

# Parts Finding Made Simple

**"P**arts is parts" may be a clever saying created by ad men trying to sell chicken sandwiches. But when it comes to irrigation repair parts, a more apt expression might be, "The whole is no greater than the sum of its parts."

In the past, sprinkler heads, valves, and other components were often replaced for the failure of a single part. It was just more convenient to stock backup components in case of a breakdown than to try and repair a broken unit with new or rebuilt parts and place it back in service. As a result, many components were discarded before their useful life was over, or thrown into a box with the idea that someday you'd have the time or the parts to fix them.

Depending upon how knowledgeable golf course superintendents or turf managers were about sprinkler repair, there were three options: replace the whole head, valve, backflow device, or controller; send the offending unit to a repair house; or fix it themselves. Those opting to make their own repairs needed to have new or rebuilt parts. Unfortunately, these parts were not always readily available.

In 1981, Bill Hayes Jr. recognized that irrigation products distributors often did not have a particular part that a person was seeking, and that normal delivery time for parts took anywhere from two to four weeks. It wasn't that manufacturers were neglecting service or didn't care about the customers. They simply had not placed a heavy emphasis on parts.

To help fill this void, Hayes created Arco Parts as a division of the Automatic Rain Company in Pleasonton, CA. By establishing the firm as a separate division, Hayes saw an opportunity to service superintendents, turf managers, municipalities, and contractors through their irrigation product distributors.

His goal was to keep an inventory of all brands of irrigation products and to acquire as much information on new, late-model, and out-of-production products as possible. What's more, Hayes visualized a nationwide distribution network for parts and eventually for service as well.

Let's say you're a groundskeeper and



**Supplying repair parts is an important service of irrigation distributors.**

need to replace a diaphragm in one of the older valves on a baseball field. The valve is located right in front of a dugout and you have a tournament starting in a few days. You can see that the valve is leaking. In order to replace the valve and repair the pipe, you'll have to pull the valve box and dig a larger hole. Suddenly a simple fix becomes a major project. If you could get hold of a new diaphragm you could keep the repair simple.

You call your local irrigation distributor. He doesn't stock the diaphragm for that particular valve so he has to order it. From a business standpoint, dealing with a small order for a hard-to-find part is time consuming and expensive for both the manufacturer and distributor. The manufacturer has devoted a great amount of time and money to developing new and improved products. He tells your distributor it may take two weeks to fill the order.

Now there's a quicker solution. While at one time the irrigation market wasn't large enough to support companies that specialize in replacement parts, that's no longer the case, as Arco and other companies have discovered.

Your distributor can now call one of these specialized firms and receive your crucial

part within a week. Since Arco is an irrigation parts supplier and repair shop as well, it protects the integrity of other distributors by not selling direct. It only supplies legitimate wholesale distributors, such as Wickham Supply in Texas, Banks Supply in Florida, Turf Irrigation in Colorado, United Pipe and Supply in Oregon, and Hydroscape, Smith Pipe and Supply, and Normac, all in California. The company services more than 180 wholesale distributors in all.

"What we're trying to do is pay attention to maintenance and troubleshooting," said Mark Witzke, the company's sales manager. "Our job is not to try to sell new products. We're concentrating on the repair and parts market for products that are already out there."

A parts distribution network serves several purposes. By facilitating the search for the right part, it makes in-house repair of components more practical for the users. It also takes some of the pressure off the manufacturers.

For Arco, the first step in establishing this network was to create a parts catalog. In 1981, this catalog had 77 pages. Today it has 316 pages, and includes parts from more than 20 irrigation product manufacturers such as Buckner, Champion, Febco, GEE, Griswold, Hays, Hydro Rain, Imperial, IrriTrol, Moody, L.R. Nelson, Neptune, Rain Bird, Royal Coach, Safe-T-Lawn, Superior, Thompson, Toro, Valcon, and Weather-Matic. To help customers identify diaphragms, the catalog includes six pages of photographs and dimensions on many of the diaphragms available.

The catalog and the company grew simultaneously. Eventually Arco began to manufacture its own brand of irrigation product replacement parts and sell them to other wholesalers around the country.

The parts manufacturing process begins with the product manager, who takes a sample of an original part to an independent laboratory to identify its composition. Bids for production of the part are then solicited from various manufacturers. To maintain quality, Arco Parts receives the first article of approval from the manufacturer it has selected. Of course, patented





Old internal assemblies can be repaired or rebuilt.

parts cannot be reproduced.

The company's own products include diaphragms, solenoids, brass and stainless-steel stems, bleed plugs, gaskets, washers, solenoid wrenches, and other assorted rubber and brass items.

Repair kits, which can help reduce downtime in the field as well as inventory cost for the wholesaler, have also been introduced by the company. Kits for remote control valves, vacuum breakers, quick-coupler valves, and rotor repair are among the more than 100 kits currently available.

These kits offer several advantages for both the wholesale distributor and its customer. With as many as 15 individual parts per kit, they cut down on a wholesaler's need for extensive stocking and inventory of each individual part. In turn, by purchasing the whole kit, the customer avoids repeat trips to the wholesaler.

