

Daily fee facilities deserve level playing field

An apple fell on my head during Golf Summit '92, hosted last fall by the National Golf Foundation in Orlando. During a panel discussion on alternative facilities, Bob Barrett — director of golf at Sunbelt Golf Corp. — described how his firm has successfully financed a multi-course golf "trail" in Alabama using state pension funds.

This wasn't news to me. *Golf Course News* had already published stories on the Jones Trail, so called because all the projects were designed by Robert Trent Jones, Inc.

However, when Barrett had finished, our table was asked to discuss various aspects of the Jones Trail project. My view was unwaveringly clear: What a great idea! Alabama ranks 48th in public golf availability. Affordable greens fees prevail. The state helps fund the project with an eye on tourism dollars down the road. And local builders are put to work.

Most everyone at my table

agreed — everyone, that is, except the Zimmermans, a married couple from Wisconsin who own and operate Kettle Hills Golf Course in Richfield. The Zimmermans are tired of competing with "government-funded" (read: municipal) golf facilities in the greater Milwaukee area. The Jones Trail — with its inventive albeit socialistic funding mechanism — was the last straw.

"I wonder how the private daily-fee operators in Alabama feel about this project," said Mr. Zimmerman, politely but with some irritation.

And you know, he has a good point. Because most of them weren't created to make money, municipal courses are often subsidized by city budgets — and they don't pay property taxes. The result? Artificially microscopic greens fees.

Mr. Zimmerman's argument was driven home at Public Golf '92, a conference



Hal Phillips
editor

sponsored by *Golf Course News* in November. Private operators of daily fee golf courses agreed with Mr. Zimmerman: They simply cannot charge municipal-level greens fees

and turn a profit.

There's another problem here, totally unrelated to the golf course industry. The Reagan-Bush years saw a sizable decrease in federal funding of mandated programs. Cash-strapped state governments, in turn, passed on these cuts to municipalities. Federal education funds, for example, are at an all-time, per-pupil low.

Perhaps we can kill a few birds with one measly stone. Cities and towns are beginning to realize their golf courses can be money-makers. If dressed up a bit, these facilities could charge more for greens fees, and thus augment municipal

budgets. Maybe the golf profits could be earmarked for something specific, like schools or trash pick-up.

Among other things, Public Golf '92 taught us that, when it comes to renovations and/or start-up developments, municipalities currently have multiple finance options.

If municipal courses raise their greens fees and offer commensurate value, isn't everyone better served? The private daily-fee operator gets fair competition. The municipal government can sustain needed programs. While the taxpayer/golfer pays more for municipal golf, he or she also gets a better municipal facility.

Private daily-fee operators don't want municipal facilities to close their doors. They just want to compete on a level playing field.

With a little ingenuity, cities and towns can make the competition more fair, and solve some of their own problems at the same time.

Public Golf '92 was chock full of lessons for learning



From the State-of-the-Game prologue by Rick Norton to a dynamic presentation on using television and radio to market your golf course by National Golf Course Owners Association President Vince Alfonso Jr., many lessons were taught at Public Golf '92. *Golf Course News*' first conference on the profitability of public golf was jam-packed with helpful



Mark Leslie
managing editor

information from some masters of the industry.

Information and suggestions were many and varied. My favorite came from Steve Lesnik, president of Kemper/Lesnik. "Preserving the condition of the golf course is managing for profit. Otherwise, it's like selling a soiled baseball," Lesnik said.

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Letters

MORE SHAPERS OF NOTE

To the editor:
I enjoyed reading "The shape of things to come" by Mark Leslie. A good shaper is invaluable, as it is their work that makes the difference between an average course and a good or great one. All the shapers mentioned are exceptional and deserving of the accolades, but I believe you missed two. Their names are Harold Dulin and Bill Grisham. Harold started shaping in 1945 with Perry Maxwell and continued on with Press after Perry's death. Bill, who works for Harold, started somewhere around 1956 and is still working.

It would be hard to list all the courses they worked on, I doubt if they even remember, but here are a few where they left their mark.

