Development Letter designed to fill a need

One of the things I enjoy doing in this space is pointing out how far-flung, seemingly irreverent stories which appear in the news are actually connected by industry trends — some subtle, some not so subtle. Such is the case on pages 1, 3, 24, 30, 31, 34 and 35 this month.

The aforementioned stories may seem disparate but, as some of our readers already know, they have everything to do with a new Golf Course News publication called the Development Letter, a newsletter which tracks golf course projects from conception through gestation to their birth.

The Development Letter is designed to tell architects, builders and their suppliers just exactly where the golf course projects are being considered, and by whom. This is becoming increasingly important because the mini-bubble in the real estate market isn’t about to fall into anyone’s lap these days.

As the story on page 1 indicates, National Golf Foundation figures indicate a slow, steady dropoff in golf course openings over the next few years. Financing remains very hard to come by and this will be reflected in the number of golf courses christened during 1993, ’94 and ’95.

Those involved with the construction of golf courses will have to scramble for business — some are already scrambling. We believe the Development Letter will aid the effort.

Do they really have ears for hearing?

Did you hear about Mack, the man who thought his wife was about to leave him? He walked to the far side of the room, turned his back to her and said, “Can you hear me?”

There was no reply, so he moved closer. “Can you hear me?” he repeated.

Still no answer, so he walked right up to her back and asked clearly, “Can you hear me?”

“For the third time, yes, I can hear you,” his wife said.

Mack’s problem seems pervasive in society today. And I’m not saying I’m immune. This human “condition” keeps people apart and at odds.

Letters

EUROPEAN VISION LACKING

To the editor:

Congratulatory comments for your guest commentary by Ronald Fream: “European development lacks long-term focus,” in the November issue, are indeed apropos of several habitual problems which seem to be plaguing the European market. Most notably an absence of vision on the part of developers. As a previous resident and golf course superintendent in Europe, I couldn’t agree more with Mr. Fream’s analysis.

What Mr. Fream failed to note sufficiently, however, is the degree to which Americans are culpable in the creation and perpetuation of such development failures. We as Americans have an inane belief that every country wants to be like America. We assume everyone is interested in the same things we care about. This is far from the truth. They don’t care if we naively launch into a narrative in English . . . because of course, why would anyone want to speak English?

I agree with Mr. Fream’s analysis. We assume that Europeans want American-style golf courses. Yet we don’t stop to contemplate all the socio-economic factors involved. In France, for instance, golf is very much the game of the upper-class, virtually inaccessible to the average citizen. In fact, contrary to popular opinion, the average French person could care less about golf. It follows then, that very few public courses are built. Without public courses to take the game to the masses, the game has no chance to develop and flourish. So here we find ourselves building exclusively private golf courses, constructed to American standards. Virtually unsustainable (and unmanageable) from an economic standpoint, they stand little chance of survival. Hence this contributes to the stagnation of the game.

I witnessed more than one project doomed to oblivion by poor planning, bad advice, lack of sufficient forethought, and uncompromising architects possessing an infatuation with name-making. Still Americans are trying to force feed high maintenance designs to ravenous Europeans.

Mr. Fream noted the importance of using financial realism in the planning design and how it affects long-term maintenance. Bravo! Ron. I have seen Mr. Fream’s Pfifffenheim and he has perhaps the best grasp for this long-range vision. He is to be commended on his desire for quality while maintaining some sense of the economic impact of the design.

Some clients admittedly de mand U.S.-style courses at whatever cost. But a certain responsibility rests with the architect/consultant to explain in depth the consequences of such imprudent behavior, even at the cost of forfeiting that “name golf course,” Financial stability and longevity will benefit the architect, client, and the game of golf.

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TOP 10 ANNOYANCES

To the editor:

Golfers are a funny lot. And sometimes they can really test your nerves. Not that I’m complaining! After all, I’m a golfer myself.

1. “You’ve got vodka in those cups: “You should make a trench here.”

2. When the crew is working in the sandtraps, and a golfer’s ball happens to land in it: “Why didn’t you get it out?”

3. “These greens don’t hold very well,” says this one guy after hitting a low 1-iron into the green from about 250 yards out. He was a 21-handicapper.

4. After putting the buckets of drinking water out for the day: “You’ve got vodka in those things!”

5. After changing the cups, a golfer’s ball drifles on the green, and the guy points to his ball (which happens to be three inches from the old cup, and 50 feet away from the fresh one) and says, “Why didn’t you leave it here?”

6. “I want a home course while changing the cups.”

7. “You should make a trench that begins at the edge of the green and narrows down toward the cup.”

8. “What are those white stakes for?”

9. “These greens are slow,” while you’re shooting a par on them.

10. “You guys really have the course in great shape,” when the golfer has an unusually good day.

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