

Introducing *the* Internet

If you've been intimidated or hesitant about exploring the Web, this introduction to the new communication technologies will have you ready to surf like a pro. The

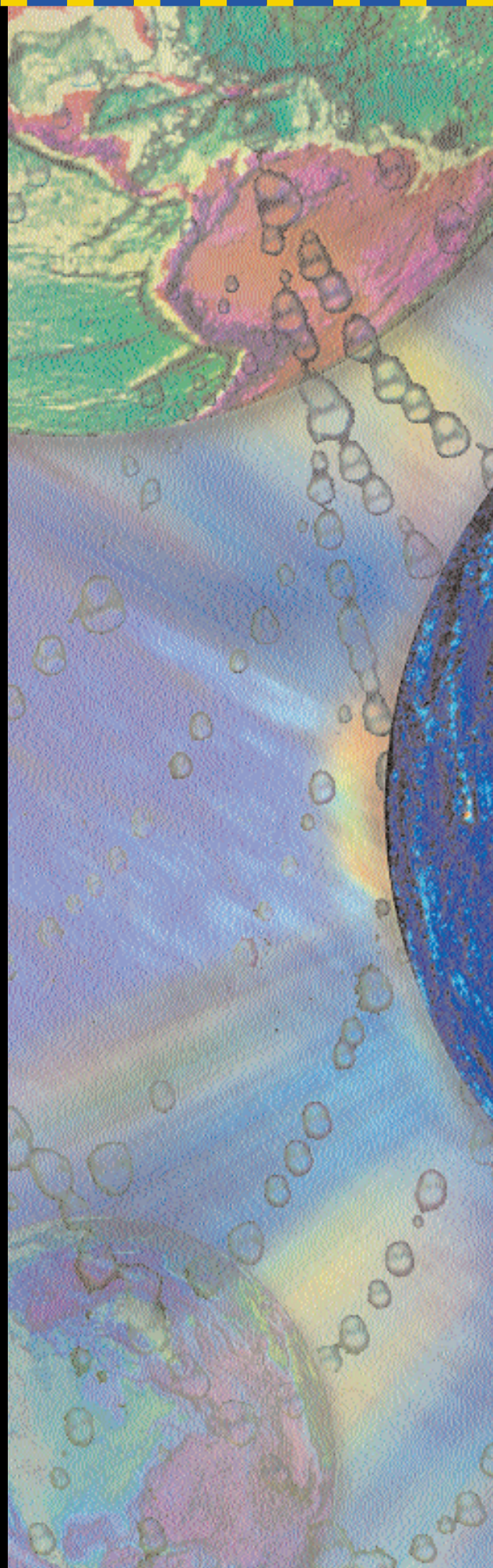
ever-expanding world of the Internet has become the new technological frontier. The World Wide Web is a system of interconnected computer resources where you can find just about any type and amount of information desired.

