

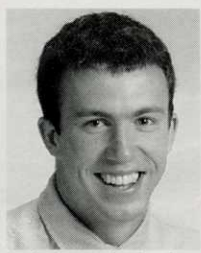
## Irrigation system improvements a choice between brown and green

**B**rown is beautiful, but green pays. Those were the conflicting phrases facing golf course superintendents this summer as drought gripped much of the nation.

As water restrictions hit courses, difficult decisions ensued. Superintendents had to decide which parts of the course got water and which didn't, running the risk of alienating golfers who have come to expect wall-to-wall green. Of course, for many there was little choice in the matter. You either let your roughs and, in some cases, fairways go, or got slapped with fines.

Going into winter, much of the country has had some drought relief, but the effects of the dry spring and summer linger on as superintendents work to repair turf damage. However, in addition to focusing on turf recovery, industry experts say now is the perfect time to analyze irrigation systems to see how they could better perform against future drought conditions.

In this month's issue, on page 8, irrigation consultant David D. Davis outlines how superintendents can evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of their irrigation systems. He discusses what steps can be taken to make the system perform



Andrew Overbeck, editor

better under drought and other stress conditions.

The steps that may need to be taken to improve the irrigation systems range from adjusting sprinkler spacing, to replacing nozzles, to tuning-up pump stations. Davis' ideal

drought-resistant system includes valve-in-head sprinklers, a weather station, a state-of-the-art central control system and field controllers and properly-sized mainlines to improve pressure control.

Davis also suggests using GPS maps to improve calculation of surface areas to maximize the efficiency of each irrigation cycle. With the introduction of LandLogic, GPS mapping technology has become, by all accounts, easier to use and more affordable. See that story on page 1.

According to the Golf Course News Poll (see page 8) many superintendents are already heeding the above advice and are updating their irrigation systems. Of those surveyed, 35.4 percent are planning an upgrade.

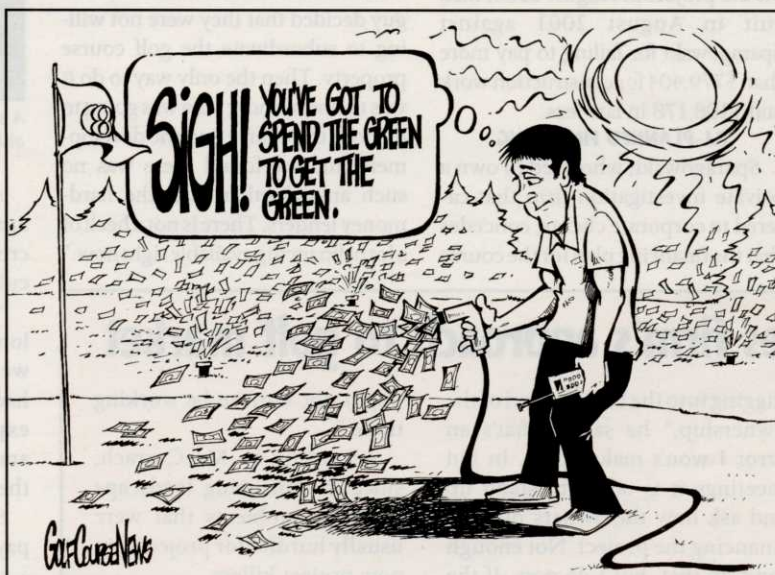
However, many are asking, "What good is a new, efficient irrigation system if I'm not allowed to use it?"

This year, courses in some areas of country were nearly cut off from irrigation altogether.

In Greensboro, N.C., the city water manager proposed cutting golf courses back to hand-watering only. After careful lobbying, local superintendents were able to convince the city water manager to institute a decidedly more measured approach. In the first stage of the restrictions, Greensboro

April 2002).

Going forward, constant vigilance will be required to keep water use restrictions from hurting the industry. However, it should be easy for courses to justify whatever investment is needed to upgrade and improve their irrigation systems now. The more efficient your system is, the less brown turf your course will have to endure when the next drought inevitably hits, keeping golfers happy



courses were allowed use 60 percent of last year's recorded amount on a month-to-month basis.

