



# Helping Others Get Into the Swing of Things

*By Bob  
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I began playing golf as a teenager and quickly fell in love with

the game. After nearly 40 years in the golf course management profession, I admit I am biased in my feelings about the game.

I believe there are few leisure activities that are as enjoyable as golf. Golf offers us the wonderful opportunity to appreciate nature's beauty while enjoying the camaraderie of others. Yet, national tracking data indicates the number of people playing golf is flattening. Certainly the challenging economy has had an impact. We know that leisure spending tends to be the first to go when the belt tightening begins.

Even before the economy soured, golfer participation showed signs of waning. For the past four years we have had more golf courses close than open. That means the loss of opportunities to play, the loss of

employment opportunities and the loss of open green spaces in our communities.

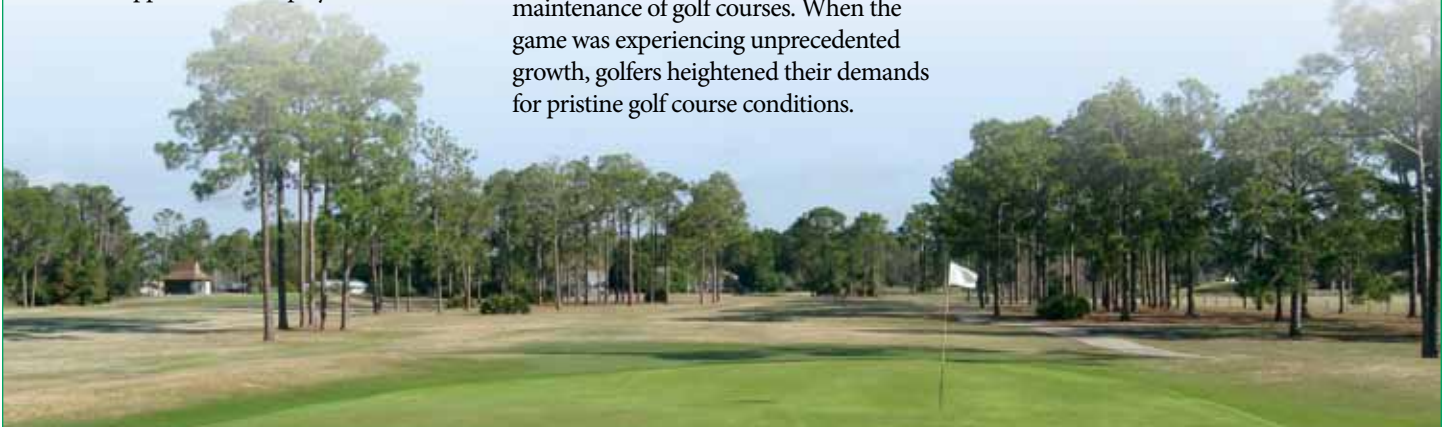
Some industry experts say the reduction in the number of golf courses is simply a market correction. My opinion is that we need to focus on getting more people to play this great game. Golf has so much to offer for people of all ages and backgrounds. It is one of the few activities that is truly accessible to all. Organized golf has responded with a number of programs aimed at increasing golfer participation and making the game more affordable. As president of the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America, I am heartened by what the industry is doing to address its challenges.

But I believe the renaissance of the game can be driven by golfers as well. They are the ones who can introduce friends and family to the game. They are the ones who can work with golf facility leaders to adopt programs that not only attract new golfers, but retain them as repeat customers. Golfers can also help to make the game more affordable. A large share of golf facility expenses comes in the maintenance of golf courses. When the game was experiencing unprecedented growth, golfers heightened their demands for pristine golf course conditions.

With a strong cash flow, the industry reacted by meeting those demands. The consequence came in the higher costs that came with providing such conditions. Increased expenses for labor, fertilizer, pesticide, water, maintenance equipment, etc., continue to drive up the cost of the game. As a result, the game has become too expensive for some people.

What does this mean for golf? It means that consumer demand and professional desires for perfect golf conditions have diminished the core appeal of the game. Golf is a visual sport, offering some of the most stimulating environments to the human eye. But the "look" or the aesthetics of the sport should not mask that the most important aspect of the golf course is how it plays, not how it looks.

Part of the beauty of the game has been that golfers must develop the skills and mental toughness to play golf shots from a variety of lies, both good and bad. I think by returning some of our focus back to providing economically realistic playing conditions, we can make golf more accessible and enjoyable for everyone.



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