

# Golf growth prospects far from 'bust'

You may have read or heard of the recent article in *Forbes* (Dec. 24) reporting on the National Golf Foundation's Golf Summit.

The feature story titled, "Extrapolation Madness," questioned the NFG's growth figures for participants and the real demand for golf facilities.

In some instances I agree that the NFG's figures may be aggressive, but I disagree with the conclusion that the future growth of the industry is a bust!

I responded to *Forbes* with the following letter. I'll look forward to

your comments.

Dear Sir:

*Golf Course News* associate editor Peter Blais responded to the National Golf Foundation's predictions as "wishful thinking"... He's right.

The NFG's numbers may be wishful thinking—and I personally think that 350 new golf courses per year is preposterous.

But remember, the NFG never projected that 350 new courses would be built. The projection is that 350 new courses will be needed to meet the demand.



C. von Brecht

new golf courses.

The problems involving golf courses are not necessarily the courses, but rather the real estate development surrounding the courses. The demand for stand-alone

The methods used to count golfers may not be valid. However, you should understand that there is a demand for

courses, primarily in the public and municipal categories, is real. Just try to get a tee time at a Chicago area muni on a Saturday morning in July.

I have presented *Golf Course News*' projections for new facilities on a number of occasions.

Although more conservative than the NFG's estimate (we're projecting 150 new courses per year for the next five years, along with 200 renovations), this steady growth is far from a bust!

Sincerely,  
Charles E. von Brecht

## COMMENTARY

# Family affair leaves no widows, orphans

Everywhere you turn, the courts, the government, the schools, the voters — someone somewhere in the country is putting a chink in the armor of the American family.

And now, just as the golf industry has resolved to be a part of the solution, not a part of the problem with the environment, it should resolve to be part of the solution to the destruction of the family, not a part of the problem.

I don't know exactly when the decline of American society began. I'll let the sociologists and psychologists argue about that. But you don't have to be a "ologist" to figure out some of the actions taken in our country have been devastating to family life.

If you're a **job-ologist** or **school-ologist**: Children and parents alike are faced with more pressures out-

side the family — either from jobs or school. More extracurricular activities keep more kids away from their families. (When your son's basketball team practices nearly every day over Christmas vacation, including New Year's Day, this suddenly becomes very real to you.)

Jobs also are often more demanding and many send parents traveling much more today. Mobility itself, from airplanes to automobiles, has hurt family life.

If you're a **mother-ologist**: Each year, more and more mothers are joining the workforce, either by choice or necessity as inflation eats at family earnings. The one person who has traditionally been home to hold the family together is often not there for the children.



M. Leslie

and children.

If you're a **TV-ologist**: Television and movies alike have desensitized child and adult alike to violence, death, bad manners and degrading sex... a complete list could fill anyone's scroll. Family values are next to non-existent, and Christians, Christian values and morality undergo constant attack.

How often in the last month did you see a family presented as a real, hon-

If you're a **father-ologist**: More men today are taking second jobs. More time away from home means less time with wife

estly communicating unit on TV or in a movie? How often were father-mother-son-daughter doing something, anything together as a family? Check out the new subtlety — little white lies that are just fine in the ads ("Sorry, honey, there's no more Coke in the fridge."). Lying as much as anything pulls child away from parent.

If you're a **vote-ologist**: We're doing some crazy things in the United States that are just tearing apart parent-child relationships. Some places have voted that a minor girl can have an abortion without her parents being informed, for instance.

Just last November Maine voters joined those in other states who have approved Sunday store openings. Did the "yeah" voters ever consider the

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## GUEST COMMENTARY

# ModCourses the answer for many

By Bill Amick

Golf seems to be on television almost constantly these days, with professional events for men, women and senior men. Superstars of golf are even well-known to millions of non-golfers.

Then why aren't greater numbers of people heading towards a first tee? It's a challenge to shoot a good score. You can compete with a single opponent or a whole field, have a friendly match, or try to lower your handicap. Golf is an eternal quest, changing daily and with each course, never completely learned or conquered.

Is golf perfect, or could it be that not all is paradise in fairway land? With all of golf's popularity, many public courses are crowded and play at some private clubs is exasperatingly slow during the busy season. Not everyone has the time to wait to tee off and then the patience to suffer through a five-hour round.

In metropolitan areas all of the nearby courses may be clubs with long membership waiting lists or fees too high for most working people or the young or retired.

If only enough new courses could easily and quickly be built in these

places. The demand by golfers is usually there. But in populated places 150 acres of vacant land can be impossible to find or extremely expensive.

Just as critical, construction and annual maintenance of these huge grassed playing fields is costly.

With today's long-driving game have come bigger courses that require more land, more money to build and maintain, and more time to play.

Yet the game continues to be just as difficult to learn, possibly more discouraging with the longer holes. With high land, construction, and financing costs, a conventional-sized golf course often is not feasible. When elected officials start discussing building a municipal course, even where there is an obvious need, a large block of non-golfing taxpayers usually gets very vocal. These voters fear such a project might increase their taxes or reduce the monies available for new roads or the police force.

