

# Designer's forum

By Dr. Michael J. Hurdzan



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## Executive is... not a dirty word

In golf there are some words that carry very strong negative connotations, such as shank, choke, and yippies. Likewise the Golf Superintendent would rather never hear words like pythium, burned-out, or broken. All of these terms conjure up images of bad experiences in golf and golf course maintenance. But there is one term in golf that elicits negative responses more out of misunderstanding rather than as a result of bad experience. That term is "Executive Golf Course". Perhaps like a friendly ghost, when you learn its personality and purpose, you may enjoy its company.

Although there is no strict definition of what is an Executive Golf Course, most would agree that it is a course with a par somewhere between 58 and 68 with an average par of 62. Any golf course with a par less than 58 is considered a par 3, and any course with a par over 68 is a full size course. The main difference then, between these brothers, is that the Executive Golf Course usually has all par 3's and par 4's with no par 5's. However, physically, the Executive course is undistinguishable from the full size course for it has full size tees, greens, and sandtraps with the only real difference being the amount of fairways and roughs. An average par 72 golf course may occupy 150 acres while an average par 62 Executive may only need 80 acres of land.

This means then that an Executive course is cheaper to build (less land cost, reduced seedbed preparation and seeding cost, less irrigation, less tile, small pumps), cheaper to maintain (less fairway and rough to water, fertilize, mow, and apply pesticides to), and has a smaller requirement for labor, power, security, etc.

It is my belief that the Executive Golf Course is the reasonable middle ground between the increasingly costly full size course and building something that looks like a golf course, but does not receive enough patronage to make it profitable. The Executive may be the most viable alternative that the investor with limited funds may have, for even at today's cost for construction and maintenance, a well planned and properly built "Executive" can make money.

First one must understand the purpose, concept, and demographics of this golf facility. If you have ever spent a day on a public golf course and observed the skill, or lack thereof, exhibited by most golfers, read the frustration on their faces, or been exposed to the dissolution of civil and social order caused by a slow group of players, then you understand that many golfers, especially beginners, women, and seniors, may find a full size golf course beyond their physical abilities, a socially hostile climate, and not much fun. These people want to play golf but they have few alternatives. They find most par 3 courses overly repetitive (boring), lacking in shot value (no fairway woods and irons), and depriving them of a respectable golfing image.

To some golfers it is almost demeaning to play a par 3 course that only requires 5 or 6 different clubs that can be carried around like a handful of pencils; and he feels like a fool going out there with a \$500 set of clubs, a 14" bag, and an \$80 pair of shoes. As a result you have damaged his golfing self-image for he needs to feel like a golfer and he needs to have a justifiable reason for sporting all of his nice equipment. The properly planned Executive Golf Course does all of these things for it provides a golf course of par 3 and short par 4 holes that are within the limited skills of the patrons, it requires hitting every club in the bag, it is less expensive to play, requires less time, and is socially

more comfortable than a place populated with accomplished, but frequently impatient golfers.

However to be successful the Executive Golf Course must not only provide a full array of golfing excitement, it must also be located very near its patrons. As stated earlier, the demographics of the Executive would indicate it to be most used by beginners, women, seniors, and those seeking a quick round of golf. Thus the course must be located so that little effort or money is needed to get there. Ideally people should be able to ride their bikes or walk to the course or drive not more than 10-15 minutes. By nature, the golfers most likely to use an Executive course, are the ones that are least likely to travel any distance. Perhaps it is for this reason the Executive length course makes an ideal companion for a housing complex, or as a use for floodplain land in the heart of a city.

The Executive Golf Course may be our best hope for wide spread acceptance of golf as a sport, for it encourages beginners, it is affordable to our youth, and it permits elderly people with fixed incomes and fading skills to continue to enjoy golf. The Executive course is ideally suited to family golf where the course is entertaining to all family members no matter what their individual skills. In how many other forms of physical recreation can parents share of their experiences, teach their children sportsmanship, and perhaps start an activity that the family members can enjoy together all of their lives? Dwell on that question a minute.

Perhaps on strict utilitarian reasons alone, the Executive course should be considered by golf course developers for they can produce attractive profits for the money invested. Income statements from properly located, designed, and built Executive Golf Courses have consistently substantiated or surpassed expected revenues estimates. But it must again be stressed that proper planning is the key to success and your best source is a golf architect experienced in doing profitable Executive golf courses.

The world is ever evolving and so are some things in golf. The dirty words in golf may never change, but "Executive Golf Course" should not be among them.