Augusta National

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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 regulate the timing of Azalea flowering, Overnight delivery and placement of some flowering shrubs can occur at Augusta. But can the average course afford it? No cart paths mar the view. With relatively few rounds of golf being played and caddies on hand, there is no need for paths.

The smooth appearance of the tidy pine needles that cover the native pines and around the recently planted trees is not a gift of nature. Not all those pine needles began their existence on an Augusta pine tree. Considerable effort is required to make that pine needle soil cover look nice.

AESTHETICS VERSUS CASH FLOW

Augusta National is a wonderful course. It is unfortunate, however, that too many other people long for similar playing conditions. Since most public courses and country clubs must earn a profit or at least break even, it is suggested that while one can appreciate the aesthetics of Augusta, it is essential to tailor one’s own ideals and objectives to financial reality. Increased maintenance costs must pass through to the end user.

There are all too many indications around now that escalating green fees, 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 improvements. The first is to focus on 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.

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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 an increase of 2 million people in the past 20 years. 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 “failed to see what is possible 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 thrown course management out of control, it might be that golf courses will be more highly valued for preserving at least some open space.