And in an increasing number of places, a limitation to building a big course is finding enough water and obtaining permission to use it to irrigate all of that thirsty grass.



Bill Amick

A way to reduce the size and cost of building courses would make it easier to provide the joys of the game to more people.

We certainly don't expect long hitters to start swinging easier or hitting 5-irons off every tee so that golf holes can be made shorter. Nor do golf's rules makers—the United States Golf Association and the Royal & Ancient Golf Club of St. Andrews — seem ready to throttle back on how far today's "hot" golf balls can be hit.

### A SOLUTION

Fortunately, a solution is already here and being used to accomplish these goals — playing a reduced-distance ball on modified golf courses.

MacGregor Golf Co.'s "Mactec" ball goes about 60 percent of the distance of a golf ball when driven

Are there any solutions for this new golf course dilemma, a shortage that continues to grow near most large cities?

by a long hitter. It weighs approximately .84 ounces (24 grams), a little more than half of the 1.62-ounce (45.93 gram) golf ball.

A modified golf course can be set up several ways. What many golfers and developers think of first is what housing developer Andy Combs opened in 1987, at Eagle Landing near Charleston, S.C. This is essentially a miniaturization of a conventional golf course, at a scale to fit the modified ball.

A second option is a par-3 course that can also be played as a modified course with a modified ball. This is the route taken by Charles Pasternak in building his Missing Links course near Milwaukee, and Joe Clark in remodeling the Highlands Links Colony par-3 course in Plymouth, N.H.

Another choice is what the developers of the Britannia course in the Cayman Islands decided upon. There are alternative ways the course can be played, depending on where the tee markers and cups are placed. It can be arranged as an 18-hole Cayman course for the modified ball, an 18-hole executive course when played with a golf ball,

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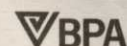
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## The critical hire — superintendent — was omitted

To the Editor:

In the December 1990 issue of Golf Course News, the article "Golf Course Europe" contained comments by ASGCA (American Society of Golf Course Architects) President Dan Maples stating that "the key to a successful golf course development is assembling a professional team. Included should be an experienced land planner, civil engineer, golf course architect, housing architect, attorney and financial consultant."

How sad that the golf course superintendent was omitted from his statement. Who is better qualified to assist in grass selection, determine initial start-up costs, labor requirements, maintainability and the necessary equipment, in addition to establishing budgetary demands?

Would new developments have an increased success rate if a qualified golf course superintendent were included as part of this professional team?

Could maintenance costs and construction problems be reduced while maintainability is increased?

Would developments be better prepared for the tremendous start-up costs of golf course construction and maintenance — primarily the first year, but certainly second and third years as well?

Food for thought, certainly.

Sincerely,  
Mark J. Hoban, CGCS  
President  
Georgia GCSA

## Not mixing irrigation with great architects

To the Editor:

In November's issue were listed golf course architects headquartered in the United States. I was honored to be on the roster with such great people as Jay Morrish, Tom Fazio, Bob Cupp, Art Hills, Roger Packard and Scott Miller. The truth of the matter is, Larry Rodgers is an irrigation consultant to golf course architects, not a golf course architect, as you listed.

My only attempt at design was a three-hole course on a friend's ranch. It was this humbling experience that taught me just how important selecting a quality golf course architect is. I am quite happy in my role as the irrigation designer on the many fine projects I have been involved with.

Thank you for putting my name in print in

association with such great architects. My role in the golf course design field is an important one, but the art and strategy must come before the mechanics of golf course architecture.

Sincerely,  
Larry Rodgers  
Lakewood, Colo.

## Comment

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tens of thousands of people who would no more have Sundays with their families?

Let's be **golf-ologists** and be a part of the solution.

Jerry Gelinas, vice president of marketing with Club Corporation of America, said potential club members "want benefits that fit theirs' and their families' needs. We've found a strong trend toward the entire family becoming part of the club environment."

Gelinas said families offer a major opportunity and a more stable membership for a club.

So, business-wise — as well as good neighbor-wise and plain good citizenship-wise — getting entire families involved in golf is a positive for golf courses everywhere.

What can you do? Ski areas are finding success with one tactic: Giving "first-timers" the opportunity to ski free of charge (including skis, poles and boots in some instances) on a particular day. Other ski areas offer ongoing teaching programs for very little money.

This is all geared to teach young and old alike the sport so that they can enjoy it to its fullest — and return and keep returning.

Would this be difficult for golf courses to do?

Courses could offer special "family" green fee discounts, or father-son discounts, husband-wife discounts... the list goes on. Biting the bullet today could mean eating a meal of success tomorrow.

Let's give the many "golf widows" new life by bringing them out, showing them respect, and honestly illustrating that they are welcome.

