I gotta call a couple days ago from a reporter on a Virginia Islands' newspaper who was writing a travel story for islanders who were dying to get out and see the Upper 48.

"If you were to plan your ideal golf vacation in the States, what would you do?"

"Well, I'd round up the usual suspects, rent a Winnebago, tap a keg of ice cold beer and head for Michigan for two solid weeks of public golf mayhem," I said, thinking, for just a moment, that I may have been a tad too frank with her.

There was a slight pause, "Michigan?"

"Yes," I said, "Michigan."

She obviously hadn't seen a the most recent copy of the National Golf Foundation's (NGF) Trends in the Golf Industry report — I took a wild guess that she hadn't seen any of them.

"Let's talk East North Central golf," I said in NGF-speak to sound like I knew what I'm talking about. "Of the nine regions in the United States, the East North Central [ENC] had the highest percentage (79 percent) of public golf courses relative to total courses. The ENC also has the highest number of public courses (2,639) and accounts for 23 percent of the nation's supply of public golf. You could go for, I don't know, two months, I guess. That is if you have the time to do Illinois, Ohio and Wisconsin too. Now there's a trip," I added enthusiastically.

There was a long, uncomfortable pause. I thought I'd lost her.

"A hunk," she said, heard her fingers flying across her keyboard. I thought she might like to get the phone numbers for the NGF to get the facts from the appropriate source. She kept typing and I dove to get a laugh.

"I'd suggest to your readers that they drink the beer only after a round and when the Winnebago has been parked and secured at a registered camp site," I added, but there wasn't anything in the way of even a chuckle. Instead I heard her fingers pulling out words.

"Okay Mr. Levans. Thanks very much indeed." Our conversation came to an abrupt close.

The facts and figures continue to astound and amaze. Public golf is king, the ENC (Michigan, Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana and Ohio region) continues to lead the way with 3,332 total courses (21 percent of the nation's golf course supply) and player participation figures are finally growing. There has simply never been a better time to be in this business.

If you're in this business, which I know you are, I'd grab a copy of the NGF's latest trend report. The report may make you wonder how long all this can carry on. Although the number of total golfers over the age of 12 increased by a little over 2 million from 1996, the biggest move in six years, one wonders how long all this can carry on. Although the number of total golfers over the age of 12 increased by a little over 2 million from 1996, the biggest move in six years, one wonders how long all this can carry on.

If you've been wondering whether golf course builders and golf course superintendents (Snow Mold Beware!) are far behind? Maybe yes, maybe no. There seems to be a dearth of architects in golf's homeland. Look at the membership of the National Golf Foundation (NGF) and the membership of the United Golf Course Superintendents Association. Tell me what they're doing to grow a paper supply, there's no one in all golf world to grow a paper supply.

With objectivity in question, readers must beware of the "subversive" Beware the Conduit! So, when you tune in or read on, Beware the Conduit! — especially you folks in Montana and Massachusetts.

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Portraits of Courage (or is that Foolishness?):

• Mowing greens in Texas — in August — without sun screen.
• Proceeding with construction on a fairway assuming that that 2-foot "puddle" in the landing area is not a wetland.
• Selecting a turfgrass cultivar for your new golf course based solely on the experience of a superintendent just 5 miles down the road.
• Dumping a cooler of Gatorade on John Daly after he wins a tournament.
• Playing PGA West without one of those long-armed ball-pickers.
• Playing from the tiger tees while your strapping 17-year-old son plays from the forward tees — for $5 a hole.
• Stepping to the 7th tee at Pebble Beach having already selected 94 drivers.

Getting this now: This person is teaching future golfers as well as some individuals who are currently under construction.

If the Brits are coming to America (see page 1 story), can the Scotsmen be far behind? Maybe yes, maybe no. There seems to be a dearth of architects in golf's homeland. Look at the membership list of the British Institute of Golf Course Architects and you will find a one in Scotland, David McLay Kidd, director of golf design for Glenelg (GDD), is located in Scotland, as are designers Ronnie Lumsden and Robin Hisham. This dear, friend is the home of Old Tom Morris, of Donald Ross, of Willie Park Jr., of Willie Watson, of Willie Mackenzie, and of Tom Bendelow. Perhaps we could put a call into Walter Woods, the old greenskeeper at St Andrews who retired a couple years ago.

Do you have your finger on the dial, Terry Buchen?