Global sharing would help golf industry

By Stephen J. Rusbar

I have actively played golf for 25 years, having been brought up through the junior ranks and participated in many state and local amateur events. Having played various courses throughout Louisiana and Mississippi, one very noticeable condition has emerged. As courses are built and enter maturity, the new development and construction surround them erodes the visual quality and uniqueness they possess. Additionally, the course's functional requirements of parking lots, roads, utility buildings and other elements contribute to overall degradation of the course's visual quality and desirability.

These elements are a permanent part of every course. But need they be visible?

The visual image, beauty or character each course projects is tied directly to its scene surroundings.

If no scenic environment complements a course, it has no particular uniqueness and, more importantly, the level of enjoyment begins to diminish.

A major golf course design flaw in practice today that supports this view is the virtual or near total elimination of the vegetation during construction. When this occurs, the course is forced to rely solely on off-site plant material to help create its visual image and character. Then, because of the subsequent peripheral development, this off-site plant material is routinely and systematically reduced to a splattering of miscellaneous trees and shrubs that have no real meaning or environmental value.

The point here is that golf courses in this country would benefit immensely from relying on their own plant material to create, enhance and preserve their uniqueness because plant material in general and trees specifically are the only true landscape that creates scale, a sense of distance and a feeling of enclosure.

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There are more than 140,000 par-4 holes in the United States alone. What separates the good holes from the crummy? Beauty? Scenic value? Uniqueness? Visual integrity or character? Aesthetics? Are they enjoyable holes that are fun to play? Isn't there a hole's design and its relationship to the natural environment that creates the uniqueness and the unforgettable image in your mind.

The initiative, creative and "plant-wise" designer is an asset golf needs.

Courses in dire need of scenic environment

B y S t e p h e n J . R u s b a r

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Trees, shrubbery add depth, character and scenic impact

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view the future. It is much more satisfying to play golf in a spectacular botanical environment—native grasses and wildflowers inclusive; to play on a green rug Surround by a "Country Club" Creative design or renovation does not overburden the superintendent with a phenomenal quantity of routine maintenance. Rather, the truly creative design allows for minimum routine maintenance while creating the visual character and environmental "signature" of the course. Sweet Bay Island in south Louisiana is a golf course arborium currently in the preliminary design and development stage. Figure 1 illustrates the layout proposed of the par 5,553-yard 2nd hole. (Could be Anywhere, U.S.A.) Figure 2, however, illustrates the proposed native plantings that support the design and create visual uniqueness. 

Please note that the shaded areas on the plan indicate native grass, cane, or wildflower plantings. The tree plantings create the density of twig and branch development necessary to mirror the cypress and maple groves common in Louisiana. These trees and shrub plantings will then be heavily mulched to retard weed development and eliminate the necessity to mow in and under each and every tree. Turf maintenance is restricted to the fairway, tee and green areas. Lake perimeter out-of-play is planted with native aquatics that visually reinforce the ecological diversity found in Louisiana. 

Figure 1 represents approximately 11 acres (less water) that would normally be "maintained." Figure 2 represents the true maintenance responsibility of only 4.7 acres. And this is just one hole.

The maintenance program for Sweet Bay Island is designed to be top-heavy with required maintenance for the first five-year period after opening. Then, because of the work performed within that five-year period, the maintenance responsibility is expected to steadily decline because of the "self-sufficiency" achieved over much of the course. Sweet Bay Island represents a unique opportunity for golf to help provide a passive recreation or leisure experience for the "other" 85 percent of the population that annoyingly does not play golf. Small boat, fishing, picnicking and nature trails are expected to peacefully coexist with golf within this 380-acre native plant arborium.

Trees add depth to a golf hole if correctly placed. They create scale and add interest to the shot. Your course or club can begin to concede areas out of play to wildflower and tree plantings. Correctly selected tree species add privacy and aid the player's concentration. This course can also implement a good tree-planting program to create diversity and add interest and character.

Golf needs to assume a lead role in environmental repair, ecology and native plant use. Golf courses today should not only be a tremendous asset to the communities they are a part of, they could make a more-significant contribution as part of the landscape and wildlife sanctuaries and as nature preserves or native arboreums. But ultimately, should tree-planting programs reach fruition, the level of enjoyment derived from playing golf will rise and the number of rounds played will fall. 

Stephen Rusbar is a registered landscape architect in Louisiana and frequently contributes his design talents on golf course projects in his area.

Trett/Triplett management firm omitted

To the editor: 
Pete Blais' article about management companies (August issue) provided a good profile of the growing acceptability for such contracted services. It also conveyed the professionalism, stability and effectiveness these firms offer owners, developers and club boards.

Disappointingly, TrettCo/Triplett Services was not among the firms listed in your chart of golf course management companies, even though we proudly manage and operate country clubs throughout the state of Michigan. We also consult to owners and club boards in all regions of the country.

Information about the services of TrettCo's club management division can be obtained by contacting J. L. Fournier or Raymond F. Zall at TrettCo, Inc. / Triplett Services, 33400 Fourteen Mile Road, Farmington Hills, Mich., 313-691-9000.

Cordially,
Raymond F. Zall

Letters to the editor are welcomed. Please address them to: Letters, Golf Course News, P.O. Box 997, Yarmouth, ME 04096.

GOLFCOURSE NEWS

October 1991