Drought, flood, fire ants and mussel invasions, yet GCN prevails

Have you ever thought about time being compressed? I'd like to talk to Mr. Einstein about this because it certainly seems like the past 10 years have swiftly passed. Wars and rumors of war. Hurricanes and earthquakes. Droughts and floods. (Sometimes, as Texas discovered last year, droughts followed immediately by floods.) Fire ant invasions from the south and mussel invasions from the north. Attacks from ravaging madmen from the far left (read Earth Firsters) and the simply mislaid from the not-so-far left (read Sierra Clubbers). They have come and gone, and yet we remain. I could get deeply philosophical here, but those who know me realize I usually poke fun at deep philosophers. Natural and manmade disasters aside, I'd rather remember the fun, and funny, things about this past decade. After all, golf is a fun game filled with fun people.

It is an industry that remains probably more insulated from changes in society than any other industry. Character may not matter in the White House, but it does in golf. Honesty and integrity may have vanished to a great degree around the country, but they are Standard Operating Procedure in golf. At least, that's my take.

What other industry could compare icons to our Arnold Palmer, Jack Nicklaus and Tom Fazio? (Or name your top three.) What other industry has the character, and characters, as our Pete and Alice Dye, Brent Wadsworth and Ted Horton? What other holds its traditions, and tradition-makers, in such high esteem as does golf in the names of Old Tom Morris, Bobby Jones, Ben Hogan and Donald Ross and in such places as St. Andrews and Cypress Point?

Every day, racial hatred is evident in the news somewhere. But there was only one Shoal Creek incident that made golf news in 10 years. What other industry has so wholly — and wholeheartedly — supported anything approaching The First Tee program, reaching out, in great part, to inner-city youths?

Every day, vitriolic diatribes are in the news somewhere, about something or someone. People don't get attacked in golf, yet golf is always being attacked. Does that seem odd to you?

Ten years and myriad topics have passed. I've written of:

- Societal Deviation: This broke through golf's barriers when what I called "Potty Parity legislation" in some states demanded that new construction build as much as twice as much women's room space as men's room.

- Political Correctness: "Are you Politically Correct? Are you sensitive to what I say? Are you caffeine-free, yogurt-loving and driving a recyclable utility vehicle?" Remember, you must say 'tree butcher' but not 'lumberjack.' Or 'counterfactual proposition' but not 'lie.' (Hey, this was Clinton before we ever heard of the man.)

Tennis anyone? Is there a weak backhand on golf's horizon?

I drive by the municipal tennis courts in our area and what do I see? Cracked asphalt, ratty netting, tilted posts, patched fences, broken light bulbs. Heck, even golf cars from a neighboring course using one of the courts as a temporary storage area.

What's even more depressing is what I don't see. Players. At least none under 35. Just an occasional pair of older knee- and elbow-braced hackers who speak warly of Rod Laver and Roy Emerson, but don't know, or much care, who are the world's top-10 ATP-ranked players in 1989.

And — a once-fanatical tennis player — begin to wonder. Am I looking at golf's future?

Backed by a seemingly inexhaustible financial spigot of federal funding, municipalities from Maine to California poured out thousands of public tennis courts in the 1960s and 1970s. I spent countless hours on some of those courts. I'd occasionally check out the local upscale public courts and the private facilities at local golf and tennis clubs. But as a youth with limited funds, I never felt quite welcome there.

As I grew older and my wallet somewhat larger, my interest in tennis waned. The upscale public and private courts that had little interest in me as a teenager, now held little interest for me as a young adult beginning to understand the concept and choices involved in discretionary income.

As the federal funding that built them dried up and the municipalities that maintained them tightened their financial belts, the municipal courts fell into disrepair. The upscale public courts closed their doors and became warehouses. The private tennis clubs lost members and tennis became a secondary amenity at golf and tennis clubs.

In 1987 there were 17 million tennis players, according to the National Sporting Goods Association. By 1997, the number had dropped to 11 million, a 41-percent annual decrease.

I've been driven by the local municipal golf course lately. I see young kids — a lot of them — with bags slung over their shoulders, making their way to a clubhouse, where they pay $6 to play all day on a well-kept course. Then I drive a few miles past the private course. Few kids there. A few miles farther on is an upscale public course. Even fewer youngsters there.

I wonder how welcome the $6 youngsters at the local muni would feel if they showed up at the local private and upscale public layouts? I wonder what those kids will be doing for recreation 10 years from now, when their wallets start to grow?

I've been with GolfCourseNews almost since its inception a decade ago.
sisted to more than 100,000 analyses in 13 projects since the 1988 Cape Cod Study and only five samples contained pesticides above health-based action levels, reports Dr. Stuart Cohen.

**March:** Joseph Baidy assumes the GCSAA presidency.

**April:** Increasing labor costs, declining membership and less money available for capital improvements are among the disturbing findings in an annual report on the health of private country clubs.

**May:** More than 60 percent of superintendents surveyed indicate they have altered maintenance practices compared to three years ago, citing pressure from government regulation, economic factors and environmental concerns.

**June:** Last mercury-based pesticide, Calo-Clor, taken off market, a result of EPA's cancellation of mercury-based pesticides.

**July:** Believing potential buyers could not live up to environmental deed restrictions imposed on the property, a bankruptcy judge nullifies the Resolution Trust Corp.'s sale of the Ocean Course at Kiawah Island to New York Audubon Society and financial partner Virginia Investment Trust.

**August:** EPA Administrator Carol Browner declares science peer-review procedures (until now non-existent) will be in effect Sept. 30, ending years of hostility with various branches of government and others in the scientific community.

**September:** Worldwide joint venture of Hoechst AG and Schering AG merger results in AgrEvo in North America.

**October:** Audubon Society of New York State presents first John James Audubon Environmental Steward Award to Tim Hiers of Collier's Reserve in Naples, Fla. The First Tee is mentioned in just about every commentary.

The common denominator through out our special guest commentaries is the call to grow participation. You've heard it, read it, dozens of times this year. Yet the need is so great at this point in the game that you're going to continue to hear it. By they way, The First Tee is mentioned in just about every commentary.

The ultimate question should be, how do we make the trip to the course routine? Not just for the kids, but the trip should be routine for me, you as well as your entire family.