PGF: The space between

A music professor once told me that it's not so much the notes that make a particular piece of music interesting, but the space between those notes. The PGF, I was told by a golf course architect, is "one of the best deal-making opportunities of the year."

The PGF attendee is generally hungry for knowledge. Not only are they owners, operators and superintendents of existing public golf facilities who want to boost their business, but I'm surprised at how many attendees are making their first leap into the business. These "first timers" are looking for answers, and they're not afraid to ask questions, as many of last year's speakers can attest.

If you're shy, get over it. Following a speaker into the hallway for comments and questions after a session is fairly commonplace and highly encouraged by the conference.

And if you're on the fence, let me ask you something. What is the cost of not attending? What is the cost of that one new idea you didn't implement at your course? Now take that list of reasons, ball it up and toss it. You're going.

We've been extremely fortunate over the past year to have Andrew Overbeck reporting in from his travels through Asia during his Watson Fellowship. Thanks to Andy, Golf Course News has had the most detailed insight into the state of golf in Asia during the economic meltdown. Even though Andy is back on U.S. soil, he will be following up on his travels and checking on the progress of all the new projects, as well as suspended projects, that he's mentioned in his pieces. We want to thank Andy for the great work and assure our readers that you haven't read the last of him.

Living labs could shake foundation

Heads up, Rachel Carsonites of the world. The list of "living laboratories" is about to get longer and, with it, the ability of American universities to produce scientific proof of the effects of golf course maintenance practices on wildlife and ground and surface water.

You want to show that golf courses are a benefit on the earth? Then the "living labs" could be your key. But, be warned: They could prove the opposite. And if they do, be prepared to find another adversary, another "beehive of big business" to stop in the planning board meetings, city councils and courts of the land.

North Carolina State University is the latest to announce it will build a golf course to serve as a laboratory as well as playing field (see page 1 story). NC State will join Golf Course News staffer, Trevor Ledger.

Meanwhile, Schuyler Meadows Golf Club has been serving for the last two years as a research property for the Sienna College-Audubon International in Newtonville, N.Y. Dr. Larry Woolbright, Sienna professor and institute research director, is overseeing long-term studies at Schuyler Meadows.

At NC State, as at the other schools, people have been very supportive of the fact that this is going to be a teaching and research tool as much as it is a recreational facility," said Dr. Charles Peacock.

NC State teaching staff and students will use the new Tom Fazio-designed course to study "everything you can think of," Peacock said, later adding: "We want a model for other people to follow."

Eight to 10 years ago, people in the golf industry declared that long-term studies of this nature were sorely needed. Yet there existed no operating golf course where such research could be done. Today, that lack has been remedied. Stay tuned for the results. They could shake the foundation of the Sierra Club, Earth First! and others of that nature.

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"I left here a couple evenings at 9 o'clock and it was still above 100 [degrees]," said Keith Ihms, superintendent at The Country Club of the Rockies in Colorado. "There have been 25 deaths in the Houston area due to the heat."

"Young golfers are often unable to keep pace with the game," said Keith Ihms, superintendent at Beef Tree Country Club in Dallas and president of North Texas GCBA. "We peaked out at this club on July 12, it was 111."

Some of us can only try to imagine what the Texas superintendents have endured this summer. But you have to talk to them for the best word picture.

"We have heart-cracks in our rough that you could lose your leg down," said Bruce Burger at The Quarry Golf Club in San Antonio. "The rain report is scary," said Ihms. "We got 8 inches of rain in January to March and then it quit. We didn't have a spring. It was cold and then it was hot."

Meanwhile, superintendents had to be particularly concerned about their employees' health. "We start them with sun shade, helmets and water coolers for water and Gatorade. We check on them and make sure we have somebody fall on us," said Mike Sandburg at Lakeside Country Club in Houston and vice president of South Texas GCBA.

"There have been 20-25 deaths in the Houston area due to the heat."