Superintendents fought and won similar battles in New Jersey and Pennsylvania this year (GCN

and your job secure.

As Davis said in his article, improved irrigation efficiency reduces operating costs, improves playability and "reduces the stress on superintendents."

### POINT

## Municipal golf still plays an important role in game's growth

By DAMIAN PASCUZZO, ASGCA

A friend of mine, Les Claytor, wrote a terrific master's thesis titled "The Evolution of the American Municipal Golf Course: 1895-1940." It is fascinating reading, as Les chronicles the development of the country's first public golf course, Van Courtland Park in New York, in 1895. The initial success of this nine-hole Bronx-based course encouraged the city of Boston to follow a year later with the creation of Franklin Park Golf Course. Other cities around the country were not far behind in building their own nine- or 18-hole golf courses.

Claytor's research documents how, despite primitive conditions, these courses thrived. Often people would line up for hours waiting for their turn at the first tee. By all accounts, a great many people learned to play the game on the early municipal layouts and it would be logical to assume that a fair number of these players went on to join private clubs or patronize resort courses during their vacations, all of which contributed to the growth of the game.

The early impact of municipal golf on American parks and the people who used them was best stated by a park official who in a 1927 New York Times article claimed, "I know of no enterprise of similar character that has afforded so much recreation and pleasure to so large a number of people."

It's been more than 100 years since the creation of Van Courtland Park and I have to wonder, how much has changed in a century?

Certainly we have seen golf continue to grow through the decades to the point that we have around 22 to 25 million participants. But, have we provided for everyone?

Recent research out of the Golf 20/20 initiative indicates that there

Continued on next page



Damian Pascuzzo

### COUNTERPOINT

## The time and need for municipal golf has come and gone

By JAY KAREN

About three years ago, an angry course owner and National Golf Course Owners Association member called asking for help fighting a proposed municipal golf course in his market. Being relatively green on the issue at the time, I asked him why he was so irate about this issue.

On the surface, it seemed to me that an owner just didn't want new competition dipping into his market share. I quickly learned there was much more to it than sour grapes. He asked me, "If you owned a bowling alley and the city opened a new bowling alley across the street, and they charged half what you charged and didn't have to pay taxes, how would that make you feel?" Good point. He went on, "Now, how would you feel if there are 10 other bowling alleys like yours in the same market (keeping in mind that the number of bowlers has remained about the same for the past five years) and the taxes you pay are subsidizing your competition?" Another good point.

There was a time in the golf industry when municipal golf courses were extremely valuable for the purpose of introducing the game to new players in an affordable fashion. While there may be small pockets in nooks and crannies around the country where municipal golf is the only incubator for new golfers, the time and need for government golf has generally come and gone.

The construction boom of daily-fee golf courses during the last quarter of the 20th century has essentially supplanted the need for municipal golf. When the free enterprise system provides ample supply of a particular desire or need, the government should take itself out of the equation. Instead, we find that cities, counties and states are building facilities as ways to fill the municipal coffers. Or worse yet,