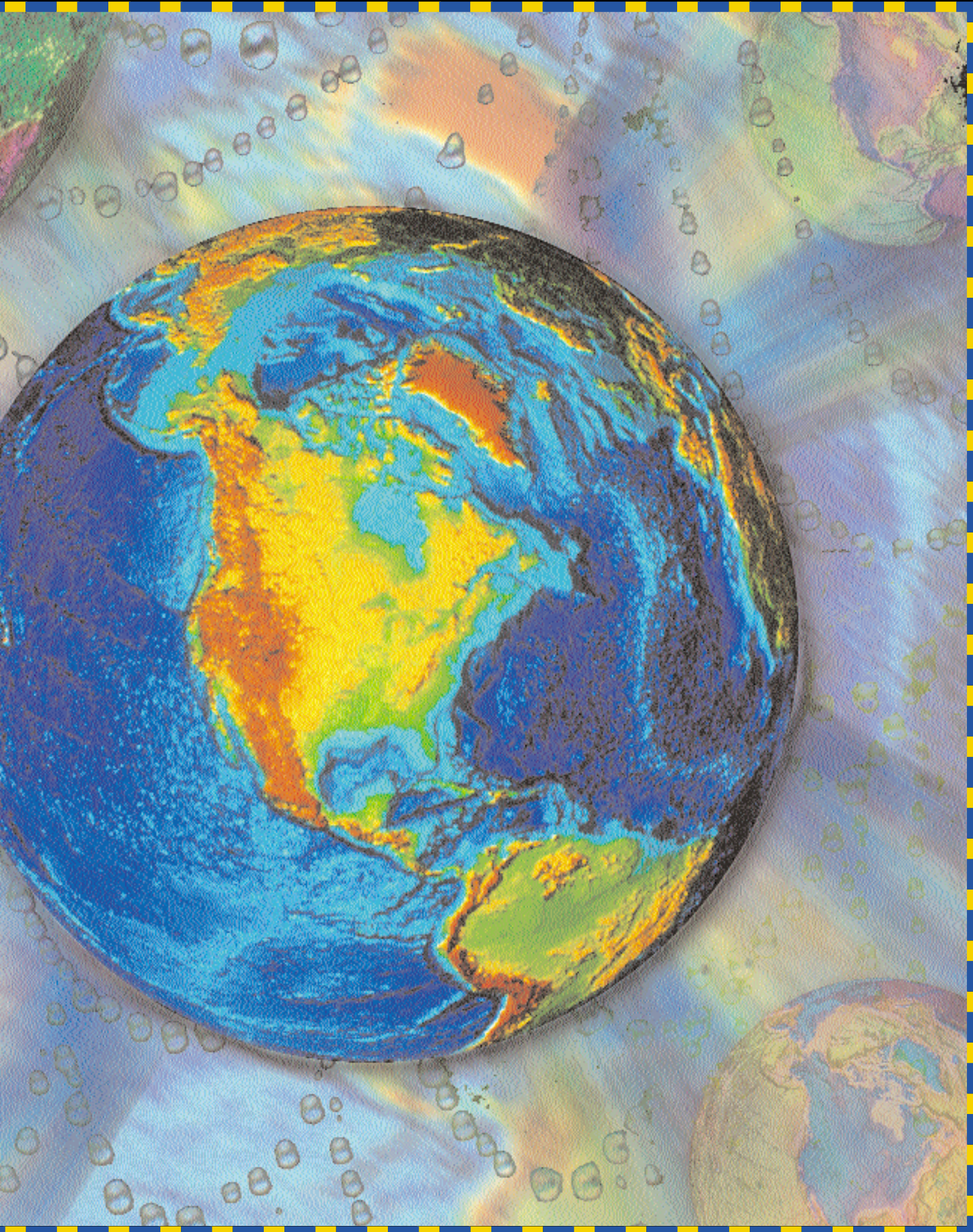
It seems everybody has a Web site these days. Most successful businesses are taking advantage of the obvious benefits and conducting online business communication as a part of daily operations. Conferences, training sessions, sales meetings and virtually all instances where communication is conducted across distances is being done online utilizing different programming avenues.

Golf has been involved in the Internet for a few years, and our industry now has a substantial slice of the Web. New sites are coming online almost weekly. The information superhighway is becoming more of a way of life for communication, and new technologies are making the Internet more user-friendly, even for novices.

For superintendents, there is plenty of valuable information out there, from weather updates, to research reports, to the latest industry trends and networking with peers. With just a little knowledge of the basic tools, you'll soon find — literally — a world of information at your fingertips.

