USGA, wildlife groups cooperate on research

By Mark Leslie

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Extensive research investigating golf courses as ecosystems will be undertaken as early as this fall, thanks to funding from the U.S. Golf Association (USGA) and enthusiastic support from several environmental organizations.

After a meeting here with environmentalists, Ron Dodson, president of the Audubon Society of New York and chairman of the USGA Wildlife Subcommittee, said: "The collaborative agreement of all those attending was that instead of spending so much time looking at particular species, we should be looking at golf courses as ecosystems.

"And we should focus our attention on ecosystems where there are many golf courses and lots of potential for new courses to be built — like Florida, California, New England and the coastal mid-Atlantic region."

Enthusied by the input

Summit illustrates need for image-building PR campaign

By Hal Phillips

SCOTTSDALE, Ariz. — The recent Golf Summit yielded this stark realization: Poor public image stands as the single largest hindrance to golf industry growth.

"If image isn't everything, it's darn close. Many still consider golf a pastime of rich, white males. Whether this assessment is less accurate than it was in, say, 1970, is irrelevant. The public at large has this perception, and it's particularly damaging because it adversely affects golf's other two major obstacles: the environment and player development.

"We accept some of the credit for elevating standards of golf architecture — which is good for the game and the business — but some of the blame for the escalating costs of architecture and, therefore, golf," said Golf Digest ranking guru Ron Whitten.

"A lot of courses are built to make a great initial impression," said Golf magazine ranking coordinator Tom Doak, himself a course architect. "Unfortunately, the surge of popularity of rankings has tended to obscure the fact that a golf course is not built so someone goes there once. Does the course have lasting value? Is it going to be better to play the 10th time than the first? Or is it going to get old really fast?"

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Golf Summit '94
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must embark on a public relations campaign as if there’s a

The NGF is a research organization, not a PR firm. "We expect to hear back from agencies at the end of January and assess their proposals and review options for funding. If we have an exciting plan laid out by the end of January, we'll be rolling this out in the spring. I don't think we can wait until the next Summit."

The NGF has formally solicited proposals from the four advertising/promotion agencies that attended Summit '94: Burson-Marsteller of New York; DMB&B of Bloomfield Hills, Mich.; Chiat Day of Venice, Calif.; and Pinnacle Worldwide of Chicago.

Most believe this past Summit was admirably focused — concentrated, as it was, on addressing three overarching problems: the environment, poor player development and the game’s less-than-positive image with the non-golf-playing public.

The latter must be addressed first. Because golf is perceived as elitist (despite the fact that two-thirds of the nation’s courses are open to anyone), course development and expansion are seen as frivolous acts when weighed against potential environmental impact.

For example, middle-income housing development is very difficult to oppose. Affordable housing is an "apple pie" issue — so wholesome American, like baseball and farming, no one dares play the environmental card to thwart it.

Golf sits at the other end of the "apple pie" spectrum.

Player development is also affected by image. One study released at the Summit showed 75 percent of non-golfers don’t even consider picking up the sport because golfers "aren't like me."

Is it any wonder that women, minorities and folks of modest means — i.e., those who don't see themselves as fitting in with rich, white males — never consider participating in the game? Clearly, the industry needs an organized, image-enhancing public relations campaign showing that golf is accessible, affordable, environmentally friendly and fun.

"The notion of an industrywide PR initiative was presented by McKinsey at the 1988 summit, and discussed in 1990 and '92," Beditz explained. "Primarily, when discussed back then, the effort was focused on advertising to help promote the game to those who don't play. Six years later, while that's still an important part to any image campaign, we see the need to also answer the negative publicity golf has been receiving. The latter point — that there is a negative component that has to be answered — makes now the correct time to implement a campaign."

Historically, acting upon Summit initiatives has been nearly impossible. Agendas are rarely focused, and implementation, much of the responsibility falls to the NGF which, in truth, is ill-suited to this task.

The NGF is a research organization that, under the leadership of Beditz, has gone above and beyond the call of duty to organize strategy sessions like the Summit. Nevertheless, the NGF is the only golf organization broad enough to handle things like an industrywide public relations campaign. Besides, as Beditz himself noted: "While we are known for our research activities, our mission is simply to foster the growth and vitality of golf. And this vision goes well beyond our research duties, well beyond just keeping score."