Jay Karen

Continued on next page

# GOLF COURSE NEWS

THE BUSINESS NEWSPAPER FOR THE GOLF COURSE INDUSTRY  
www.golfcoursenews.com

### Publisher

Jonathan Whitney

### Editor

Andrew Overbeck

### Managing Editor

Derek Rice

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Country Club of the Rockies

### Editorial Office

Golf Course News

106 Lafayette St., P.O. Box 997

Yarmouth, ME 04096

207-846-0600; Fax: 207-846-0657

aoverbeck@golfcoursenews.com

drice@golfcoursenews.com

### Advertising Offices

Golf Course News

106 Lafayette St., P.O. Box 997

Yarmouth, ME 04096

207-846-0600; Fax: 207-846-0657

### Midwest, Western U.S. Sales:

Jonathan Whitney

207-846-0600, ext. 263

jwhitney@golfcoursenews.com

### Eastern U.S. Sales:

Michael Pajak

207-846-0600, ext. 223

mpajak@golfcoursenews.com

### Marketplace and Classifieds

Anne Washburn

207-846-0600, ext. 230

awashburn@golfcoursenews.com

### Subscription Information

Golf Course News, P.O. Box 3047

Langhorne, PA 19047

215-788-7112

For reprint information on orders of 500 copies or more, please call PARS International at (212) 221-9595, or e-mail jeclipse@parsintl.com.

United Publications, Inc.

Publishers of specialized business magazines.

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## NGP acquisition a good sign for golf business

Several months of speculation and rumor-mongering ended in September when Goldman Sachs agreed to acquire National Golf Properties (NGP) for \$1.1 billion, most of which will go to satisfy the real estate investment trust's more than \$800 million in debt.



Derek Rice,  
managing editor

Once Goldman is able to buy back enough shares to take NGP private, it will merge the company with management company American Golf Corp. (AGC), its largest tenant, eliminating a large part of NGP's original problem. Namely, AGC's inability to make lease payments.

While it's obvious the NGP that will emerge when all is said and done will be very different than the company of today, the Goldman

acquisition is huge for the industry. It is a statement that Wall Street is willing to take a look at golf, which is a refreshing change.

Bottom-line-focused Goldman, which does not have a background in golf, simply will not tolerate under-performing assets. The firm will evaluate NGP's courses and try to cut loose those that aren't pulling their weight, retaining only those it feels can still turn a profit. Something tells me there will soon be a glut of courses on the market to be had for a fraction of what NGP paid to acquire them.

This deal may be just the kickstart the golf industry needs. Many of the larger lenders, such as Bank of America, have left the space and default rates on golf loans are ris-

ing. It is not the most ideal time to get involved with a golf course project from a financial standpoint, as competition is shrinking what were already slim margins.

According to Steve Mooney, CEO of Commercial Bancorp, who has been in banking for many years, this is the latest in a string of good news for the industry. Equity money is starting to flow back into golf. As Mooney says, wherever equity money goes, "the lenders will follow blindly - they always do."

...

On the subject of management companies, in the page 1 story "Munis face challenges from many fronts" in last month's issue, I neglected to mention that Black Gold Golf Course director of golf Eric Lohman works for KemperSports Management, which operates the in Yorba Linda, Calif.-based course.

## Municipal golf still fills important niche

Continued from previous page

are many people who want to play the game but don't. They make up the latent demand segment of the market. Conservative estimates place the number of people in the latent demand segment of approximately 10 million. Other estimates take that figure up to 20 million people. The reasons most often cited for not playing golf are time, expense and difficulty.

This is where municipalities still play an important role in golf. Municipalities, counties and other government entities are not under the same pressure to maximize profits as developers in the private sec-

tor. This allows them to develop those simple, inexpensive golf courses that meet the needs of so many existing and potential golfers. In the same way that they provide ball fields, soccer fields, tennis courts, skate parks and BMX tracks for their citizens' use, they need to build golf facilities in a way that the private sector can't.

Over the years, metropolitan areas such as Los Angeles, Spokane, Wash., and New York have built a terrific collection of municipal golf courses that are simple, affordable and fun. They service their citizens as they have for decades. But as new communities continue to

sprout up across the country, it is important for them to understand the value and role a municipal golf course plays in their future.

I believe municipalities also have a responsibility to think beyond traditional, regulation-sized golf courses. In most instances they are better positioned than the private sector to develop and operate executive-length and par-3 courses. These "alternative golf courses" often act as the entryway to golf to many aspiring golfers. Not unlike baseball's minor league system, par-3s and executive courses allow players to improve their skills, learn the etiquette of the game and gain the confidence necessary to move up to regulation golf courses.

## Leave the business of golf to private owners

Continued from previous page

as a means for some politicians to leave their legacy behind in the form of 18 holes of upscale golf.