Junior programs, women's programs, teaching for the physically challenged... the opportunities are boundless, the untapped ideas endless.

Let's be inventive. It will help our business, our society, and perhaps even our self-esteem..

# Roberts: Answering tough questions

BY ELIOT C. ROBERTS

Reports of municipalities in the more densely populated parts of the country considering landscape restrictions and ordinances have become more common. To some degree, this is related to increasing interest in Xeriscape, which emphasizes use of native vegetation with proposed reductions in water and energy use for maintenance. A back-to-nature or natural practices philosophy has appeal, particularly in densely populated regions where in recent years much of nature's value has been tarnished by pollution of various sorts.

Of the many questions asked The Lawn Institute, seven are key to better understanding landscape quality and environmental relationships. These are:

- 1) Which are better, trees or grass, in taking carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere and returning oxygen?
- 2) What does landscape sustainability have to do with landscape value?
- 3) What is really the goal of most new landscape ordinances?
- 4) How can we deal with landscape plans, regulations and specifications?
- 5) Are energy costs unreasonable in landscape maintenance?
- 6) How much idealism is behind demands for landscape change?
- 7) Why do we so often read in news stories that turfgrasses are an enemy?

Answers to these questions should help clarify some important issues.

Q — We hear a lot about photosynthesis using carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere and releasing oxygen. What does it all amount to? Which are better doing this, trees or grass?

A — This type of comparison makes woody plants look good and turfgrasses look poor, but it doesn't present the whole picture. All carbon fixed in organic matter (biomass) oxidizes in time. This may be fast — such as burning — or slow (by) decomposition. In decomposition, micro-organisms are involved and humus is formed, enriching the soil.

Woody plants contain a lot of carbon and therefore may take years to die and decompose. Or they are harvested for construction, pulp or fuel. Ultimately, virtually all of this carbon ends up back in the earth's atmosphere and there is very little net gain in oxygen.

With turfgrass, clippings decomposed continuously as long as temperatures are warm and the soil is moist for microbial activity. This enriches the soil and improves its structure so that water drains better and erosion is reduced.

This benefit is far more important than the so-called balance of carbon-dioxide and oxygen.

When considering a closed system where wood may be removed and replaced regularly with immature plants, the gain in oxygen cited for woody plants may be expected.

In an open system, characteristic of the real world, biodegradation of wood is continual so that atmospheric gains in oxygen are not realized.

The "liability" of turfgrass not accumulating more carbon over time becomes an asset in providing carbon energy for some 45,000,000,000,000,000 [quadrillion] microbes living in every 1,000 square feet of turfgrass root zone. These soil-building organisms require carbon as a source of energy for natural humus-forming processes.

Since terrestrial plants that fix carbon through photosynthesis all biodegrade, and consume oxygen and release carbon dioxide back to the atmosphere, where has our at-



Dr. E. Roberts

mospheric oxygen come from?

The 20 percent oxygen found in the atmosphere is quite stable. Much more or less would make life hazardous for both plants and animals. The biotic origin of oxygen is aquatic, or at least plants and animals that have their final resting place under water where anaerobic decomposition is prevalent. Deposits of carbon containing coal, oil and natural gas have all formed under these anaerobic conditions.

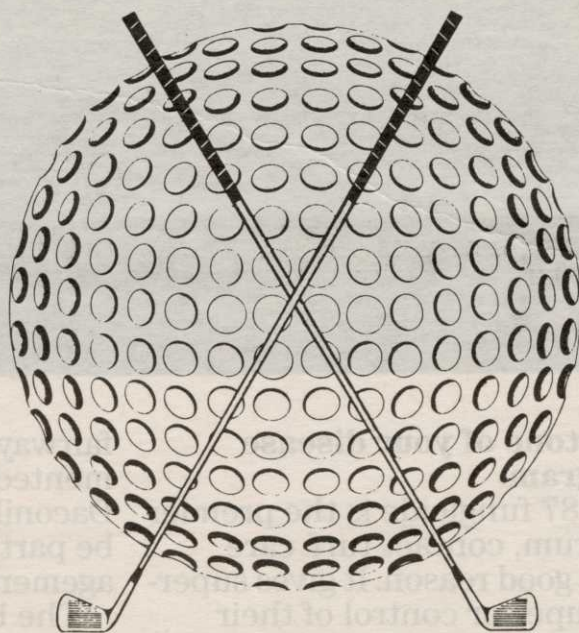
Thus, our fossil fuels of stored carbon, which originally came from carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, are only now being burned. Had these sources of carbon not been discovered and used, we would most likely have been limited to burning wood as a source of energy.

With finite amounts of fossil fuels available, we must look for other sources of energy.

Providing positive levels of carbon storage and oxygen productivity are the least likely of all landscape benefits to be realized. To be sure, every little bit helps, and we should promote the concept of living plants in the landscape. They are infinitely better than the alternative — dust and dirt, asphalt and concrete.

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