What's Audubon and what's not

This month's front-page story on the once-and-future golf course in Jacksonville, with its complex, compelling political battles, was long enough without delving into the curious relationship between the golf course on the outskirts of the New York Audubon Society's jurisdiction and New York Audubon, of course, administrators the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary System (ACSS) and Signature Program, widely hailed in the golf industry for their practical marriage of business, recreational and environmental concerns. Duval Audubon is a chapter of National Audubon, which doesn't necessarily look fondly upon New York Audubon and the ACSS.

Every year or so, it seems important for golf to take a reality check with regard to the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary System. It's a fantastic program, but folks must recognize that ACSS participation doesn't necessarily earn your course environmental legitimacy outside the golf universe. In December, for example, a local newspaper科 published a story about the local Audubon of New York organization affiliating with the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary System.

"Unfortunately," Williams said, "when spring greens, people historically watch the Masters on television, or return home from winters down South and expect the courses up here [Illinois] to look like the ones they left down South: in wonderful condition." The problem is — from Illinois and Kansas to Minnesota and Michigan — it has been a cold, wet, rain-drenched summer has seemed a distant dream. So how do superintendents counter the prevailing attitude in many places (usually private clubs) that there should be little gods creating perfect playing fields? The solution, according to Mr. Phillips, was to set a clear and compelling example. In other words, just because your course is an ACSS participant, or even a Signature member, don't expect other Audubon organizations or members of the environmental movement at large to throw you their unyielding support.

"It's kind of frustrating," says Ron Dodson, assistant director of environmental affairs for International Turfgrass, the Orlando-based organization founded by New York Audubon. "I tell everyone interested in our Signature Program, during the first visit: If you think that because you follow our program you're going to bring all of Audubon in behind you, you're wrong.

This concept is easy to grasp when you understand how the golf course market is structured. To the editor:

I would appreciate the opportunity to respond to your article "Manufactures hedge bets on distribution." [GCN April 1996].

I strongly oppose the statement by Mr. Phillips that "ten years from now, golf courses will likely purchase their accessories directly from the factory." I feel that the professional turf equipment distributor will still be the avenue for accessories in the future as we are now: the local distributor's ability to most effectively and cost-efficiently market and deliver these products to the customer.

My company is fortunate to distribute Standard Golf and Par Aide accessories in Louisiana and Mississippi, and through aggressive stocking and marketing strategies, we have shown significant growth in the last several years. I will not argue that every distributor aggressively promotes accessories, but in our market we do not have the luxury of selling every customer a "$150,000 mower" on every sales call. Those customers, however, will purchase accessories at their local distributor and sometimes it is the turf equipment distributor's ability to most effectively and cost-efficiently market these products to the customer.

We've never had a golf course go through the Resolution Trust Corp. — a statement few of those "signature" designers can match. I hope Mr. Hirsh will take these factors into account before he pronounces his study complete.

NAME DESIGNS MORE COSTLY

To the editor,

Peter Blais' cover story for April, "Name designers pull higher dues and green fees," restates the obvious part of the story. But what about the other side of the ledger? So-called "signature" designs cost more than can the manufacturer.

Independent turf equipment distributors exist only because we can sell more of a manufacturer's product in a given market more cost-effectively than can the manufacturer. And I believe that, while some exceptions will continue, we will continue to be the primary provider of golf course accessories in the future.

Kim E. Robertson,
President
Delta States Turf, Inc.
Baton Rouge, La.

LISTENING TO ALL VOICES

To the editor:

Thanks for being sensitive to our needs and issues; and, to the voices heard that are still trying to define what constitutes REAL golf course management "Determined: All sprinklers are not created equal," GCN April 1996.

You and Golf Course News are a class act, keeping me informed of the April issue and a note of thanks was special. Because we are certain that sprinkler systems, from residential through golf courses, are really the Achilles Heel of the green industry, more information will be shared.

Enclosed are a few pictures. We think this is a great and worthwhile industry. Our concern: too much "lip service," not enough "hands on."

Al Kline, CGCS
UNM Championship GC
UNM North GC
Albuquerque, N.M.

STUDY'S AUTHOR RESPONDS

Dear Tom Doak:

I just received your copy of your letter dated 18 April 15 to Hal Phillips. You're right! The cost of your letter is more than a bushel of brains.

More than a bushel of brains you put forth to round up information that I will not argue with. If it was my call, I would have applied this fertilizer or that chemical to hasten winter-damaged turfgrass back to its green, lush old self (see story page 1). Now we can hope golfers in the New England United States can do the same: Be patient. Last year was not always the case, and in the wake of major turf damage, a number of Midwestern superintendents lost their jobs. Why, they had the audacity to control the weather.

"Golfers here seem to be quite understanding," said Gerry Faubel from his club in Saginaw. He credited Michigan State University and the Golf Association of Michigan [GAM] for approaching the
To many, our advice has been that it is been opined. Continued from page 10

Greg Norman or Ben Crenshaw now "signature" designers because of their recent successes on and off the golf course? Should Mike Hurdzan, or Jay Morrish, or Tom Doak be considered "signature" because they are well known and respected within the golf industry? I don't know the answer to these questions and only a large survey of the golfing public could answer that.

Your comments to Hal are of great interest to me as I am sure this topic and study will progress and evolve over many years to come. As a consultant and appraiser I would love to have an instant answer to the signature architect question for my clients.

As a golfer (and Golf Digest panelist) I care only about the quality of the golf experience created. Maybe someday we could do a survey on the relative financial performances of courses by individual architects.

However, that, too, would be distorted because of the effect of decisions made by the developers and managers of those facilities. Please feel free to call me with any additional comments or questions, or just to "rap" a bit.

By the way, I played and enjoyed Stonewall and hope that if you're in the area sometime you'll call and we can tee it up. Unfortunately, since Stonewall is private and Fazio's Harteifeld National nearby is daily-fee, a financial comparison would be misleading.

Laurence A. Hirsh MAI, SGA President, Golf Property Analysts Harrisburg, Pa.