Cherry Hills C.C. (Denver), Hiwan (Evergreen, CO), Prairie Dunes (Hutchinson, KS), Pecan Valley (San Antonio), Kissing Camels (Colorado Springs), Fairfield Bay (Clinton, AR)

(Some of this work is remodel as well as original construction) Both men live south of Spring-

field near Crane, Mo. Neither has been much for recognition and I thought maybe it was time.

Just visiting with Harold is a real treat.

Pat LeValley, P.E.
Project Manager
Wildcat Golf, Inc.

INSENSITIVITY CHARGED

To the editor:
I am writing in reference to the choice of word reflected in your caption concerning the distinguished Powell Family ("Powell clan honored by NGF" — October, 1992).

The term "clan" was not only repulsive but was extremely demeaning to the African-American Race. The accomplishments achieved by the Powell Family are certainly significant, and should have been mentioned. Mr. Powell who designed, developed and owns the Clearview Facility is probably the only African American in our country to have accomplished this extraordinary feat. In addition, Renee enjoyed a 13-year professional career, the longest tenure of any African American on that tour.

I believe as a service to your

readers, these facts could have been related. Further, this extremely coveted award is certainly one that demands an explanation of those criteria used to select, as well as the list of prior recipients.

Golf continues to be a major contribution to racism in our country. Articles such as this type, minimal treatment of achievement, does little to improve the plight of minorities in this industry. I have made the effort to acquaint you with what I believe could be an honest oversight.

Elmer Beard
President
Jackson Park Golfer's Assoc.
Chicago, Ill.

Editor's note: The word "clan" is a term of Scottish nomenclature meaning family or blood relation.

TECHNOLOGICAL ADDENDUM

To the editor:
I enjoyed reading the attached article ("Landfill course catches world's attention," October, 1992 edition) and would like to make you aware that part of the technology that made this project possible was designed and installed

by our company. The Horizontal Well System that was used at the St. Lucie course has been patented by us and developed over the last five years. It is currently working in seven major golf courses in Florida and South Carolina and is planned for use at a dozen more courses in the Southeast and the Bahamas.

We feel this technology will be widely used in the golf course industry in the future, because it will solve, in many areas, the one problem that is most on the minds of owners and operators: a good supply of irrigation water! This system can recover and recycle water from surficial water supplies that lie beneath golf courses in quantities great enough to fulfill most irrigation needs.

I have included information on our systems, as well as a video, and I hope you will give mention in your fine publication to let the industry know that there is an alternative source of water now available.

Donald R. Justice
President
Horizontal Wells
A Division of HDSI
Cape Coral, Fla.

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Leslie on Public Golf '92

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Here are some other comments.

APPROVALS AND CONSTRUCTION

"Two-thirds to three-fourths of the government officials in the country have never heard of the IPM (integrated plant management) approach and if they hear of it, they'll support it," said Stuart Cohen, president of Environmental & Turf Services.

"Golf courses will become important amenities in office, business park and development ven-

tures," predicted Fred Jarvis, a partner with LDR International.

"Golf course architects are necessities, not expenses," said American Society of Golf Course Architects Immediate Past President Tom Clark.

"When you cut money, don't fool too much with the greens, irrigation and drainage. If you're cutting 10 percent on everything, cut 15 percent of the clearing cost and leave the irrigation and drainage alone," said Jerry Pierman, president of the Golf Course Build-

ers Association of America.

"A lot of community work is involved. Get local lawyers, businessmen, *et cetera* involved. They'll work gratis," suggested architect Larry Flatt, who helps Midwest communities build golf courses cheaply.

"Install signs telling the public you're protecting the wetland or other sensitive area. It's good public relations," said Ron Boyd, president of Williamsburg (Va.) Environmental Group.

FINANCING

"The most active lenders now are proud to talk about financing 10 to 12 golf courses a year," said

Gary Gilson, a partner in corporate finance at Shook, Hardy & Bacon. "In the 1980s you could look at a financing package that had 10- and 20-percent equity, because the lender knew that equity was also supported by a very strong likelihood of real-estate appreciation... But everything has changed. The private-side financing picture now involves equity in amounts of 40 to 60 percent.

