

## Golf, the Census and a less-spacious America

**C**alifornia leads the nation in everything from pop culture to high technology. Now it may be showing us the way to a more crowded and energy-deprived America of the future.

Joel Joyner's front page story in this issue explores California's energy debacle and its impact on the state's golf courses. Superintendents are bracing for a summer of power blackouts and soaring electricity rates, topped off by less water than usual.

And that's not the worst of it. According to U.S. Energy Secretary Spencer Abraham, the country as a whole faces "a major energy supply crisis" over the next 25 years. He warns that the shortage could swamp the economy and lead to radically reduced living standards.

"The bad news," Abraham warns, "is that the situation in California is not isolated, it is not temporary and it will not fix itself." Blackouts and spiking electricity prices could spread this summer to Arizona, Nevada, Oregon, Washington and other western states.

The long-range impact on golf operations is tough to predict, but we might very well look back on 2001 as the good old days. If energy demand is outstripping supply right now, the future looks downright ominous.

### AMERICA'S POPULATION DOUBLING

Driven by some of the highest immigration levels in American history, and based on current growth rates, our population of 284 million will double in 70 years. More than 90 percent of that growth will be the direct result of post-2000 immigration.

But great damage may be done long before then. Our immigration policies place us in a league with the ruinous population growth patterns of such countries as India and Bangladesh. Our growth rate is higher than China's. We've added 81 million people just since 1970, the year of the first Earth Day. Back then, environmentalists predicted

2040. California will add the population equivalent of the entire state of Texas by then.

And, of course, there's no end in sight. California could eventually swell to 100 million people, or 200 million. It probably will. But the growth will take a heavy toll. As long as California's population issue goes unaddressed, the demand for new housing units – already at more than 250,000 a year – can only mean more new subdivisions on more of the state's hillsides and deserts, longer commutes, more freeway congestion and more strain on the power and water supplies.

Golfcourse architects and superintendents go to great lengths to lighten the impact of a golf course on the environment. But if the whole environment is wrecked by a relentless tide of immigration, who is going to care?

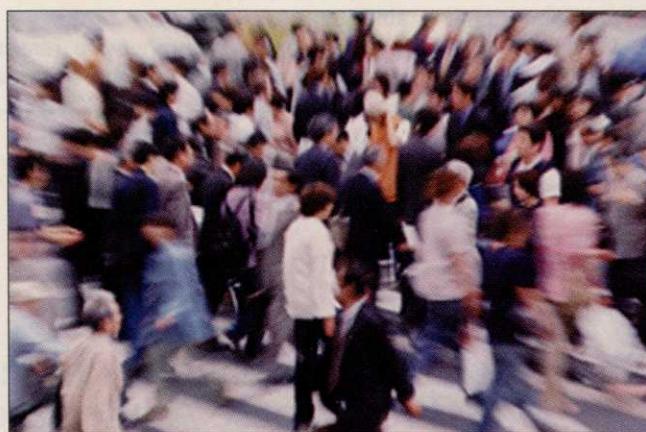
Californians are gradually waking up to this threat to their famous lifestyle. Last fall, in more than 50 of the state's 58 counties, antigrowth or slow-growth measures were on the ballot.

Those steps are almost futile, however. Unless Congress returns immigration to more traditional levels – down from one million a year to 250,000 or so – California seems destined to plunge helplessly into an overpopulated future.

### POPULATION VERSUS WATER IN FLORIDA

Florida's future looks just as grim. The recent Census tells us that the Sunshine

**Continued on next page**



At current growth rates, U.S. population will double in 70 years.

that by 2000 our population would have stabilized and we'd be at zero population growth. Instead, at a bare minimum, we will add 120 million more in the next 50 years.

In those states where population is growing the fastest, the existing infrastructure may buckle, affecting everything from power and water to roadways and schools. As it happens, pressure will be greatest on some of our most prominent states for golf, especially California and Florida.

### CALIFORNIA BURSTING AT THE SEAMS

According to the latest Census projections, California's population is expected to grow from 35 million today to at least 55 million by

and others often wish they could follow.

### A TOUGH EXAMPLE TO EMULATE

The basic fact is that Augusta National is Augusta National, as worldwide TV sees it, for all of two weeks each year. An immense force is directed into achieving these two weeks of perfection. It is impossible for any other course to assemble as grand a team to direct and produce the results.

Other courses attempt to duplicate the appearance of unrestrained, luxuriant turf and flowering trees and shrubs. Augusta National inspires this effort. While Augusta

and to many golfers than luxuriant turf.

