

## If this isn't open space, what is?

Couldn't help but titter a bit when I read J. Barry Mothes' story on the long-delayed demise of Liberty State Park's proposed golf development (page 3). While this story has dragged on for 18 years and a definitive decision had to be reached at some point, it's ironic that Gov. Christie Todd Whitman — that pro-business, GOP wunderkind rumored to be the running mate of choice on at least two Republican presidential tickets — was the pol who leveled the final, fatal blow.

Whitman, of course, is New Jersey's newly elected Republican governor who stormed into office decrying the state government's anti-business stance on a range of public-policy matters. How interesting that she saw fit to bludgeon a proposal that would have preserved and enhanced a dilapidated park site while simultaneously generating funds to maintain the entire park.

Let's listen to a conservative politician staking out her environmental credentials, shall we?

"Liberty State Park provides green sanctuary in the state's most densely populated county," Whitman said, in announcing her decision. "More important, the park belongs to all the people of New Jersey. Public sentiment overwhelmingly supported keeping it that way, without a golf course. I agree.

"It is time to close this issue once and for all and move ahead with the original intent of Liberty State Park," she continued. "The idea was for Liberty State Park to be a park in a classic sense — where people can go to enjoy quiet and solitude. A golf course doesn't fit that definition."

It's this last part that really steams me. It's not necessarily Whitman's transparent, righteous attempt to cast herself as "sensitive" on environmental issues — so she can play the "Liberty State Park card" during an upcoming vice presidential debate!

What burns my bacon is Whitman's stubborn unwillingness to see public-access golf courses as open space, not to mention her use of class-based rhetoric to denigrate golf as inherently exclusive. The governor and, unfortunately, the public at-large still haven't grasped that public-access golf courses are green belts that smart communities have been exploiting for years.

Allow me a short, illustrative vignette:

I played George Wright Municipal Golf Course in Hyde Park, Mass., the other day. This truly magnificent Donald Ross design was laid out in 1931, when Hyde Park was still a sleepy suburb of Boston. The city has since overtaken the area, sprawling (as



Hal Phillips,  
editor

## Think you've got a handle on the left? Think again...

So, the Sierra Club is a bunch of wimps who've sold out to The Establishment. Factories don't burn down by themselves; they need your help. And President Clinton is environmentally "spineless."

Welcome to the world of *Earth First!* ... And pray they don't visit your golf course. The mere existence of *Earth First!* and its 100 chapters nationwide should make us all thank God for the other environmental groups — you know, the ones who are at least partially cohesive and rational in their thinking.

I just read through *Earth First! Journal* and got an education — an education I'd like to pass along to you. Of special interest to the golf industry is this edition's installment of "Dear Ned Ludd," a regular feature for discussion of "creative means of effective defense against the forces of industrial totalitarianism." With a disclaimer that neither the *EF!* movement nor the *EF! Journal* "necessarily encourage anyone to do any of the things discussed," the column details how to destroy a golf course's irrigation system — trusty hammer and flathead screwdriver in hand.

"Forget all that you have heard about pouring gasoline or Roundup on the greens," the column advises. "Don't even bother carving up the tee's [sic] or stealing golf carts. Just cut off that IV from the aquifer."

Now, think of your club's protocol as you read this caution to the Dear Ned Ludd reader: "A quick note on security. There is virtually no security. I worked as a night waterman and security guard at a municipal golf course for four months. I was specifically told not to mess with anyone that [sic] trespassed. I was instructed to call 911 and let the herbies deal with any vandals."

The last graph serves as a call to arms: "So now you know. Go get busy. And if you get really serious about drying out a golf course, get hired on. You'll make some extra dough while conserving precious water."

In another attack leveled at golf, an *EF!* reporter called Cedar says Freeport McMoran's Barton Creek Properties in Austin, Texas, "is polluting Barton Creek and Barton Springs with sewage effluent used to fertilize two existing golf courses." (First time I've ever heard of golf courses **desiring** effluent — and to **fertilize** to be sure. Boy, there's so much scientific knowledge in this group.)