James Garrett, CGCS





Web basics

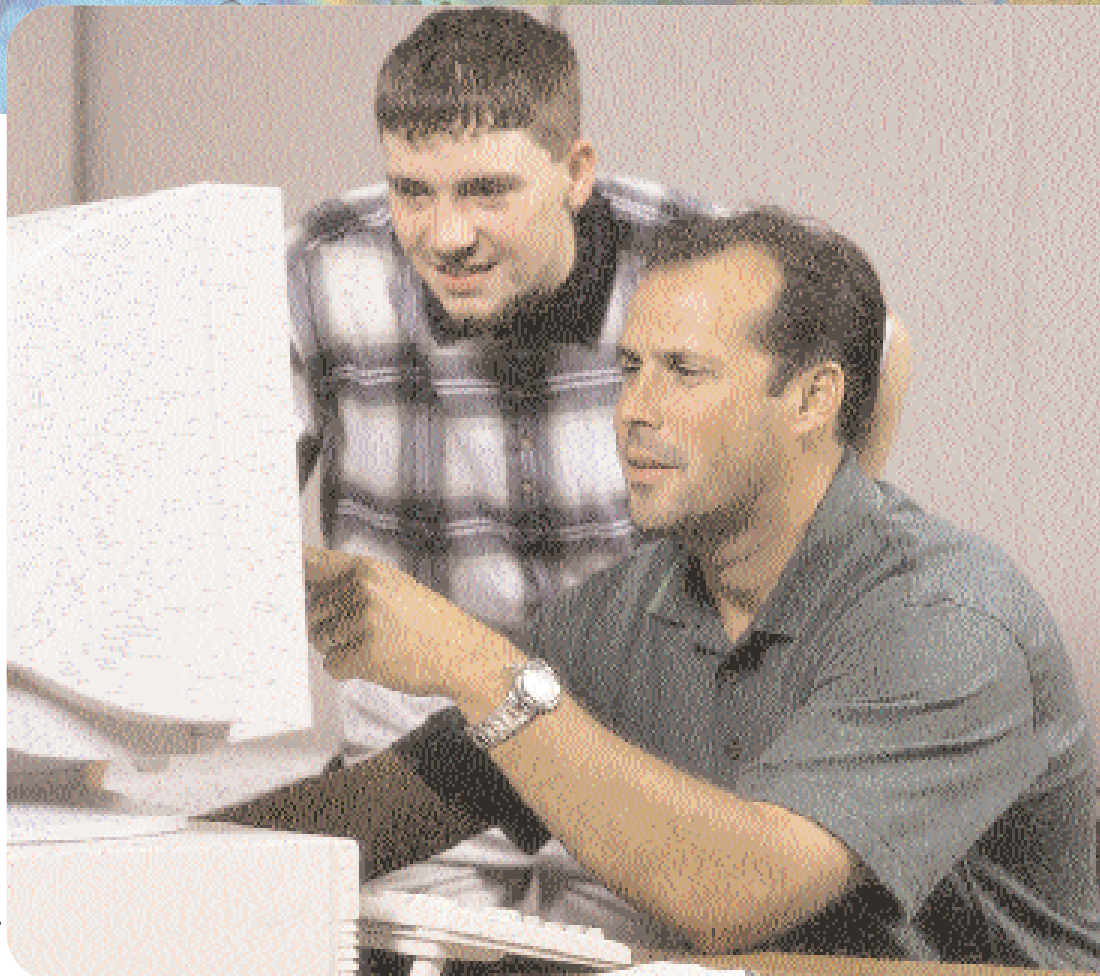
Internet service providers (ISPs) are companies that provide access to the Internet. They have local phone numbers that your computer accesses through a modem to connect the computer to the Web. Most ISPs charge a flat monthly fee (an average of \$15 to \$25) for an unlimited amount of online time. Some also provide browser and e-mail software for your computer.

Online services, such as America Online (AOL) and CompuServe, provide a complete package for Internet access. The packages, which include the companies' own browser and e-mail software, are reasonably priced. Once you have the browser software installed and the bugs worked out, it's time to "surf the Web."

One of the first stops you'll want to make will be the GCSAA home page (www.gcsaa.org—see sidebar for additional information). Other notable Web sites for the golf industry include Golf.com (www.golf.com), Golfweb (www.golfweb.com), Golf Online (www.golfonline.com), the PGA (www.pga.com), USGA (www.usga.com) and Club Managers Association of America (www.cmaa.org). In addition, most of the vendors in our industry have Web pages that provide useful information about their products and services.

There are also sites, such as Turfnet (www.turfnet.com) and The Turf Zone (www.TurfZone.com), that cater specifically to the turf maintenance industry. These sites can be useful for helping superintendents remain on the cutting edge of information and technology in our industry.

Many more sites can be found by conducting searches using one of the search engine services such as Web Crawler or Yahoo. At these sites, type in a key word to begin the search, and the service will locate sites that fit that subject. Try to avoid broad subjects such as



Superintendents and their staffs have developed Web sites to update golfers about scheduled maintenance practices and communicate other course news.

