Pioneers of public-access

W e pay a great deal of attention to the public-access golf course market in the pages of this publication. Indeed, Golf Course News coined the phrase "public access" so we wouldn't have to say "daily-fee, municipal, semi-private and resort" every time we referred to the largest portion of this country's 15,000-plus golf facilities.

Five years ago when the boom in public-access development was just getting ready to roll, Golf Course News decided to create an educational forum for the owners, superintendents and developers of these facilities. Why? Because even then, back in 1990, while public-access courses accounted for half the new courses being built each year, there was not a single conference and trade show that served this vibrant market sector.

That was five years ago.

During the ensuing five years more than 2,000 golf courses have opened nationwide — a full 80 percent of them public-access. Today daily-fee, municipal, semi-private and resort facilities account for more than two-thirds of American golf courses. Ninety percent of those courses now under construction are public access, so don't expect the trend to change anytime soon.

With the fifth Public Golf Forum scheduled for October 27-29, in Chicago, I want to take time here to salute all those who have pioneered public-access development. To the owners, superintendents and developers who have been instrumental in preparing their golf industry colleagues for the unique challenges that lay ahead. Special thanks go to our keynote speaker: the inimitable Arnold Palmer, architect Robert Trent Jones Jr., Alice, Perry and P.B. Dye, and ClubCorp Chairman Robert Dedman.

Add to that prestigious list golfer, designer and certified character Peter Jacobsen who will keynote The 1996 Golf Course News Forum. Is this the fastest-growing portion of the golf industry? Who can blame them for taking advantage of an opportunity to do what we think of as "public-access golf." It is the standard practice of the California Coastal Commission to include a nondiscrimination clause in all Coastal Commission permits issued to private clubs. In fact, there was no discussion on this issue by the Coastal Commission or its staff at the hearing. The Olympic Club has advised the Coastal Commission that the non-discrimination clause is acceptable because it simply reaffirms the club's existing policy on non-discrimination. Any suggestion to the contrary in your article is regrettable.

I trust that you will print this letter in a prominent position in your July issue in order to set the record straight.

Dennis F. Moriarty
President
The Olympic Club
San Francisco, Calif.

Ed. — The above letter was received after deadline for the July edition, which explains why it appears this month. According to Bob Merrill, chief of permitting for the California Coastal Commission's (CCC) North Coast office in San Francisco, the CCC considers all private golf clubs "visitor service facilities, i.e., facilities that do allow public use of coastal lands. However, in exchange for permitting, the CCC often insists that private clubs promise — by including language in or rewriting their bylaws — not to discriminate on the basis of race, origin, said Merrill. While there is precedence for the CCC to insist on this nondiscriminatory language when issuing permits to private clubs, it is not "standard practice," as Mr. Moriarty claims. Indeed, because the Olympic Club leases land from the City of San Francisco, the club was enjoined by the city as recently as 1987 (prior to the U.S. Open) to remove gender-discrimination language from its bylaws. Prior to this year's permit approval, which allowed the Olympic Club to open its new course on a coastal parcel, the Olympic Club "did not have a policy that definitively stated that it's the policy of the club not to discriminate," the Olympic Club eliminated gender-based language in 1987, so we asked that they include some more definitive language; we asked that they go a step further to say they wouldn't discriminate."
Audubon Society's hiring of Audubon International (AI) and how the two so often play out in the golf industry is the National mended fences. It's fascinating ing warming relationship with Peter A.A. Berle, and the ensu-

Yet, the NAS leadership has been purged, to an extent, and the fence appears to be on the mend.

"We're making inroads with National Audubon," said AI President Ron Dodson. "A couple of months ago, we had two NAS staff people in the office, talking about what we're doing and they're doing. Dr. [Frank B.] Gill [NAS' new director of science] was here. Later, we received some complimentary letters from them."

Next is a meeting between Dodson and Flicker to discuss "program philosophy, direction, and so forth."

"My ultimate hope," Dodson said, "is that we can learn to support each other where we can. We don't need to get to the point — nor do I think we ever will — where we will endorse each other's programs or philosophies on everything. The bottom line is that we're all busy. There are a lot of environmental issues we all need to work on...

"I'm hoping that, if nothing else, we'll at least get some correspondence generated from them, communicating with their chapters that some of the correspondence sent out from the previous administration of National Audubon is no longer in effect; that while they do not do the same kind of programming we do, we all philosophically are trying to help people do good things for the environment; and that using personal agendas and casting disparaging remarks about fellow environmental organizations and people concerned with the environment is just to be pursued any longer."

While NAS can still disagree with AI's work with golf courses, Dodson added, "they don't have to put out shaded half-truths, mostly lies that make people question our integrity and personal attacks on me and my staff. I want to get over that."

Meanwhile, it's nice to see the NAS commit itself to science as "the foundation on which the rest of its work must rest." In his comment in Audubon magazine's May-June issue, Flicker declared this position while noting the hiring of ornithologist Gill. It's interesting that Flicker on the one hand claims the history of Audubon is as a leader in science, and on the other hand acknowledges: "Credibility in this area will bring us respect throughout the scientific community, enabling us to form partnerships with outside researchers such as our Audubon Associates. These experts will serve as unofficial advisers to the organization in their particular field."

Along this line, NAS started an Important Bird Areas Project and is expanding its bird-monitoring programs and the MAPS project (Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survival). Dodson added. NAS is "exploring a backyard-habitat initiative, one that will stress private ownership and the pride and responsibility that goes with it."

Sounds rather like the Clinton-GOP thing, doesn't it — where one person tries to usurp another's ideas?

Fact is, the New York Audubon has promoted its own Backyard Program for quite some time, as have the National Wildlife Federation and others. "The finest form of flattery is trying to do what we're doing," Dodson said. "National Audubon has 500,000 members. If they can get each to do something in their backyards to help migratory birds, I think that would be great."

AI hasn't pushed its Backyard Program, waiting instead for the right sponsor to come along. That happened with the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program, which was adopted by the U.S. Golf Association, and the Adopt-a-School Program, adopted by the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America.

Now, about that backyard program... Remember this, says Dodson: "Homeowners can use diathon and yet golf course superintendents can't. But a backyard is a backyard. A golf course is a backyard. A farm is a backyard. What's the difference with National Audubon starting a backyard sanctuary program and what we're doing with our golf course program? They're endorsing what we're doing."

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Pelican Bay undertakes greens work

DAYTONA BEACH, Fla. — Golfers will experience larger greens and more consistent putting surfaces when a $260,000 greens improvement project at Pelican Bay Country Club's Members Course here is completed later this year.

The project, supervised by International Golf Management (IGM) of Lakeland, is slated for completion around Labor Day. All greens at the 18-hole course are being reconfigured and enlarged, and most bunkers and sandtraps are being changed, according to Jerry Broome, IGM's regional manager at Pelican Bay.

Broome said Pelican Bay's outstanding characteristics are its roominess and the "sense of tranquility" golfers feel when they play either of the two courses.

A specialist in providing golf course maintenance services on a contract basis, IGM is also overseeing a $700,000 golf course upgrade at The Palms, one of five courses it maintains at the sprawling Palm-Aire Spa and Resort in Pompano Beach.

Under this project, IGM is in charge of redesigning and rebuilding the 18-hole course's greens, bunkers, select tees and fairways, as well as major irrigation and drainage improvements. This is the first face-lift for the Robert von Hagge-designed course since it opened in 1959. Work was scheduled for completion by the end of July.