At the maintenance facility, when crew members and volunteers weren’t working, some of them gathered around and studied the sleek looking machine that looked like something out of a “Transformers” movie. It was the Tranz-Former Fairway/Greens Roller from Salsco Inc. It was used on the Lake Course’s fairways during the tournament.

Matt Shaffer, the director of golf course operations at Merion Golf Club near Philadelphia, was one of the people looking at the machine. Shaffer, who worked as a volunteer and whose club hosts the U.S. Open next year, is the man behind the Tranz-Former.

Shaffer, a thinking man’s superintendent, is always looking for ways to do his job better. He contacted Sal Rizzo, the founder and CEO of Salsco, about building him a fairway roller. Rizzo has built and sold greens rollers for years, but a fairway roller was something different. But Shaffer had a feeling that Rizzo would be interested in his request.

“Sal is innovative and imaginative,” Shaffer says “He also likes to be challenged.”

About 10 months later, Rizzo unveiled the Tranz-Former, which is self-propelled and has a transport speed of about 11 MPH and a rolling width of 10 feet. The transport wheels rise to place rolls into position for rolling.

Shaffer has been rolling fairways for years to rid them of dollar spot, but it was time consuming to roll big fairways with small greens rollers. At Merion, the fairways have always had an “antagonistic” dollar spot problem, Shaffer says. But when the fairways were rolled and dew was removed, the dollar spot never showed.

The Merion staff built a five-gang roller and towed it on the fairways behind a tractor. It worked, but operating it was difficult, especially when turning. That’s when Shaffer began contacting companies to see if they might be interested in building a fairway roller.

“Most of them said they didn’t see the value in it,” Shaffer adds.

When Shaffer saw the finished product, he was impressed with Rizzo’s engineering.

“It’s just fantastic,” Shaffer says.

Merion owns two Salsco Tranz-Formers.”