Mark Leslie,  
managing editor

Continued on page 45

Continued on page 23

## Letters

### DOAK WARNS AGAINST OVER-RENOVATION

To the editor

I read with interest your column about course "face-lifts" in the April issue.

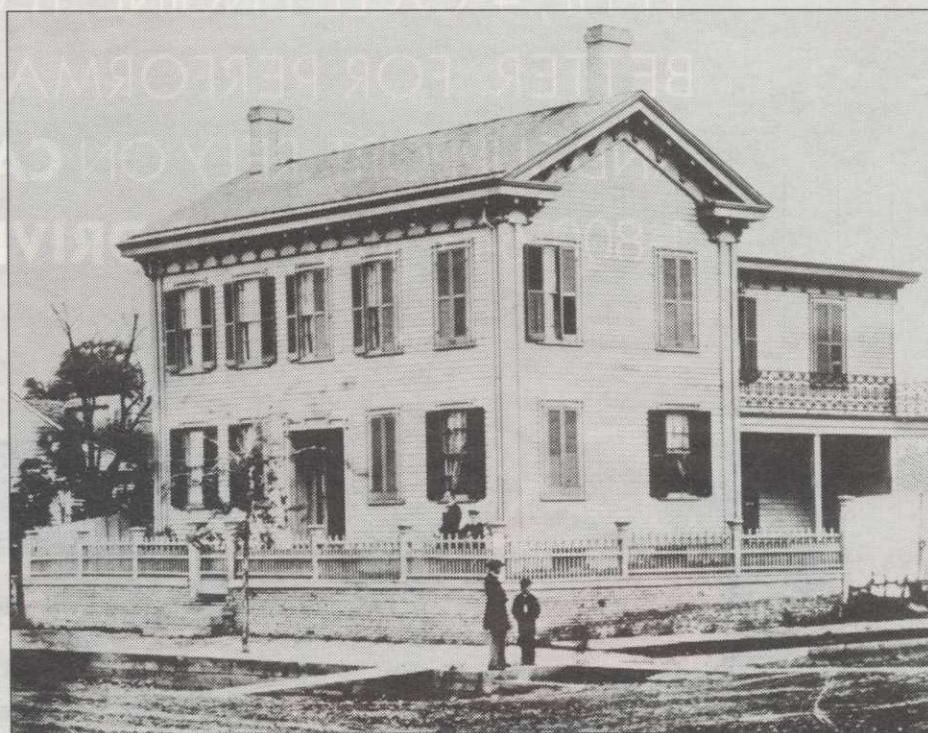
I agree with the architects you quoted that, often, club committees are too "gung-ho" to make changes to their courses. But many young architects have just as much trouble restraining themselves in suggesting "improvements," when there is a committee full of eager members willing to tear up as much as the architect recommends. For those struggling to find work on their own, the temptation is even greater to fix things that aren't really broken.

A lot of these vintage courses don't really need face-lifts at all — or at least nothing more than advice on how to re-edge their bunkers and return greens to their original size. They're only considering more because the club across the street just rebuilt all its greens, or because they read about it in *Golf Course News*.

What some of them need is reassurance that their courses have stood the test of time quite admirably. But how many architects are willing to throw away a consulting fee to tell them that?

Not many — and that's why the renovation market is really booming. Every club should get a second opinion before opting for major surgery.

Tom Doak, president  
Renaissance Golf Design, Inc.  
Traverse City, Mich.



### OLD ABE'S NEW HOUSE

Word has been received here regarding the historic exploits of Joe and Pat Gibbs, owners and developers of the Chocoley Downs Golf Course and Residential Community in Marquette, Mich., on the Upper Peninsula. Mr. Gibbs, a longtime antique collector and history buff, has decided to build an exact replica of Abraham Lincoln's Springfield, Ill. home on the golf course. Joe even went to the trouble of securing the building's original plans, drawn up in 1838. "The folks at the National Park Service said it's the first time anyone has ever requested the plans," he explained. In addition to the Lincoln home, Mr. Gibbs is adding a carriage house connected to the main structure by — you guessed it — the Lincoln Tunnel. Chocoley Downs is a 36-hole Jerry Matthews design in the making, with nine holes complete and nine more nearly on line. According to Mr. Gibbs, a full third of the course can be viewed from Old Abe's new house.