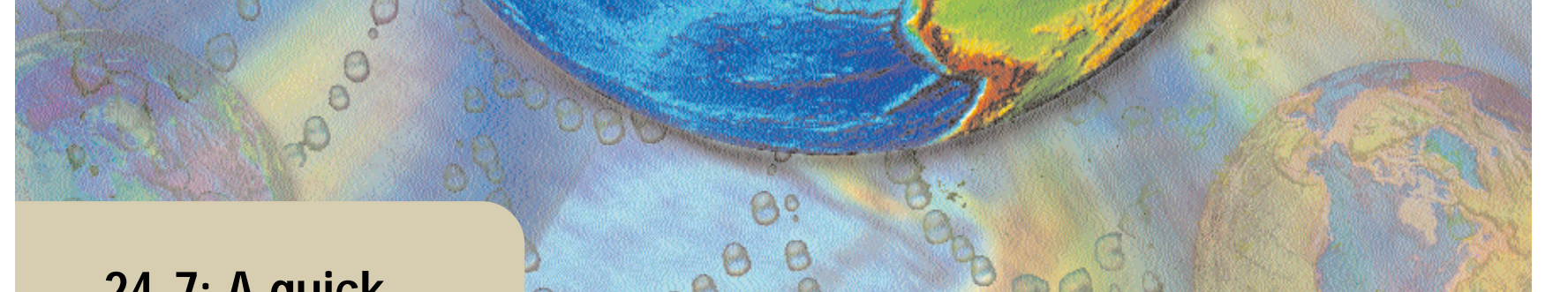
"golf" because this will produce about 30,000 sites in some way identified with golf. A more narrow search, such as "golf turf disease," may produce only 100 matching results. You can then browse these sites to see if they have the specific information for which you're looking.

Most Web sites will have a "links" page that contains a list of sites with similar subject matter so people can "jump" to those sites. Using your mouse to point and click, you can be transported to the desired site immediately. Links are one of the quickest ways to navigate through the Web to find desired information.

New higher-speed connections to the Net (ISDN and ADSL) may become available in your area soon and will provide extremely high-speed and large-volume data transfer capabilities. The capabilities of these new connections can be compared to the differ-

KEY POINTS

- Internet service providers connect you to the Web, usually for a flat monthly fee.
- Once you're connected to the Internet, a first stop should be the GCSAA home page (www.gcsaa.org)
- Most Web sites have a "links" page with a list of related sites, which are a quick way to navigate through the Web to find information.
- Developing a Web site can help you promote your profession and maintenance department.



24-7: A quick guide to GCSAA Online

Sharmion Linseisen-Kerley

As easily as you can drop by the corner convenience store, you can visit the association's electronic "storefront" day or night at www.gcsaa.org. Even if you can't find what you're looking for, you don't have to shut down your computer empty-handed — you can always leave an e-mail for the GCSAA staff, or even post a message on a discussion forum for fellow superintendents.

The site offers a strong inventory of information about the association, access to GCSAA's products and services, as well as several specific tools and resources.

Technical resources

The *GCM* database contains every article posted on the site since 1996. Beginning with the October 1998 issue, the database contains every feature article from each issue. The entire MSDS database has been licensed for the site from C&P Press and is also updated quarterly.

Program information

Log on to keep up with government relations activities, regional seminar offerings, other approved PDU and CEU opportunities, and even what's happening with GCSAA's new public relations initiatives.

The site also has comprehensive information about the conference and show, including exhibitor listings, an itinerary planner, detailed information on educational sessions, and online registration and travel arrangements.

Online forms

Use a GCSAA Online interactive form whenever possible for the quickest service. Currently, you can place an ad for

ences between the volume and speed of a garden hose vs. a 4-inch pipe.

All about e-mail

E-mail (electronic mail) communication is quickly replacing the fax for quick documentation. E-mail is paperless and much quicker than the postal service. Software packages such as Microsoft Exchange, Eudora and Netscape Communicator provide programs for sending e-mail.