### \$1.5-MILLION MAINTENANCE BUDGET

Augusta sets an unrealistic example. Consider its vast advantages: an excellent superintendent, seemingly unlimited maintenance funds (at least \$1.5 million per year), a crew topped off by numerous volunteer superintendents, permanent maintenance labor staff of around 40 with another 40 brought in for the week preceding the Masters, fresh new state-of-the-art equipment annually, limited play, nearly ideal weather conditions in the spring and constant tinkering with the design and maintenance to yield exceptional results.

To achieve even near-similar results elsewhere drives up the maintenance budget severely. Higher costs for maintenance then must be reflected in higher green fees or membership dues.

### HELPING MOTHER NATURE

The climate helps, too. The basic fairway turf of Bermudagrass can easily be over sown with fine-leaf ryegrass in September or October as the Bermuda enters dormancy. The ryegrass flourishes in the cool winter weather under intense maintenance. The creeping bentgrass

**Continued on next page**

## Augusta National: a study in immaculate perfection. Too bad nobody else can afford it

By Ronald W. Frear

This year's Masters Tournament at Augusta National Golf Club clearly demonstrated the unsurpassed excellence of Tiger Woods' golf game. There is only one Tiger.

In fact, there is only one Augusta National, too. This singular existence is often overlooked and unappreciated by avid golfers, golf club committees and club members. During the past 10 years or so, satellite television access and expanding worldwide coverage of the Masters have circled the globe.

As I travel internationally, I often hear people wishfully say, "Why can't our course look like Augusta?" The unmitigated perfection of Augusta opens new potential and new standards for other golf courses. Augusta continues to raise the benchmark,



View of Augusta National, with Masters under way

Photo by Ron Frear

must be as it is for only those two weeks leading to the tournament, other want-to-be look-alikes must face the fact that immaculate perfection is extremely expensive to realize and is not everlasting.

When viewed from a cost-effective, or cost-push action and reaction view, trying to emulate Augusta brings more harm to many courses

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## Management Co. list retooled for 2001

When you turn to page 22 in this month's issue, you'll notice that *Golf Course News'* annual Management Company List looks a bit different. Due to the fact that we added more than 40 new companies this year, we decided to streamline the way we present the information.

This year's list features 141 companies, all ranked by the number of courses in each of the firm's portfolios. The list not only provides an instant snapshot of the numbers that shape the golf course management business but also illustrates the tumultuous times that many of the companies have been going through.

In addition to the section in this issue, a complete list of the companies, their full course portfolios and contact information is now available on the Web at [www.golfcoursenews.com](http://www.golfcoursenews.com).

### PLENTY OF CHANGES

While management companies still have almost 1,600 courses in their collective clutches, one look at this year's list and you'll see that many large companies have left the building.

Some of the biggest firm's from last year's list went out of business, including Family Golf Centers and Golden Bear Club Services. Golf Trust of America is also absent from the list as they sort through their liquidation process.

A number of other firms revamped



*Andrew Overbeck,  
managing editor*

their portfolios and plenty of courses changed hands. And despite the economics of the marketplace, firms such as Gotham Golf Partners, GolfMatrix, and Heritage Golf Group have all expanded.

### AMERICAN GOLF STILL LEADING

There are also dozens of new additions: Medallion Golf Group, Redstone Golf Management, and Z Golf, just to name a few. Still another company has changed its name: Shaker Golf Corp. has now become Vintage Golf Properties.

This year's top companies, however, have not changed much, with American Golf Corp. still holding a substantial lead with 294 courses. ClubCorp and Troon Golf round out the top three with 118 and 54 courses, respectively.

### FEEDBACK

As always, we here at GCN look forward to getting feedback from the industry on the new format of the Management Company List.

And although we strive to update this list every year with the most current information, please let us know if any of the information on the list is not correct.

## Augusta National

**Continued from previous page**

greens are at their best in early spring before the onslaught of summer heat and humidity.

Subsurface heating coils help bring early-season growth to some of the greens ahead of Mother Nature's schedule. It has been said that cooling tubes beneath some of the greens help prolong the quality of the bentgrass when the heat and humidity arrive.

To achieve Stimpmeter speeds of 12 or even 13 requires bentgrass and special mowers with extremely thin bed knives. Even so, the height of cut for Masters week (approximately 1/8 inch) cannot be maintained throughout the golf season. The grass will die.

Achieving these speeds requires intense attention to the greens with many actions beyond only mowing. With fewer than 10,000 rounds of golf a year and restricted play leading up to Masters week, traffic over the course is at best modest. Limited annual play eliminates the cancerous effects of traffic-induced compaction that stresses many courses.

