Wide range of public courses needed

During the past month, I've had the opportunity to play two levels of public golf in my home state of Florida. I say two levels because these courses, although both public, are on nearly opposite ends of the public golf spectrum.

Buffalo Creek is a municipal course operated by Manatee County. It's out in the sticks, where rattlesnakes and armadillos still thrive, and gators sun their backsides in the shallows and on the banks of water hazards. It's a wide open links-style course with plenty in great condition. For $94 (including cart and tax) you can enjoy a round at this great facility. I might add that Palm Beach County residents pay less, and out-of-season rates are lower.

The point is, here are two extremes. I enjoyed each equally for different reasons. Although the majority of us do not afford the upscale fees of the new breed of public facility, I believe there is a market for these courses. The TPC courses have been very successful in promoting public participation of their facilities around the country for a high greens fee.

The major point I'm making is the continued need for public golf play. On the other end of the spectrum is Emerald Dunes, located a half mile from the Florida Turnpike in the middle of Palm Beach County. Designed by Tom Fazio and opened a year or so ago by Ray Finch to be an upscale public facility, it is truly a spectacular golf facility. As you arrive, the attendants at the bag drop are cordial, and direct you to parking and the pro shop. The locker room facilities equal many private facilities and the locker room attendant was terrific.

The course is a tough but fair test of golf in excellent condition. For a day, Emerald Dunes makes you feel you're a member of a private club. For $84 (including cart and tax) you can enjoy a round at this great facility. I might add that Palm Beach County residents pay less, and out-of-season rates are lower.

Scotty Cameron of Scotty Cameron Golf Design is Emerald Dunes' greens designer. He designed several greens, as did Joe Fontana, a native Floridian. The greens are the high point of the course and the signature hole is 13 where it is a 108 yard par 3 to an elevated green surrounded by a deep bunker. It is a great par 3 and a great finishing hole. After a great round, an impressive dinner awaits at the club at no extra charge. It is a fine round for high-level competition, especially considering the majority of the golfers are still learning how to play the game.

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Franz
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but doing so within the budget guidelines set up by the superintendent.
So there's the question of salaries. How much do you pay a top-notch technician? In the Sarasota, Fla., area $8 per hour is about average. But is this wage really competitive and fair compensation for this dedicated "backbone" of the golf course maintenance department? I think not.
My feeling is that a qualified technician should earn at least $350 to $450 per week. The term "qualified" meaning someone who has been a professional for at least five years and has worked on a diversity of equipment ranging from string trimmers to backhoes. But how does a superintendent justify paying a technician $8 to $12 per hour? Tell me the bean counters the truth about this position of great importance and responsibility. Tell them he is responsible for perhaps hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of equipment. This should aid the bean counters in their decision. If superintendents will more fairly compensate their technicians, we will see a marked increase in professionalism among technicians. And these qualified technicians are invariably the backbone of this very prosperous industry.

COMMUNICATION A KEY
Now let's talk about communication. It is a big word that means one simple thing: Let's talk! If communication exists between techni- cian and superintendent, life is great. If it doesn't exist, life can be unbearable at times. I know this first-hand. I love to be put on the back as much as the next guy. It's human nature.
But I also like to be told when I'm doing a less-than-pleasing job. This type of communication is very productive. It works in both directions. Too much criticism and too little praise is detrimental. But too much praise and not enough criticism isn't healthy either. These qualified technicians are invari- ably the backbone of this very prosperous industry.

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TO THE EDITOR

To the editor:

As the golf industry accepts the reality of its "boom" not touching all with Midas-like prosperity, the certainty is there'll be another boom. This external surge in the popularity of the game will happen when the baby boomers who have been an anomaly throughout their lives begin to reach retirement after the year 2010.

To survive in these intervening years, we'll need a boom in management competency, a preoccupation with management that can deliver profits, consistent with public expectations of benefit and value.

Future growth of the industry should stress the mundane skills of financial analysis, cost containment, scheduling, forecasting, mar- keting, public relations and a host of other talents perhaps overlooked in our recent celebration of unbridled optimism.

In my younger days in the hotel industry, a mirror image of golf existed. The 1960s saw hotel occupations and industry predictions soar with the opening of each new hotel. No one gave much thought whether the needs curve was being hyper-extended. While building in the 1970s continued to meet the needs of earlier years, the industry was intoxicated with its own success and oblivious to overleveraged "Taj Mahals."

The "morning after" did arrive in the 1980s with an extended hangover and continuing industry distress of today. This new reality indicated in aid retrospect how overbuilding and unsound business practices can be in- toxicants of choice.

Much the same can be said for golf courses. Some served their purpose as realty sales inducements, testimonials to bloated egos, or victors of inept management. In the future, they must be able to stand alone as busi- nesses. There won't be a need for them to stay open, dispensing charity in their markets.

The business of golf can create an internal boom in management know-how. It can sharpen skills demanded by the public, the lending community, owners and elected of- ficials charged with operating public golf courses.

Better tools to judge the quality of man- age ment through studies of other successful operators will equip these const ituencies to reward or punish their golf enterprises. Expec- tations will increase as public awareness of success in other quarters demands imita- tion. At least for the moment, golf has it all. Ninety percent of the courses today can take advantage of the lessons of other busi- nesses to survive and prosper. The public's wide variety of choices will mean loyalty to courses perceived as good values.

Returning to the basics of seeking customer satisfaction, courtesy, cleanliness, telephone courtesy, image projection and a wide variety of costless improvements will tell the public we want and appreciate their business. It should continue the reasonable growth of the game, consistent with its universal appeal, an aging population and greater leisure time. These changes will have their price.

A leaner, meaner breed of professional manager, meeting the expectations of his/ her various constituencies, will emerge. They'll be the superstars of the next 20 years, helping to create internal and financial growth for the business of the game, and thus the game itself.

The lesson of the '90s will be: Manage or move! Sincerely,

Curt Walker, executive director
Public Golf Management Assn.
Minneapolis, Minn.

Letters to the editor are welcomed. Just address them to: Letters, Golf Course News, P.O. Box 967, Yarmouth, ME 04096.

P.J. Boatwright, 'soul of USGA,' dies at 63

MORRISTOWN, N.J. — P.J. Boatwright Jr., 63, called "the soul of the USGA" by the organization's current president, died April 5 at a hospital here after a long illness.

Boatwright had been prominent in the United States Golf Association since 1959, when he was named assistant director. He served in that capacity for 10 years before succeeding Joseph Dey Jr., as executive di- rector. In 1980 he became executive-director of rules and competitions. He was joint sec- retary of the World Amateur Golf Council for the last 20 years.

"He meant so much to golf. For many years he was the ultimate authority," said USGA President C. Grant Speath of Palo Alto, Calif. "Whenever anybody anywhere had a sticky problem, they came to P.J., whether it was in the United States or anywhere in the rest of the world."

David B. Fay, USGA executive director, said, "We grieve for him and his family, and at the same time we're so much better for hav- ing known him."

An Augusta, Ga., native, Boatwright grew up in Spartanburg, S.C., attended Georgia Tech University and Wofford College. He won the Carolina Open in 1957 and 1959, the Carolina Amateur in 1951, and qualified for the U.S. Amateurs.

He was inducted into the South Carolina, Carolinas and Wofford College Halls of Fame, and was presented the Metropolitan (N.Y.) Golf Association's Distinguished Service Award in 1983, and the Metropolitan Golf Writers Association Gold Tee Award in 1986.

He is survived by his wife Nancy; two daughters, Cindy of Wayne, N.J., and Carolyn of Columbus, Ohio, a son, P.J. III of Dallas, and three grandchildren.

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