

Hex Plugger Drives Miltona Turf Products

By Glenn White

As the superintendent/owner of Lake Miltona Golf Club, Robert (Bob) Shields was faced with a common problem - repairing dead spots on golf greens. In the mid 1980s the only repair tool available was a circular cup cutter. Bob recognized the need for a more effective tool, one that would create a uniform plugging pattern with no gaps. As a result he developed the Hexagon Turf Plugger. This tool not only revolutionized turf repair but also spawned a new company - Miltona Turf Products.

The Hex Plugger continued to be refined and application was made for a patent. This process begged the question: Could the Hex Plugger be marketed to other golf course superintendents? Hoping to find the answer, exhibitor booth space was rented at the 1989 GCSAA Show in Anaheim, California where the Hex Plugger was first displayed. Response was extremely positive. Show attendees placed orders for over 200 pluggers. Miltona Turf Products then exhibited at the annual Minnesota Golf Course Superintendents Association Turf Conference held in Brooklyn Park December 1989. Again, response was very encouraging.

Miltona Turf Products entered the golf industry as a factory direct mail-order business. More products were developed and in 1990 the first brochure was produced for mailing. It was a full color 4-page flyer with price list and order blank inserts. It offered the Hexagon Turf Plugger in two models/sizes, the Sod Slide and Miltona's Bench. The Sod Slide (now known as the Sod



Everything You Need To Keep Your Course Beautiful

**Fertilizers • Herbicides • Fungicides • Insecticides
Seed • Golf Course Accessories • Equipment**

Each LESCO Stores-on-Wheels® is stocked with products specific to your geographical area.

LESCO®

www.lesco.com

800-321-5325

Stripper) was developed for repairing hydraulic oil spills. The unique Miltona Bench offered a comfortable design and could be "accessorized" as a portable tee station - complete with ball washer, shoe brush and wastebasket. Heavy-duty turf stakes rounded out Miltona's first mail order offering.

At the start, Miltona Turf Products was run out of the Shields' home while renting warehouse space in nearby Carlos, Minnesota. A sales manager was hired to look after the day-to-day workings of the company. Miltona Turf Products soon outgrew its in-home office. A new building was built on a nearby site to house offices, a shipping room and warehouse space. A receptionist/bookkeeper position was soon added.

In 1991, four more tools were ready for market, two of which became patented. The Cup Auger finishes cup holes at a consistent depth while removing troublesome sand from the cup hole. The Handi Aerifier aerifies localized dry spots without littering a green with soil cores. It attaches to a common cup cutter handle and can be used anywhere. A line of accessories and diagnostic equipment was also added to the Miltona brochure.

Miltona's acceptance in the market continued to grow. Its tools were used in the final preparations for the 1991 U.S. Open Championship at Hazeltine National Golf Club. The 1992 brochure included a testimonial from Chris L. Hauge, then superintendent at Hazeltine.

(Continued on Page 19)

Miltona Turf Products –

(Continued from Page 18)

Miltona Turf Products' growth accelerated and new product ideas required constant attention. In 1995 the Lake Miltona Golf Club was sold. Tom and Patty Blank became the new owners that fall.

Handling more products required more space. The warehouse was expanded in 1997. Bob Shields continued to build the business through 1999 at which point it was sold. Dan and Deb Halvorson became Miltona's new owners in January 2000. Deb and Dan had definite plans for the business. Keeping pace with current technology, many operational advancements were made. The daily shipping process became computerized. A website featuring the Miltona catalog online was established. Superintendents could now place internet orders 24 hours a day. The catalog mailing process was refined and expanded. Upgraded catalog designs were introduced. Expanding into related turf markets was explored.

New product research and development continued with an expanded interest in superintendents' ideas, input and feedback. This brought about the successful introduction of numerous new products: the Dew Draggin', Ground Zero Leveler, Level Best Ball Mark Repair Tool, Hedger Trimmer Blades, Dimple Tines, Valve Key Tool and innovative signage.

Exhibiting annually at the GCSAA Trade Show, Miltona has developed business relationships with several international companies. Its products have been introduced to many markets outside the United States. Miltona Turf Products conducts business in virtually every Canadian province, Japan and several European countries. The number of worldwide distributors started with only a handful. Today that number has grown to over 25 distributing companies in 14 countries accounting for more than 10% of annual sales.

Miltona has also proven to be a viable marketing outlet for products developed outside the United States. One prime example is the HIO (Hole-In-One) hammer action cup cutter. KSAB Golf in Sweden approached Miltona to market the HIO nationally throughout the U.S. Introduced in 2002, the HIO rapidly became one of Miltona's most popular products.

The 2003 Miltona catalog expanded to 36 pages and its display booth used for the 2004 GCSAA Trade Show was completely redesigned. The company logo also changed. Its new look is emblematic of Miltona today - bold, innovative and progressive.

In keeping with the goal of providing exceptional tools direct to the turf professional at a reasonable cost, the Halvorsons also acquired a small wholesale hardware supply business, Soderholm Quality Products. The two entities operate out of the same Miltona, Minnesota location. Several Soderholm tools are available to superintendents via the Miltona catalog and website.

Miltona Turf Products continually strives to maintain its unique niche within the golf industry. Miltona is not and will not be all things to all people. Consistently offering one-of-a-kind tools, high quality products, and excellent customer service have been key factors in Miltona's growth.

Throughout the 16 years Miltona has been in business its guiding principle remains the same: to manufacture and market turf maintenance equipment of the highest quality direct to professionals with a level of service second to none. Miltona abides by this philosophy daily and looks forward to serving superintendents and other turf grass professionals in Minnesota, throughout the country, and around the world.

Simplot
PARTNERS™



Timing is Everything



Introducing New PolarKote® Fungicide

- **Puts the Freeze on Gray and Pink Snow Mold**
- **Easy to Use**
- **Delivered When You Need It**

Contact Simplot Partners:

Joe Churchill, Chris Hoff, Dale Parske
(651) 633-6251 or (888) 828-5354

www.simplotpartners.com