An e-mail address includes the user name and the domain. For example, in the e-mail address jgarrett@gte.net, [jgarrett](mailto:jgarrett@gte.net) is the user name and [gte.net](mailto:jgarrett@gte.net) is the domain name. After the destination address and subject are entered, you can type the desired message into the message field. Files containing text, spreadsheets, pictures or anything that can be digitized can also be attached to e-mail and sent along with the message.

Using e-mail for communication is quick, easy, effective and — most important — documented. Delivered e-mails can be easily archived on disks or Zip drives for future reference. Messages can also be copied, forwarded, blind copied and marked urgent if needed. You can even request a return message to tell you when the e-mail is delivered or read, which further documents the communication process. Mailing lists can be developed to aid in the distribution of e-mails to numerous recipients quickly and effectively.

Once you've had your e-mail system running for awhile, you'll undoubtedly experience "spam," which is unsolicited e-mail mostly from commercial venues advertising their products and services over the Web. It's the junk mail of the information superhighway.

Some ISPs offer programs that will screen most or all spam before it gets to you, so discuss this with your service provider. There are also some new Federal Communication Commission

requirements stating that a method of removal has to be included within the message.

Some e-mails may contain "viruses." A virus is a computer program that runs in your computer and can have devastating effects. Virus-scanning software is readily available from the local computer store or online. A good rule is to have virus protection software — such as Dr. Solomon's FindVirus or Norton AntiVirus — running when checking e-mail. Also, if you don't recognize the originator of the e-mail message, be wary of opening it.


For sending sensitive communications via e-mail, privacy software is available to ensure confidentiality. These programs encrypt the message code so that only those with the password can decode and read the message. They provide a high level of security because the basic code-encryption technology was developed for military use during wartime. Pretty Good Privacy (PGP) is one such program that will encrypt files. When using a security program, don't forget the password, don't use the same password over and over, and be sure the recipient knows the correct password.

Web site development

Most ISPs provide — as part of their service — space on their servers for personal Web pages.

Web pages are written in Hyper Text Markup Language (HTML), a language using letters, numbers and symbols that translate into colors, pictures and text on your computer. You can also find commercial software packages (Easy HTML, WebPage Wizard) to help you develop a personal home page.

Having a personal Web page streamlines e-mail communication because a link that will direct e-mail to you can be embedded into your page. You can also link your page to family members' pages or other interest pages, such as



an intern, reclassify your membership, request information from the service center, submit your application for the Environmental Steward and volunteer for committee service entirely online.

Ordering online

GCSAA Online offers secure online ordering services for the GCSAA Bookstore, including the Superintendent's Video Workshop series, seminar textbooks and GCSAA research reports. Additional services that can be ordered through the site are registration for regional seminars and the conference and show, and subscriptions to *GCM* and the Employment Referral Service.

Education opportunities

The association recently made its first foray into the online education field with an electronic version of its "Responsible Pesticide Use in Golf Course Management" course. The online course takes you through three distinct modules, each of which can be completed in about three hours. At the end of each one, you'll take a 20-question multiple-choice exam that will determine whether you're ready to move on to the next module. The course is offered for 1.4 CEUs and costs \$85 for members and \$125 for nonmembers.

Information for golfers

Two sections of the site, "For Your Golfers" and "Golf and the Environment," offer a selection of material that you can post on bulletin boards or adapt for your course's newsletter. Topics include ball mark and divot repair, bunker raking, aerification, green speed and ways to explain the need for frost delays. Many of your golfers' environmental questions are answered in the site's series of Greentips, which cover recycling, effluent water, pesticide-use facts and the envi-

ronmental benefits of golf courses.

Discussion forums

The GCSAA Web site's five discussion forums have become the heart and soul of the site through the wide-ranging dialogue among member users.

The various forums include "Talking Turf," "Shop Talk," "Student Union" and "The GCSAA Exchange." The site's often-spirited, catchall forum is "Talking it Over."

All forums feature a searchable archive, as well as e-mail notification when a user responds to your posting. The forums also indicate new messages since your last visit and offer you the ability to customize your display.

