POINT • DR. MICHAEL HURDZAN:

Dana, I want you to listen to why it is important to build cost-effective golf courses. We need to build low-cost golf courses and these are the reasons why:

First, why do people play the game of golf? The reason they play is not necessarily because of celebrities, or tournaments, or magazines. The reasons have more to do with the spiritual refreshment, the ethereal surroundings, the intrinsic pleasure, mental relaxation and the elusive pursuit of a game.

To find the answer to that question, we need to look at a definition written by David R. Forgan:

"Golf is a science, the study of a lifetime, in which you may exhaust yourself but never your subject. It is a contest, a dual, or a melee calling for courage, skill, strategy and self-control. It is a test of temper, a trial of honor, a revealer of character. It affords the chance to play the man, and act the gentleman. It means going into God's out-of-doors, getting close to nature, fresh air, exercise, a sweeping away of mental cobwebs, genuine recreation of the tired tissues. It is a cure for care, an antidote to worry. It includes companionship with friends, social intercourse, opportunity for courtesy, kindliness and generosity to an opponent. It promotes not only physical health but moral force."

The reason I bring that up is because it says the most important part of golf is the spirit of the game, the idea of being out with your friends and being able to play the game. And, although I grant you that the prettier the surroundings the more pleasurable the experience, it isn't absolutely necessary. The most important thing is being out with your friends and being able to enjoy the game.

Nowhere in this definition does it say anything about Stimpmeters, slope ratings, golf cars, top 100 courses, or Tiger Woods. It doesn't say golf must be played on fast greens, groomed fairways and roughs, or have manicured hazards. It doesn't even say golf must be played on green grass.

If we could arrange golf courses into a pyramid based on quality, at the very top

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of the pyramid we would put high-cost, expensive, very exclusive golf courses. Down on the bottom we would place basic, low-cost, effective beginner-type golf courses. You would see those courses at the very top, the exclusive ones that cost a lot of money, depend on a good base. We have to have a good foundation, and when the foundation starts to crumble and break down, the top will suffer as well. The better the base, the higher the top will rise. So, the bottom of the foundation is what we really need to be concerned about.

The future health of golf depends upon three words: affordable, accessible and sustainable.

Affordable means keeping golf so that the average person can go out and enjoy the game. It means having golf competitively priced with going out to the movie theater, or going to a family restaurant, or being able to go to the course once or twice a week or once or twice a month.

Accessible means having golf as close to the city as possible, so that children can get there on bike or public transportation. Having the golf course at a friendly place where people don't need to worry about wearing Bobby Jones shirts or Footjoy shoes. But, rather, it's a place where you can go and just get comfortable and enjoy the pleasures of the game.

Sustainable means putting a golf course into the environment that needs the least amount of input possible to produce an interesting round of golf: the least amount of water, fertilizer, pesticide and fossil fuels. The fewer those inputs, the more sustainable that golf course is going to be.

A $1 million golf course accomplishes all three of those goals. There is a rule of thumb that for every million dollars invested in a golf course, we need a $8 to $10 greens fee to recover that cost. If we build a $3 million course, greens fees might be $24 to $30. If you add in the cost of a modest clubhouse, maintenance building and maintenance equipment, you might be able to sell a round of golf for $8 to $15 for every $1 million invested.

The most important factor is the site. If you have a good site you can build an inexpensive golf course. What would a $1 million golf course look like?

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—Michael Hudzan

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