

Market still developing for underground reel

By ANDREW OVERBECK

COLUMBIA CITY, Ind. — Former superintendent David Mihailides and Reelcraft Industries are pushing forward with their underground hose reel product for golf course and sports turf applications.

Mihailides invented the hand-watering device in 1999 while superintendent at Boulder Hills Golf and Country Club (now called Foxwoods G&CC) in Rhode Island. He then incorporated DGM Syringing Systems to distribute the product that has since sold more



The pressurized, retractable hose is hidden underground.

than 400 units.

Mihailides signed a deal with Reelcraft in April 2001 to market and manufacture the product and left his superintendent's position in hopes of making his invention pay off. He is now working to build brand and market awareness for the product.

"It is my hope that this becomes a specified product with both new irrigation systems and renovation projects," he said. "We need to get consultants and distributors involved to spec the product."

However, since irrigation sales depend on slimmer and slimmer margins, Mihailides is finding it difficult to penetrate the market with such a cost-prohibitive product. While it is difficult to argue the convenience of having an underground, constantly pressurized hose next to a green to control hot spots and localized dry spots, it has been difficult for some superintendents to get past the price point.

"Our underground reel costs \$1,450 with a 75-foot hose attached. A quick coupler, pressurized

isolation valve, hose and fittings costs \$400 and the hose can be used all over the course," said Mihailides. "So there is a price difference. But we are also saving courses labor, time and wear and tear on equipment.

"This keeps the hose right at hand and saves water because you only have to water as much as is needed," he continued. "Instead of sending four or five guys out to hand-water all day long, one guy can do it."

Product benefits aside, Mihailides realizes that he has a challenge ahead.

"We have a brand-new product and no competition," he said.

One way he hopes to build awareness is to produce private-label products. "That way," said Mihailides, "superintendents won't say 'Why should I buy this' but 'Who should I buy it from?'"

In a move to expand the product line beyond underground reels, Reelcraft has also introduced a trailer-mounted reel to allow golf courses to more easily transport hose around the golf course. The unit hooks into the back of a utility vehicle.

As seen in the February 2003 issue of