# GOLF COURSE NEWS

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## ADVERTISERS' INDEX

102	18th Green Bent Grass	3
186	Accuweather	45
104	American Cyanamid	4-5
143	American Leisure Design, Inc.	42
144	Anderson Instruments	42
128	The Andersons	31
136	The Andersons	37
111	Aquatrols	16
108	BASF	11
181	C-LOC Retention Systems, Inc.	45
113	Ciba *	18-19
107	Club Car	9
185	Colorado Lining Co.	45
170	Continental Bridge	44
150	Cushman, Ransomes America Corp. *	18-19
139	DTN Weather Center	40
174	Eagle Golf & Landscape Products	44
179	Enwood Structures	44
180	Excel Bridge Mfg.	45
115	Flowtronex/PSI	22
131	Fore Par	35
142	Fore Par	42
176	Formost Construction Co.	44
146	Fox Valley Systems	46
—	Golf Course Expo	47
122	GreenTURF International	17
132	Griffin Industries/Nature Safe	36
171	Harrington/Harco Corporation	44
—	ISK Biosciences Corp.	24-25
148	Jacobsen	48
109	Jacobsen	12-13
178	Jesco Products/Pinhigh	44
114	John Deere	20-21
121	Kalo	25
135	Kirby Markers	37
188	Lin Lar Golf Inc.	45
172	Master of the Links	44
184	Master of the Links	45
106	Milorganite	8
119	Otterbine/Barebo	26
124	Par Aide	28
137	Partac	38
177	Pavelec Bros. Construction	44
187	Precision Small Engine	45
173	Precision Tool Prod. Co.	44
118	Quail Valley Farms	26
127	Regal Chemical	31
145	Regal Chemical	46
110	Rohm & Haas	14
123	Seed Research of Oregon	27
117	Smithco	23
125	Southern Corp. Promo.	30
129	Standard Golf	32
175	Steadfast Bridge Co.	44
126	Tee & Green Sod	30
101	Tee-2-Green	2
120	The Thinking Superintendent/GolfLink	25
141	The Thinking Superintendent/GolfLink	42
105	Toro Comm'l. Prod. Div.	6-7
183	Trims International Software	45
103	Turflite, Inc.	3
138	United Horticultural Supply	38
130	Valent	34
116	Warren's Turf Professionals	22
140	Watertronics	41
182	Yard Edge	45
134	York Bridge Concepts	37

\* Appears in regional editions.

## Phillips comment

Continued from page 10

urban areas often do) over and around this modest, middle-income municipality.

During a late-afternoon round, my four-some witnessed the following: A young couple and baby roaming the 6th and 7th fairways; four boys and their bikes cutting across the 9th on their way home from school; a shabbily dressed, middle-aged man (some might even have called him a vagrant) quietly reading John Steinbeck's *Cannery Row* on the 14th tee; and at least seven dogs happily leading their masters through their after-work walks.

No disruption. No adolescents riding their knobby tires across the putting surfaces. Just golf and community at dusk. The green fee was \$20 and, come January, Hyde Park residents enjoy some of the best cross-country ski trails and sledding hills in Greater Boston.

Sounds like a park to me.

In many ways, Gov. Whitman shouldn't be faulted for not realizing that fully two-thirds of the golf courses in America are open to anyone (of course, you have to pay — just as you have to pay to attend a sporting event, or many state parks for that matter). Similarly, the governor shouldn't really be expected to know why Hyde Park residents — and thousands of other communities across the country — consider their golf course to be part of the local park system.

Part of Whitman doesn't want to know because she's worried about her public image and how it might affect her political viability. Yet, it's even more likely that she understands none of this because the golf industry has done a damn poor job of passing along the facts.

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