Tell anyone outside the golf industry about the supply and demand struggle in which we find ourselves, and they just can't believe it. Golf is more popular on television than ever before, but the business of golf has seen better days. Mayors, city and county councils and state park divisions that are currently building golf courses seem to be insulated from the truth about the overabundant supply of golf courses that already exists.

Don't get me wrong - I am not anti-growth. But I am against illogical and unreasonable growth.

It's not just a supply-and-demand issue. It's also a matter of government waste. First, only eight percent of the public plays golf. Municipalities should not engage in \$15 million projects (sometimes much larger) that are aimed at less than 10 percent of their citizens.

Also, some municipal officials will argue there is a lack of affordable golf. With today's plethora of coupon books, twilight pricing, junior discounts and intra-market price wars, the affordability point is moot. In cities and counties where schools are falling apart, teachers are underpaid, medical services are poor, crime is high, why on earth would you spend tax dollars on an upscale, designer golf course? There are many cases around the country where those courses are operating in the red to the tune of hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Take a case in New Jersey, where it can cost literally hundreds of thousands of dollars for a privately owned, daily-fee golf course to obtain a liquor license. In that same county, a new municipal course will get a license without paying a fee whatsoever. Other tax abatements include sales and property taxes. Such relief should be reserved for projects and programs that affect the quality of life of a large percentage of the populace, such as

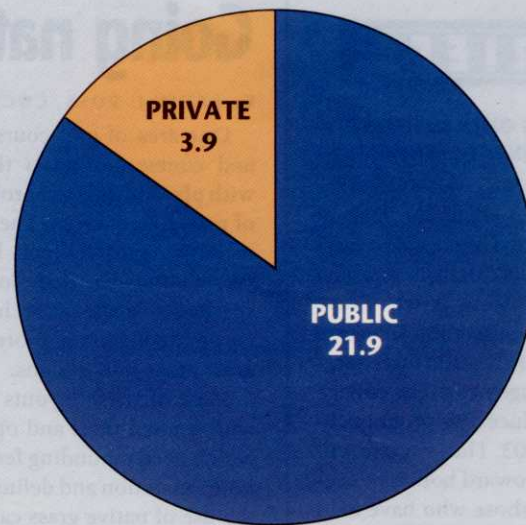
attracting new industry that will create hundreds or thousands of new jobs or augmenting public safety services. Unfair competitive advantage can also take form in other ways, such as preferential water use agreements.

If private enterprise is providing affordable golf in a given market - even if it means playing in the afternoon or even walking the course - the municipality should be vehemently challenged on any move to develop a new golf course. The proverbial pie has already been split into more pieces than necessary. In this day and age, there are much higher priorities for municipalities than playing golf course owner. Leave the business of owning and operating golf courses to the sole proprietors, families and corporations around the country who are already doing a fantastic job of delivering golf to the American public. ■

Jay Karen is director of membership for the National Golf Course Owners Association and is based in Charleston, S.C.

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Source: NGF Golf Consumer Spending in the U.S.

Again the research of Golf 20/20 bears this out: "alternative facilities open to the public share a complementary relationship to regulation-length courses nearby. That is, golfers pay and play more at traditional facilities in communities with abundant alternative facilities."

While it is easy to focus on bringing new players into the game, we cannot forget about older players who for either physical or economic reasons, simply don't want to go the full 18 anymore. Alternative facilities are a great way for them to continue their participation in the game.

Cities can take a leadership position in environmental stewardship by converting degraded sites in municipal golf facilities. We've seen in recent decades the conversion of many landfills, and brownfield sites into player-filled golf courses.

Enjoyable, accessible and affordable are the keystones of municipal golf courses. They have played a historic role in the growth of American golf and will continue to be an important part of the game's future. ■

Damian Pascuzzo is a partner in Graves & Pascuzzo Ltd. in El Dorado Hills, Calif., and is past president of the American Society of Golf Course Architects.

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