Supers combat stress, burnout
Poor delegation skills a cause
By J. BARRY MOTES

Survey says: Architects don't agree on very much
By MARK LESLIE

As distribution shrinks, firms go factory-direct
By HAL PHILLIPS
On the issues of the day, golf course architects have little consensus

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Financing for their projects.

- Fifty-seven percent said developers are not spending less on their courses, while 38 percent said they are.
- Forty-eight percent said financing is getting easier for clients to find, while 47 percent think it is not.
- Thirty-nine percent declared that minimalism (less earth-moving) has returned to design, compared to 31 percent who said it has not, and 30 percent who responded in other ways.

In responding to other questions, 86 percent said they are specifying use of newly developed turfgrasses, though many are doing so only to a limited extent; 79 percent said radio-operated irrigation systems are becoming more popular; and 65 percent said they are designing courses to have less area needing irrigation.

MINIMALISM

Golf Course News asked whether minimalism has returned to design, and Desmond Muirhead, known for his provocative layouts, had this to say: "Minimalism is a movement in art. Unless it is very strong and well executed, there is a yawning emptiness to a golf course designed with minimalism as a goal, somewhat like a stripped-down Chevrolet. By the same token, I think the excesses of the 1980s, which required 14 men on Flymos to maintain the bunker slopes, are on their way out."

We took that as a "Yes." But Bob Cupp took exception. "Some people are bragging [that they are minimalists], but not really," he said.

Brian Curley of Landmark Golf Co. said minimalism has not returned but acceptance of less earth-moving has.

Still, many others felt minimalism "never left," or, as Clyde Johnston added: "Public focus was on [Pete] Dye, [Jack] Nicklaus, etc."

Robert Muir Graves said, "We never maximized."

Mark Mungeam of Cornish and Silva put it this way: "I think a lot of architects like to call their work 'minimalist' or 'traditional' — after the client has spent $3 million to achieve it — because that is the fad right now."

Taking a cue from his belief that less money is being spent on courses, Don Knott wrote, "Lower budgets equal minimalism."

Which leads to the question on expenditures.

CONSTRUCTION SPENDING

Saying clients are not spending less, Florida’s Ted McAnlis explained, "Costs continue to rise," while Mungeam added: "More emphasis is being put on USGA [U.S. Golf Association] specs for greens and better mixes for tees. Plus, environmental protection such as monitoring or sediment and erosion control are all more expensive."

Mike Hurdzan said expenditures are not declining "because upscale is 'in' and upscale takes bucks."

Bill Coore, Ben Crenshaw’s design partner, replied "No" because of "poor site selection and architects’ and developers’ desires to 'overstate' in order to gain attention for their projects."

And Richard Phelps of Colorado agreed: "Clients still want what they see in magazines."

But, others felt less money is being spent. Hale Irwin and Arnold Palmer’s partner, Ed Seay, agreed — Irwin saying "fewer fancy" designs being done while Seay added that clients want "less frills." Kenneth Ezell of Florida said he found there is less funding and more equity.

And Donald Sechrest of Missouri said simply that more public [less costly] courses are being built.

Claiming "undoubtedly" less money is spent in the United States, Muirhead explained this is so because of "the great decrease in membership fees and the tendency to build public courses."

John Sanford of Florida said less is being spent because so often "golf must stand alone" and other amenities fall by the wayside.

Bob Leu of Gilmore Graves Golf in Wisconsin said: "The golfing public can’t pay the bill for the high-end courses."

FINDING FINANCING

Here the responses were evenly split, for whatever reason — the region of the country or the types of clients individual architects secure, for instance.

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Designing issues bring little consensus

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"Still horrible," said Ray Richard, who is based in the troubled Northeast, which has not yet shaken off the recession. An A balanced response was given by Jeffrey Brauer of Texas, who said: "Based on our activity level, the activity of architects and builders I have talked to, it must get." But he said a bond counsel responsible for securing bonds on most of the public courses in Texas indicated "some bad projects have been financed in the public golf arena and the public sector is still casting a wary eye in the financial community."

RADIO-OPERATED IRRIGATION

Nearly four out of five architects said radio-operated irrigation technology is growing more popular. But Mike Beebe of McCumber Golf Design noted that people should not understand this to mean they are more popular than computer-controlled systems, which they are not, he said. Ronald Fream of California warned, "Too much sophistication adds cost and does not always improve results."

And Brauer and John LaFoy of South Carolina said radio-controlled units are more adapted to retrofit situations on existing courses, Brauer adding, "We see little value in specifying them for new construction."

LESS IRRIGATED AREA

In regard to designing courses with less irrigated areas, answers correlated with the areas of the country where an architect is busy.

Many responding in the positive explained "somewhat," or "in some cases." But, among those responding negatively Bob Lohman of Illinois explained, "No. We are already at minimum in the Midwest"; and Tom Marzolf of Fazio Golf Course Designers, Inc. said, "Clients want irrigated turf."

NEW TURFGRASSES

Meanwhile, university and corporate breeding of new turfgrasses are apparently reaping a harvest.

Architects gave a reserved response about specifying new grasses. Most are doing so, but to a limited extent. "In some cases," said Lester George of Virginia. "For example, I am specifying the use of buffalo grass in Texas, where I have ready access to the supplier. We have water consumption concerns and there is less area to irrigate."

LaFoy is specing new varieties for putting surfaces, he said. Fream said he is concentrating on drought- and disease-tolerant cultivars as well as those requiring less maintenance.

And Tom Johnson of Washington said, "Yes" but specified: "Varieties of old standards, however."

In many cases, architects, builders, project superintendents — and owners — prefer to wait and let others take new varieties instead of acting as the "pioneers" and committing their own money.

Projects getting underway in Illinois

Three new 18-hole golf course projects are moving forward in Illinois.

An 18-hole championship layout and nine-hole putting course are part of a 2,650-acre planned community scheduled to break ground in Huntley by spring. Prime Group hopes to receive final approval for the 4,690-home golf community sometime in February and to begin construction in March. Bob Lohman is the course architect. The course would be ready for play in early 1997. Corporate offices, parks, retail stores and an outlet mall are also planned as part of the Prime Group project.

In Elburn, Inland Land Appreciation Fund has presented a conceptual plan to develop a 625-acre golf community in Elburn Village. An 18-hole course surrounded by 1,500 homes is envisioned in the project, according to Inland planner Joe Abel.

The village of Cahokia, meanwhile, is building an 18-hole municipal golf course that could break ground this spring. The project's contractor is Svendsen Builders Inc. and the developer is Fairway Golf Development.