The larger issue is money. The NGF has already solicited proposals from several savvy PR firms, but how does a non-profit organization raise enough cash, say $2 million, in the first year?

Here are some ideas that merit attention:

• All 2,500 NGF business members (like Golf Course News) would be required to kick in $1 per head.
• Every allied golf association — all the acronyms: PGA, GCSAA, NGCOA, USGA, etc. — would levy a member-based fund of $10 per head.
• Owners of 4,000 NGF member facilities would implement a green fee surcharge of $1 and turn the proceeds over to the NGF.

Then there are those who stand to suffer most if golf’s expansion is hobbled by environmental regulation; the folks whose businesses shrink if the game can’t attract new players or keep the players it has.

The manufacturers.

Growth, growth, growth. The industry wants it, but manufacturers need it. It’s only right and proper that the bulk of this PR money comes from the makers of balls, mowers, shafts, fertilizer, etc. They stand to gain the most if the campaign hits the mark; and lose the most if feet are continually dragged.

Donating 5 percent of each manufacturer’s annual advertising and PR budget would do the trick.

"All of those things have been noted and should be considered," said Beditz. "We believe that all of those stakeholders should be interested in supporting a cooperative effort. If, indeed, we can get to the grass roots level on this, meaning the facilities, there are 500 million rounds being played."

"We don't need $1 a round. A penny a round would do it."

Summit attendees agreed the industry is at a crossroads. Growth (there's that word again) is tapering off and image problems threaten to erode the status quo. Continued on page 20
Duich's contributions to turf world earn Rossi Award

By MARK LESLIE

CHAPEL HILL, N.C. — Forty years of teaching students, breeding turfgrasses that in some cases have dominated their industry, helping to initiate national turfgrass trials, and elevating the Pennsylvania State University turfgrass program to among the nation's elite have earned Dr. Joseph M. Duich selection as the Don A. Rossi Humanitarian Award for 1995.

"We are honored to present this award to a man who has meant so much, and done so much, for the golf industry," said Philip Arnold, executive director of the Golf Course Builders Association of America (GCBAA) which presents the award. "I can't think of a more 'humanitarian' profession than teaching, and Dr. Duich has the respect and admiration of golf course superintendents — as well as builders — all over the country."

"Dr. Duich is one of the unsung heroes in our industry, who has also helped builders with technological advances," said GCBAA Vice President Paul Eldredge of Wadsworth Golf Construction Co. The Rossi Award is given in memory of Dr. Joseph Duich.

Duich has been instrumental in introducing new turfgrasses to the golf industry, notably Pennfine ryegrass and Penncross, Penneagle and Pennlinks bentgrasses, which have been dominant on the world market for decades. More than 5 million in royalties from these turfgrasses has been returned to the Penn State Agronomy Department to support its programs and perpetuate turf research.

Duich has been involved with students. That's the best part. It was particularly rewarding in the golf course construction area. He is a fellow of the American Society for Advancement of Science.

Duich received the Distinguished Service Award from the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America in 1987, the USGA Green Section Award in 1981, and has been given numerous other awards and honors. He is a fellow of the American Society for Advancement of Science. He also helped initiate the first regional turfgrass evaluation trials, which were the forerunner of today's National Turfgrass Evaluation Program administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

"Dr. Duich is one of the unsung heroes in our industry, who has also helped builders with technological advances."

— GCBAA Vice President
Paul Eldredge

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National, fully coordinated, professional public relations campaigns have the ability to change image and perception. A Summit speaker used the fur industry as an example of how image can stymie a market. After five years of taking hits from rabid anti-fur activists and watching profits go down the drain, the fur industry finally embarked on a very successful PR offensive. In terms of public perception (and sales), the fur industry has regained its viability.

But those five years can never be recovered. Let the mink coat — covered with rotten tomatoes heaved by angry protesters — be a lesson and a warning. The golf industry can't afford to wait five years.

January 1995