"Local banks with whom you have a banking relationship are probably your strongest prospects."

"Financing looks a lot better on the municipal side," said Tom

Boczar of Capital Links, the financing arm of Double Eagle. "But it's difficult to make the financing fit the situation. Lenders are getting more comfortable with alternative financing structures other than general obligation bonds.

"Build in as many profit centers as possible — teaching academies, golf cars, putting courses, short-play golf, food and beverage facilities, practice range, 18-hole golf, pro shop."

MAINTENANCE

"The major task is not interfering with play. Get the equipment and crew on the property and the jobs done quickly so all can be done by the time the public gets there," said Mel Lucas, former president of the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America and a turf agronomy consultant. He added: "Benches create maintenance problems and slow play... Make the course appealing with landscaping... Post an 'Aces' list."

"Superintendents say, 'We are the money-spenders. Others make it.' Change that [attitude]," said American Golf Corp. Regional Superintendent Dean Woshaski. "Involve the superintendent in the overall income of your course. He needs to know he's part of money-making ideas. We challenge our superintendents to be innovators and create income.

"We cross-train, have flexible hours — a change from the traditional eight-hour day. We work mornings and evenings to keep up production."

Scott Zakany of ISS Golf Services, which contracts out course maintenance, said: "We employ an aeration support team that aerates our courses, so the individual superintendent is not bothered by it. This also spreads the cost around between golf courses."

Regarding pesticide use, Royal Melbourne superintendent Tim Sedgely, former president of the California Golf Course Superintendents Association, said: "Work with the EPA [Environmental Protection Agency]. The hysteria doesn't come from the EPA but from the public. Work with them and they will help you with a plan."

"Turn over equipment before it starts costing you more than it's worth," suggested Peoria (Ill.) Parks District Director John Potts. "The type and condition of equipment will show on the golf course."

"Inform clients in advance of disruptive practices," suggested Tim Kelly, superintendent at Village Links of Glen Ellyn (Ill.). He added, "The driving range is the hole that will make the most money for you."

MANAGING FOR PROFIT

"The secret to success is your staff," Lesnik said, and recommended incentive programs to reward performance.

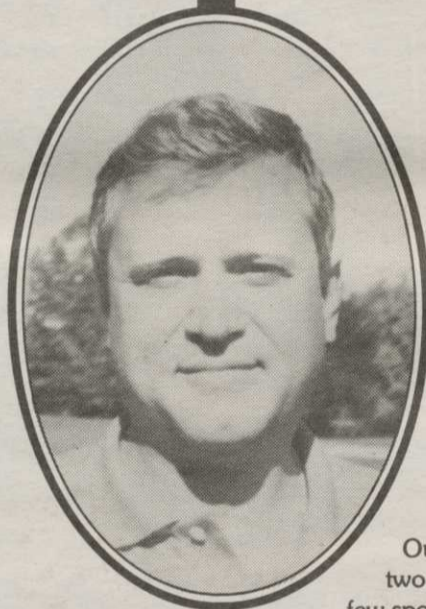
"Stay in touch with your customers," American Golf Corp. Senior Vice President for Golf Operations Ken James said, urging a yearly company-wide survey.

James also said: "Look at the traditionally weak playing times

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TOM GRIMAC

— CGCS —

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Our middle-of-the-month spray program varies, however, we use a minimum of ½ gallon of Surf-Side per acre with our tank mix which could include any of the following: Bayleton, Banol, Dacthal, 26019, Prograss.



(PAST HISTORY) DURING 1980 I treated one green with Surf-Side to learn something about the use of surfactants. We syringed the treated green a couple of times during the season, whereas, the rest of the greens required over 50 days of syringing... that one green was incredible! DURING 1981 We treated all the greens and only had to syringe a handful of times, maybe a dozen times all summer, and most of that on the high spots.