Making contact

Beyond the discussion forums, you can search the online membership directory, or, if you're looking for someone whose course conditions or disease problems may be similar to yours, you can search the online directory of member users to find someone who may be able to help. In addition, you can e-mail the board of directors through the site and move through the "GCSAA Tour" to find the particular GCSAA staff member who can answer your question.

Finding your way around

Several tools that appear on the banner of just about every page of the site cut navigation problems down to size. The "search" option allows you to look through the entire site by entering a keyword in the search field. You'll then get a list of results that may match your search criteria. On the same banner, there's also a site map link that you can use to scan the entire contents of the site.

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about \$200 to \$1,000 and most camera stores stock them now. These cameras will download the picture files directly to your computer via a hardwire connection to an I/O port or save them onto a floppy disk inserted into the camera. If you need a physical picture, your computer can print one with supplied software. When digital cameras were first introduced, picture quality was a concern, but the latest cameras produce very high-quality pictures. The quality of the printed product largely depends on the quality and resolution capacity of the printer.

Promote your role

Developing a Web site can be an excellent way to promote your maintenance department and your role as a superintendent. The site could be part of the main golf course Web site, or if your course doesn't have a site, your department could develop one of its own.

You could use the Web site to inform golfers about expected maintenance plans by posting schedules for aerification, overseeding and major projects. You could also post maintenance staff pictures, with the individuals' work accomplishments and awards. This would also be a way to boost morale and encourage individual responsibility.

In addition, you could post golf and turf articles that would interest golfers. You may consider adding links to other turf sites — such as GCSAA, your local chapter and the USGA Greens Section — to encourage Web surfers to access those useful sites. Update your site often, changing articles monthly and noting any new staff additions, accomplishments and awards.

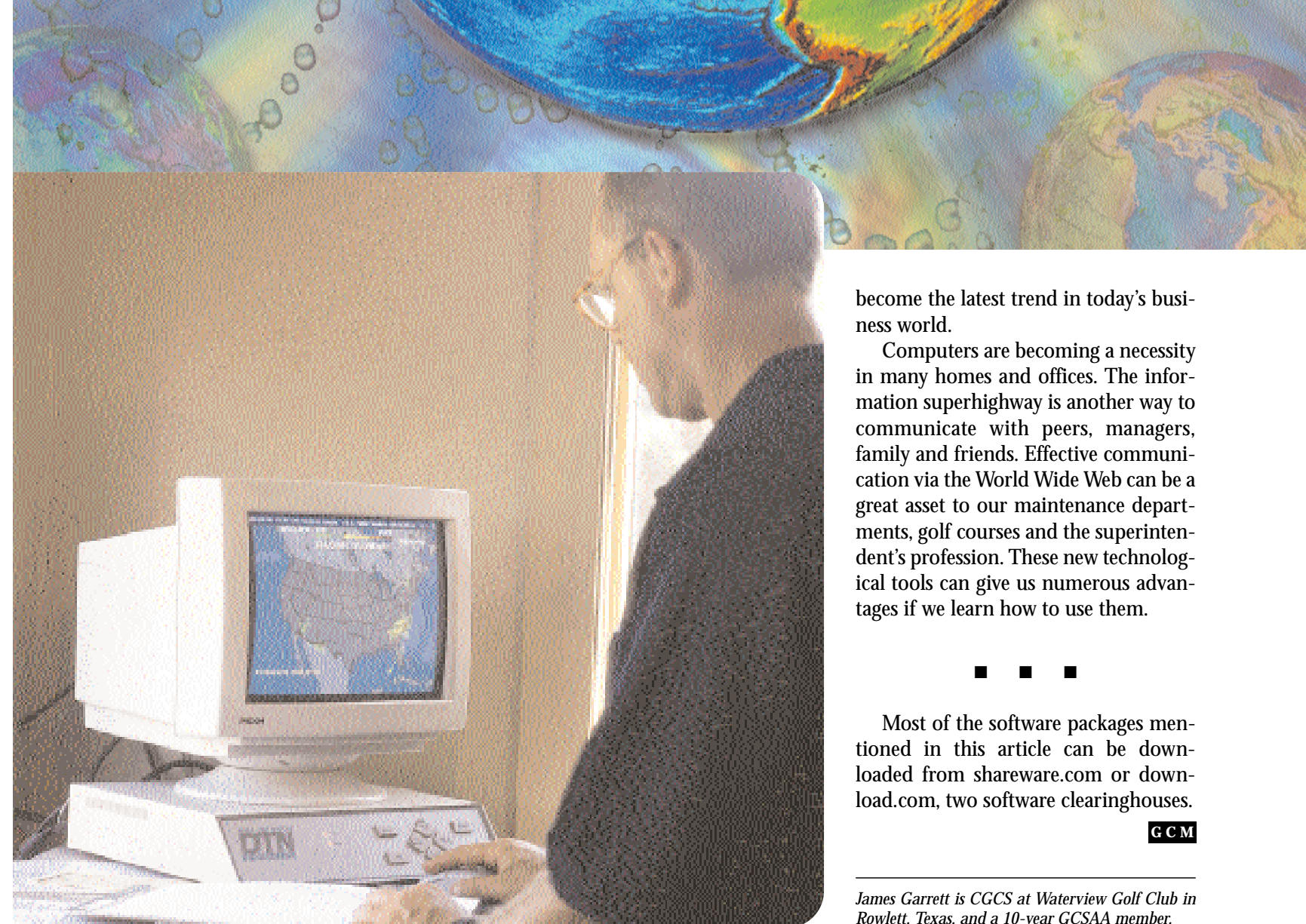
Once your page is complete and loaded onto the server, you must publicize it. Note the site in your club newsletter, advertising material and on your business card. The golf course maintenance section of the clubhouse bulletin board is another place to promote the site directly to golfers. One of

