The golf industry is at war. If you don't believe it, four stories in this month's edition of Golf Course News clearly illustrate the nature of the conflict. It's a war of public relations and it centers on what defines a "good neighbor." Are golf courses "good neighbors?" The answer almost doesn't matter, because the question is flawed. The better question is: "Are golf courses good neighbors to be good neighbors?"

And the answer is no.

Anti-growth special-interest groups, often disguised in grass-root skirts, have taken their messages to the seats of power and directly to the people — any place where laws are written and public opinion is formulated. Has it been effective?

Well, has it become harder or easier to get approval for new golf course construction approval? Is it harder or easier to register products with the EPA?

The golf industry could use a hired gun of its own

"Have gun, will travel," reads the card of a man. Remember Paladin? Where is Richard Boone now — when we so badly need him?

Today's golf development scene is often like an old scene in a Western movie, "Showdown at the O.K. Corral Planning Board."

This is serious stuff and not to be made light of, but the similarity is stunning.

The problem is, here in the real world the guys on one side (the self-styled anti-growth environmentalists) bring their hired gun into town, and the folks on the other side (the golf industry) have a barn full of ammunition but no gun to shoot with.

Richard Klein (see story on page 1) made it his life's work to stop golf course development. He says he wants development to proceed, with restrictions. But the fruit of his work belies that statement. What is most dangerous about Klein is that he speaks authoritatively, as if he is an expert on pesticide runoffs, fertilizer use, heavy metals, what is called "environmentalism" whose sole mission in life is to stop golf course proliferation.

This is the type of activity the golf course community must face. Sitting idly by — hoping people will see through the giberish — has not proven effective. It's time to offer proactive responses to Klein, Morita and others like them. Some have taken issue with our decision to write about Morita and Klein. Critics believe we give them publicity they don't deserve.

I couldn't disagree more. The golf course industry needs to know about Morita and Klein because the golf community itself must answer their often fatuous assertions. Ignoring them won't make them go away.

Colleague Mark Leslie believes the golf industry needs a hired gun of its own — someone armed with facts to refute the Kleins and Moritas of the world, someone to attend every zoning board of appeals meeting in America (see below).

In order for the golf industry must take the message to the people, because facts nearly always triumph over fanaticism.

"Enough said. Yet, after watching this process get the better of the golf industry, patriots are beginning to fight back."

Turn to page 3 and read about the National Golf Foundation. It's a service organization that reports on the economic impact of golf. Much of the NGF findings seem like common sense. If golf course create jobs, pay huge taxes and spur local economic activity.

Common sense? Certainly. But if the NGF doesn't put the word out, John Q. Public will have to take exception with the "environmentalists" whose sole mission in life is to stop golf course proliferation.

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