"80% to 85% reduction in syringing in the past 10 years has meant major water and labor savings."

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GOLF COURSE NEWS

Building specifications

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Jessup, Md., located just outside Washington, D.C.

"It would be a big help if we could all get on the same page with regard to bid schedules and specifications," said Spencer Holt, a staff architect in ASGCA President Art Hills' office.

Getting builders and architects to agree on bid schedules should be easier than specifications, according to GCBA Executive Director Phil Arnold.

Bid schedules list general areas of construction. They generally run three to four pages, acting as a sort of table of contents for the 30, 40 or more pages of specifica-

tions that follow.

While they may have different names, bid schedules include headings such as mobilization of manpower and equipment to the job site, layout and staking, erosion control, clearing, earth moving, shaping, drainage, irrigation, features (greens, tees, bunkers) construction, bridging, bulkheading, water features (ponds) development, cart paths, finish shaping, seed bed preparation, and grassing.

The builders committee submitted a first draft of a proposed bid schedule to Hills with suggested headings and items that would be included under each, MacDonald said.

One of the things all the committee members agreed on was the need for unit pricing instead of a lump sum charge for a

single bid schedule item, MacDonald said.

"Unit pricing allows a builder to accurately adjust his bid if changes are made. If an architect decides to lower a fairway two feet, you can show him how much that will cost," MacDonald said.

Another reason to concentrate on bid schedules before specs is the potential cost of omissions, Clute said. Changing specifications from one kind of sand to another, for instance, can be expensive. But it's a minor cost compared to suddenly discovering the whole features construction line has been left out of a bid schedule.

Builders are keenly aware standardizing specifications will be a more difficult task. Some areas will be impossible since sites vary widely and architects need room to be

creative. "You can't expect all bunkers to be three feet deep, for example," Clute said. Added MacDonald: "We're not telling architects what they can and can't do by trying to standardize specifications. We're simply offering information regarding things we know have worked in the past."

Still, there is tremendous room for standardizing certain items. Holt agreed. The architect estimated 70 percent of golf course construction is fairly consistent from job to job, leaving 30 percent to the whim of Nature, architect and developer.

"It's good builders realize we can deviate from the specifications if we come across unique circumstances where we can't use a standard practice. We don't want to be put in a box," Holt said.

Public Golf '92

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and improve them, like giving a 30-percent discount from the rate on the green fee and cart combination."

Reid Pryor, golf administrator for the city of Indianapolis' 12 courses, said: "We have the staff involved in a very detailed customer service plan. Then, when it's in place, people come through the course as customers and give us feedback as to how we're performing according to our plan.

"Get the politicians involved. We show them our customer service plan, the benefits of quality golf, the impact on the city, our expenses, *et cetera*. They are now our greatest supporters."

"Use computers as cash registers. This helps keep account of who your customers are and how you can better sell," Potts said.

Kemper/Lesnik's vice president of marketing, Doug Schmidt, said: "The club pros are a marketing arm of our organization. They have a sense of ownership."

Schmidt suggested a course's exposure and image can be improved through the local media, charities and PGA affiliates, and added: "Go home and invite your local sports editor to play."

"We treat visitors like private clubs treat members," said Emerald Dunes owner Raymon Finch. "Don't be apologetic about a price. A price attracts a certain element."

Among Finch's suggestions: operate beverage carts on the course; price creatively; use volume cards; get name recognition using a billboard; use a marker at the tee to show pin placement; and start a beginners' league by converting the course into a beginner's layout on slow days.

Alfonso, co-owner of The Rail in Springfield, Ill., said: "Golf is an entertainment medium and should be fun. My concept with my staff is that people coming to The Rail have made a conscious choice (and maybe even created the finances) to spend money at our course. Show you care, by caring for the flowers, edging the grass, taking pride in the appearance of the entryway."

Alfonso is on radio daily, television weekly, and visibly supports the ballet, sports teams to charities in the Rail name.

Good advice — all.

What do you get
when more than
4,400 turf
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