### MAINTENANCE IN THE REAL WORLD

Courses that must withstand 40,000, 60,000 or even 100,000 rounds of play per year cannot compete. Tropical locations where bentgrass is unknown must deal with Bermudagrass cultivars or perhaps paspalum on the greens. Trying to achieve Augusta greens' speeds on Bermuda or paspalum cannot be done, even with the new Tifeagle hybrid Bermuda variety. Bermudagrass cannot be cut as closely as creeping bent.

Trying to shave down Bermudagrass

greens seeking ever-faster Stimpmeter readings leads to deterioration in the reliability of the turf and the quality of the putting. In any event, remember that Augusta's greens speeds are faster during Masters week than at any other time of the year. They are not maintained at that height throughout the year. They cannot be.

The immaculate perfection of fairways, and now even a little semi-rough "second cut" along with tees and greens, is as much due to superb management of fertilizers and micronutrients as it is of mowing. Not every other course everywhere



*View of green at Augusta National*

can afford the price of intense micronutrient supplements and nitrogen-phosphorous-potassium fertilizer programs. Mowing each year with brand new equipment that is carefully adjusted, perhaps with factory mechanic assistance, helps. Most golf courses cannot afford to replace all their primary and expensive mowing equipment every year.

### AZALEAS BY FEDEX

The spectacular floral show around

## Golf and the Census

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State holds 15 million people today. Its population is projected to hit 20 million in 2020 and 30 to 40 million by 2050.

Florida adds 750 new people every single day. At current rates, Florida needs 111,000 more gallons of fresh water today than it needed yesterday, and the same tomorrow. And so on. This in a state where water shortages, salt water encroachment and diminishing aquifers are already serious problems.

Florida could build huge desalination plants and start tapping the Atlantic and the Gulf of Mexico, but that would be very expensive water indeed.

Not many Floridians are crazy about what's happening to their state. Some 72 percent of them say that growth, sprawl and overpopulation are Florida's worst problems.

### HIGH GROWTH IN THE ROCKIES

Even in Colorado, residents are alarmed by rapid growth. The state's population is expected to increase by 67 percent over 25 years, from 4.3 million to 6.4 million.

That's trivial compared to California. Nonetheless, 72 percent of Coloradans, in a recent poll, said they believe that "the current pace of population growth threatens the quality of life."

Fully 70 percent said state and federal leaders "have a responsibility to reduce development and halt population growth so that a high quality of life, a healthy environment and a sound economy can be maintained."

If there's a bright side to a population that's burgeoning out of control, it might be that golf courses will be more highly valued for preserving at least some open space. ■

## MAILBAG

### REFUTING THE 'THREE-YEAR RULE'

Dear editor:

I read your article about the "three-year rule" (May issue), and had to let you know about golf courses on the North Shore of Chicago. My course, Sunset Ridge Country Club, was built in 1923, and I'm only the fourth superintendent. Domenic Grotti was here from 1933 to 1978, and I've been here 36 years, including 22 as superintendent.

I could come up with another 20

guys who have been at their clubs for 15 years or more. Ed Fischer has been at Old Elm Club for 30 years. Julius Albaugh has been at Westmoreland Country Club for more than 30 years. And Mike Bauier has been at Inverness Golf Club for some 30 years.

I know of five more superintendents in this area who've been in their current jobs at least 20 years.

Dennis Miller, *Sunset Ridge CC, Northfield, Ill.*

guest fees and joining fees are discouraging new players and limiting the play of average golfers in many markets. Decreasing the amount of play by excessive cost is only desirable at a few select and noted courses.

There are many rational and efficient actions an experienced superintendent can do – given a reasonable budget, or modest budget increase – to improve the appearance and quality of the course. Some owners and operators only want average or marginal maintenance results, and in some markets those are acceptable.

### SETTING REASONABLE STANDARDS

Not every course must strive to produce an Augusta "10." Most golfers would be very pleased with conditions equating to seven or eight on the Augusta scale. For high traffic courses, five or six, together with smooth, puttable greens, would produce the most favorable revenue stream. Improvements in green speeds and in the appearance of the turf in general can add an extra bit that does distinguish the course from others that don't offer these conditions.

These efforts can translate into increased revenue for the course. Members surely appreciate improved levels of turfgrass quality. Scores can improve with better turf. It is up to each individual course to set a reasonable or attainable standard. What is good for Augusta is not necessarily good or practical for everyone else. ■

Ron Fream, of Fream & Dale Golfplan, has been involved with planning, design, construction and maintenance of golf courses in about 60 countries.