With the groundwork for its parts supply and distribution network laid, the company ventured into the controller repair and sprinkler rebuilding. Actually it has been working on controllers since its inception, but the growing popularity of solid-state controllers posed new challenges.

Not all manufacturers offer controller repair and PC board rebuilding. In the past, a superintendent or sports turf manager faced with the problem of a broken or faulty clock might replace the whole unit, even when such a practice was not completely necessary. Controller repair and PC board rebuilding presents an alternative to discarding controllers that can be salvaged.

PC timing board rebuilding is a relatively new addition to the company's services, and it could almost be called a timing board "exchange." When a wholesale distributor sends its customer's board (which in many cases is connected to the back of the control panel) to Arco, the rebuilt PC board the customer gets back is not necessarily the original that was sent. To keep repair time down, the company stocks rebuilt boards.



Rebuilt assemblies with remount kit.

So while your original board is being rebuilt for another customer, a rebuilt board has your controller up and running.

To help the customers of its wholesale distributors with troubleshooting and repair, the company offers a series of four seminars. The seminars are open to interested persons in the wholesale distributors' areas. While they are currently offered only in California, the company plans to hold them nationwide eventually.

The first seminar covers general irrigation. It is designed for those unfamiliar with irrigation. According to Witzke, the seminar discusses irrigation "from the point of connection," and includes an overview of piping, sprinklers, valves, backflow devices, and controllers.

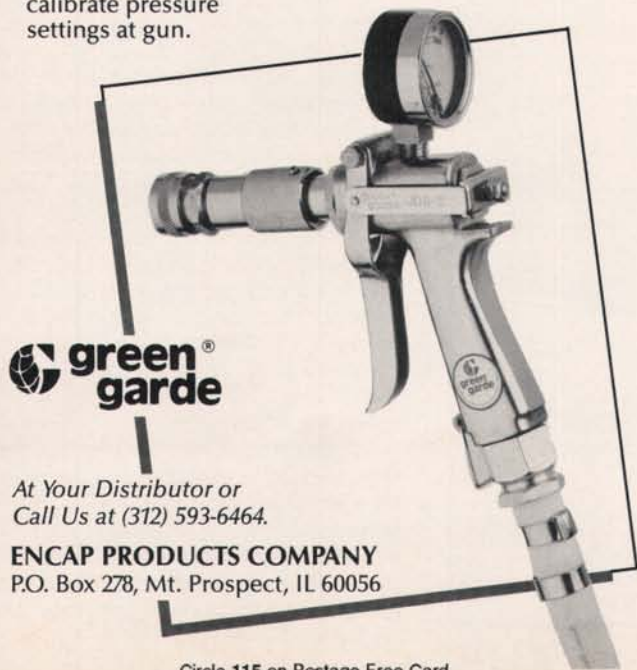
Remote-control valve troubleshooting is the focus of the second seminar. "We start

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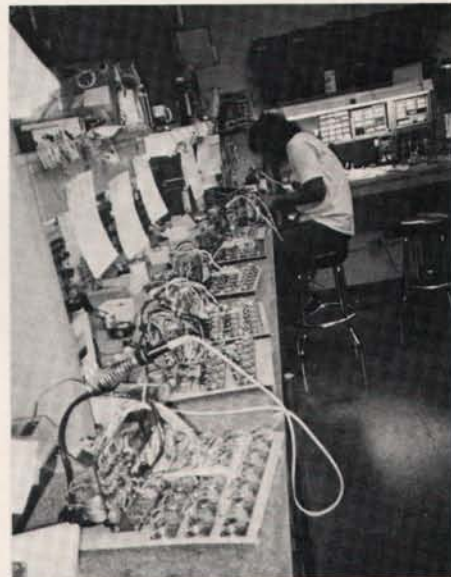
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### Parts Finding

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with valves that are outdated, go all the way through the current production models, and teach hydraulics," said Witzke. "We teach how the valve works, how water gets on top of the diaphragm, how water exits the valve through porting, and what prevents a valve from opening and closing."

The first 5½ hours of the second seminar is taught in the classroom. The second part is strictly hands-on. Arco Parts sets up working manifolds in the field, complete with booby-trapped valves. The job of the student is to troubleshoot and repair them. In this manner, classroom learning is reinforced by hands-on application.



**Many turf managers are not aware that controller circuit boards can be repaired.**

The third seminar deals with controller programming and troubleshooting. It covers the basics of electromechanical, hybrid, and solid-state controllers. Programming comprises 70 percent of the discussion. The remaining 30-percent is concerned with troubleshooting. Witzke said that of all the solid-state controllers his company receives, 40 to 50 percent are in perfect working order. The problem is often a user's inexperience with programming.

Seminar four is relatively new and covers backflow device troubleshooting. According to Witzke, it is a "touchy" topic. "In certain areas of California, if you even open a backflow device it has to be recertified," he said. "We're not trying to teach people how to be certified. What we are trying to teach is that if there's a problem with a backflow device, you can repair it and then call someone out to certify it."

For the growing number of irrigation managers who repair their own equipment, improved parts availability saves time and money. Through the cooperation of product manufacturers and wholesale distributors, a national parts network helps take the frustration out of irrigation product repair, because finding the right part should never become a full-time job. ●

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