camping, financial, music, etc. It's also nice to include on your page information such as hobbies, family facts and maybe a picture of your golf course.

If you want to add pictures to your site, they must be scanned into a digital

format. Several formats are available for pictures: GIF, JPG, TIF, and BMP, with the GIF and JPG formats being the most widely used on the Web.

Digital cameras will take pictures in the digital formats. Prices range from



become the latest trend in today's business world.

Computers are becoming a necessity in many homes and offices. The information superhighway is another way to communicate with peers, managers, family and friends. Effective communication via the World Wide Web can be a great asset to our maintenance departments, golf courses and the superintendent's profession. These new technological tools can give us numerous advantages if we learn how to use them.



Most of the software packages mentioned in this article can be downloaded from shareware.com or download.com, two software clearinghouses.

GCM

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The Internet includes hundreds of sites with resources to help superintendents anticipate weather conditions, review research on turf diseases and pests, improve environmental efforts, better manage their staffs and more.

the most efficient ways to promote your Web page is to link it to as many other sites as you can. Contact the Webmasters of those sites for specific instructions and legal requirements.

Chatting on the Web

"Chat" on the Internet is interactive communication. There are chat rooms across the Web covering a wide range of topics.

Voice chat (v-chat) is talking long distance over the Internet using your computer. It's a good way to save on long-distance charges if you make a lot of long-distance calls. Your computer must have a sound card, speakers and voice chat software installed. A full duplex card is desirable because this allows full two-way communication simultaneously. Both parties communicating must be using the same v-chat

software. Two of the most widely used v-chat packages are FreeTel and Pow Wow.

Video conferencing

Video conferencing has become a popular tool for businesses to facilitate meetings across great distances with low cost and no physical travel. While verbal explanations are taking place, visual presentations can be shown on the computer screen using graphics software.

Spreadsheets, graphs and any documents that can be digitized can be projected onto the computer screen for everyone in the conference to see. This technology has opened the door to "telecommuting," which means more employees have the flexibility to live and work wherever they desire without affecting their employment. With more and more employees working from home offices, video conferencing has



2000 Leo Feser Award candidate

This article is eligible for the 2000 Leo Feser Award, presented first in 1956, and then annually since 1977 to the author of the best superintendent-written article published in *Golf Course Management* magazine during the previous year. Winners receive an all-expenses paid trip to the annual conference and show, are recognized during the Opening Session and reception at conference and show, and have their names engraved on a plaque permanently displayed at GCSAA headquarters.