Ed Hiscock

Former CFO now skims scum

It's not often that you can put the phrases "chief financial officer" and "skimmer" together in the same sentence and have everything turn out alright, but a new water-cleaning tool for golf courses developed by a former CFO might be the exception that proves the rule.

Scot Weiss is now CEO/president of the Orlando, Fla.-based Holden Synergy Group and a full-time inventor and manufacturer, but not that long ago he was a high-level finance officer who only dreamed about being an inventor.

His dream came true with his development of a number of devices for the pool and spa industry, including the Parachute Skimmer (www.parachuteskimmer.com), a hand-held pool cleaner that Weiss has adapted for golf course use in water hazards and retention ponds.

Weiss describes the skimmer as being like "a swimming noodle" with two parts. Below the floating "noodle" is a part that sinks, with mesh netting suspended between. The user removes debris by dragging the skimmer through the water by a rope or pole.

Weiss, who currently manufacturers the skimmers (although he's looking for a manufacturing partner), started with a 3-foot-wide home pool version, but began making a larger model for use in commercial- and competitive-sized pools, including custom-made models for SeaWorld. He's also started selling the pool skimmer in retail franchises and has been in talks with outlets such as Rec Warehouse and Target.

The golf connection began when the company's Internet presence brought them to the attention of Lakemasters Inc., a firm that manages the water portions of about 400 Florida golf courses, including Bay Hill.

While online, Lakemasters Vice President Mike Martin and President Stuart Cohen ran across the Parachute Skimmer. "In Orlando we have different algae. We have black algae, which really is hard to kill, and in summer it's really unsightly," Martin tells *GCM*, "and I said 'that just might work,' so I took one of the Parachute Skimmers and went to one of our properties and tried it. It worked great."

Martin realized the tool would work well enough to save some chemical applications. "Instead of spraying it and having it so unsightly for six to eight weeks to get it killed," he notes, "you skim it off so it's off the surface. Then you go in and do one major treatment after that and it's pretty much done because you're getting rid of the biomass."

One part of the Parachute Skimmer floats and one part sinks. The two parts are connected by nylon mesh, which allows debris to be skimmed from water. The tool comes in various sizes, including one for use in golf course water hazards and retention ponds. Photos courtesy of Scot Weiss

Martin says he's ordered 10 of the skimmers at about $135 each.

According to Weiss, it's called the Parachute Skimmer because the top piece (the one that floats) looks a bit like a parachute. But it's also a metaphorical parachute representing his decision to bail out of his high-powered financial management career to follow an inner call to invent.

Weiss is now looking for investors to enable him to expand. "I'm looking for investors because I really want to manufacture here in the states to create jobs, and I really want to gear this up to be able to do that."

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NEWS & notes

The city of Rincon, Ga., is purchasing Lost Plantation Golf Course for use as a re-use water sprayfield for its wastewater treatment system. The city has been discharging treated wastewater into creeks that flow into the Savannah River. By purchasing the golf course for this purpose, the city will gain revenue from the course, reduce discharge into the river, reduce withdrawals from the Upper Floridian aquifer and be able to extend water and sewer services to more properties. The purchased should be finalized by the end of 2009.

On Nov. 19, 2009, the WaterSense program released its draft specification for weather-based irrigation controllers. The public was invited and encouraged to submit comments directly to the EPA. To view the draft protocol, go to www.epa.gov/watersense/specs/controltech.htm. In addition to the opportunity to submit written comments, the EPA in December also conducted several public meetings regarding the draft specification.