products," John points out. "The mergers allowed me to stay with the same business and learn new market strategies without giving up my tenure."

While working in sales for the first 17 years of his career, John worked predominantly in the golf course business. "It was a two-step distribution process," he explains. "We'd sell through turf distribution partners and detail our products to end users."

#### ***Goes beyond golf courses...***

A major change in John's career came in 1997 when the Bayer Corporation approached him and asked him to become a sales specialist supporting both turf and pest control products. There, his customer base expanded beyond the golf course community to also include lawn care, arborist, structural pest control, and formulator accounts. His geographic territory continued to be in the Midwest - Illinois, Wisconsin and Indiana.

While in this job, John saw the opportunity to diver-

sify his background and create new challenges for himself; he recommended to Bayer that it create a position for someone to work exclusively with formulators. "It's a specialized area," he points out. "We take our products, like Merit for grub control, and offer it to specific formulators who impregnate their fertilizer base with the active ingredient and sell it as their fertilizer with Merit insecticide. We work with our formulators on state registrations, labeling, licensing agreements, and marketing."

So John recommended this new position to his management, and the new position was created in September of 2002. "I was called in to interview for the job and I got the offer from Dan Carrothers, director of Bayer Environmental Science," John says. "It is truly an exciting time in my career and an opportunity to build new customer relationships."

As the formulator account manager/lawn care operations for Bayer, John now works with formulators in the Midwest, Northeast, Southeast, and California. He's on the road about 100 nights a year and, as always, he maintains an office in his home. "With my 22 years of experience, I've met a lot of people in the industry," John says. "I may not have built relationships with formulators outside the Midwest; however, I know who they are and they know who I am. Now I have the opportunity to present programs and build new relationships. The company has high confidence in knowing that I can do that quickly and effectively and, in return, create new sales for the business."

#### ***Sales is based on relationships...***

Building relationships is important to John - what he likes most about sales. "Over the years I've become more personal with people so they've gone from being customers to being friends," he says. "I see the whole chain

### ***Close ties to the golf course***

**CAUTION:** Nine out of ten turf professionals agree. Growing up in close proximity to and/or working on a golf course may exert undue influence on your choice of profession.

While working on this article it hit me: Many of the people I've interviewed this past year or so have grown up near a golf course and/or worked on golf courses while growing up. Being somewhat analytical, I wanted to know precisely how many. Would you believe, nine out of ten?

**John Turner:** Grew up four blocks from a golf course; worked at courses beginning at the age of 11 and through his college graduation.

**Dean Musbach:** Was born and raised on golf courses where his father was a superintendent; visited grandfather on a golf course where he was a superintendent; Dean worked on courses while a student.

**Wayne Otto:** Grew up on a farm across the road from a golf course; began working on the course soon after graduating from high school.

**Ed Kirchenwitz:** Grew up four or five blocks from a golf course; his first job as a child was on a course.

**Dave Brandenburg:** His first summer job was on a golf course.

**Ervin Graf:** Grew up across the street from a golf course; his father was a superintendent.

**Dan Quast:** Born and raised down the street from a golf course; his first job was on the course.

**Scott Schaller:** His father, grandfather and uncle were all golf course superintendents; his first job was on a golf course.

The only person in the past 10 articles who didn't grow up near a golf course was Bill Vogel. However, he did grow up on a farm and return to a family business.



of events as my customers grow and mature. I see their children grow up and get married.

"On the flip side, it takes a long time to build these relationships," he continues. "You have to be patient. A lot of the young sales reps today see me, see some of my successes, and they want to achieve success instantly. You have to establish your credibility first. One of the hardest things about changing jobs is leaving behind the long-term relationships I've built in my core states, like Wisconsin. My new challenge is to build and expand new relationships. Based on past experience, I trust that I'll be able to do that quickly."

John points out that the industry is very competitive, with five other large companies competing with Bayer. His goal is to understand the customers' businesses better than the competition. "Anybody can sell a product," he believes. "I want to be more involved. I want to know how they buy, when they buy, who's involved. If I can make them more successful by knowing their businesses, then they'll make me successful. That's my highest priority - to travel and meet my customers, to know their businesses inside and out. And, at the same time, to try to initiate programs and products that fit their needs both now and in the future."

### ***High degree of professionalism in Wisconsin...***

Having traveled extensively in Wisconsin during his first 22 years in sales, John finds both the quality of golf turf and golf course superintendents to be very high. This, he believes, can be traced to "an evolution of extremely high professionalism in the state of Wisconsin," John says. "I've always admired Wisconsin turf managers and even the people of Wisconsin."

This professionalism is due, in large part, to the educational forum in the state. "It all starts with a young person who likes the field of turf," John says. "The university provides the backbone, the education. Then it encourages the young people to go out and work with superintendents who serve as mentors. As a result, the young people begin to create their own identity, their own way of managing people and growing grass.

"Monroe Miller even mentored me a little bit when I was a young salesman," John points out. "He truly opened his doors, asked me about my goals. He actually sat down with me and gave me a list of people around town to talk with. He was very influential in my young career. Other golf course superintendents like Wayne Otto, Dan Quast and Carl Grassl have also been very influential in my professional sales career in Wisconsin."

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