

Savings Sweet as Molasses

Innovative superintendents and course architects are constantly finding new, cheap ways to "get 'er done."

But perhaps this is one that takes the prize.

The bane of superintendents around the country has been aerification ... More importantly, the kick in the wallets that owners experience while crews aerate their courses. It was one of those owners – Jimmy LaRosa at Pete Dye Golf Club in Clarksburg, W. Va. – whose anxiety over lost rounds led his head superintendent, Gary Grandstaff, and assistant superintendent, Rick Sinyard, to develop a new product that substantially replaced the need to aerate by de-thatching turf microbially.

"We haven't aerified fairways in 10 years and we have Penneagle bentgrass," says Grandstaff. "We aerify greens once a year in the spring. And

September and October are now our heaviest, rather than least heaviest, months of the year for play."

How?

After LaRosa said he didn't want Grandstaff to aerify because it disrupted play and caused lost revenue while conditions returned to normal, Grandstaff and Sinyard "fiddled with many natural ingredients and stumbled on inventing our own product."

That product, I-Mol (for iron and molasses), along with manganese, calcium, potassium and a package of micro-nutrients, is sprayed throughout the growing season.

"Initially, we didn't know how valuable it was," Grandstaff says. "We started finding out you can pull back fertility because the microbial activity is directly related to thatch. You're eliminating thatch and providing nutrients but not eliminating

compaction, so we just slice fairways.

In 1998, a neighboring superintendent told Grandstaff and Sinyard that if they bottled their concoction he'd buy it. Two years later they obtained a 5,000-sq.-ft. facility and started bottling I-Mol. Today the two men and

"We haven't aerified fairways in 10 years and we have Penneagle bentgrass."

Gary Grandstaff

Grandstaff's wife, Shirley, distribute the product from New England to Georgia and from Pennsylvania to Ohio.

"We've sold some in California and just sold a small container to South Korea," Grandstaff says.

How much does I-Mol save?

"If you're handling just greens, the topdressing sand alone for the average golf course costs in the range of \$5,000 if not higher, plus a couple thousand dollars more in time and equipment breakdowns," Grandstaff says. "Doing greens with our product is a couple thousand dollars. When adding fairways, you're looking at 30 gallons of product per week for 16 to 20 weeks per season at \$40 per gallon. That comes out in the vicinity of \$18,000 to \$20,000. But how much do you spend on fertility in addition to aerification and cleanup? With I-Mol you eliminate all those things, you only have to slice, and members know that's as bad as it's going to get."



Gary Grandstaff, right, with wife Shirley and Grandstaff's assistant superintendent, Rick Sinyard, blend and ship their product-borne-of-necessity from the warehouse of their business, From the Ground Up.