

LIGHTS AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL



**GREEN SIDE UP
BY JOEL JACKSON**

If you are watching your investment portfolio, you are probably still in a state of uncertainty and anxiety over the nation's economic outlook. Certainly the golf industry isn't out of the woods yet, but at least some clearings are visible and there's room to stretch instead of always walking in the shadows.

After a couple of years of poorly attended events,

meetings and outings, reports of increased attendance at many chapter events are filtering through the grapevine. I know the Envirotron Classic was a 36-hole sell out, and attendance numbers from other early spring events was up over the past year or two. So there are some positive signs that people are tired of hiding in the cave and are craving continuing education and camaraderie.

There are encouraging signs from introductory programs like Get Golf Ready and news that individual facilities are getting more creative about welcoming golfers of all ages and abilities. Creative forward-tee installations by golf course architects are helping new golfers be more successful and enjoy the game while they develop their skills.

More clubs are setting aside tee times and days of the week where junior and beginner programs can get established. In one of the more extreme, but certainly unique, inventions for golfers

with limited physical abilities but still with the desire to be on the course with friends is a system called Ezee Golf. It consists of one special club that "fires" the golf ball 50 to 225 yards with power cartridges similar to a nail gun, and a wedge and a putter for the up-close chips and putts.

Certainly this isn't for USGA-sanctioned play and GHIN handicaps, but the majority of golfers are all about fun and friendship outdoors and not about placing a club championship trophy on the mantle. The game is finally making room for the "game" of golf and not just the competition to beat par or your opponent.

Recently, I played in two scramble tournaments at the International Network of Golf (ING) spring conference at the Innisbrook Resort in Palm Harbor. They have a full handicap pairs event to win a spot in the World Pairs Championship held in Scotland. But for the rest of us hacks there are scramble events.

Rather than the same old cruel and usual punishment of making me tee off from the blue tees where my drives become useless for the team, the golf committee said, "Let's have fun!" Seniors were invited to play from their tee of choice where they felt most comfortable.

I was not embarrassed to drive up to the forward tees and give it a whack. In fact, by doing so I had a real chance to contribute to the team and put a ball in the landing area where the A and B players drive. It let me enjoy the round a whole lot more than just saying, "Well, I don't need to hit on this hole."

We need to get more people engaged in the game for the industry's survival. It's refreshing to see golf courses, businesses and associations exploring new ways to get that done. ■



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