

GOLF COURSE DESIGN CHANGE

Golf Course Designer Joseph Finger predicts that unless something is done soon to bring down the cost of golf course construction, "Golf will revert to the rich man's game it was 75 years ago."

Finger, speaking at the Southwest Turfgrass Association and New Mexico State University, told participants that the golf course with "wall to wall greens" is too expensive to build and maintain and uses up precious natural resources. Golf course designing, he said is one third golf, one third engineering and one third agronomy. Architect Finger, who was a championship golfer in college, owns a small turfgrass farm near Houston.

Armed with the credentials which by his own definition make him a complete golf course designer, Finger travels around the country designing golf courses and talking about problems facing golf course construction. Land costs are high and good land is becoming harder to find near urban areas, he told the audience of agronomists and golf course managers.

Construction and labor costs are escalating right along with interest rates and taxes. "High Taxes", he said are shrinking disposable incomes which finance luxuries such as golf.

Golf course designers also must consider demands made on scarce resources. The acute shortage of water in the west is forcing some golf courses to go to a water allocation system. Water allocation is moving eastward as population pressures increase demands on the water supply. The remedy for these problems is to make the golf course of the future, the golf course of the past. He explained that before Americans created wall to wall greens, golf courses traditionally had been a combination of natural terrain fairways and manicured greens. The natural rough, he believes, adds character to a course using low growing natural grasses in combination with intensively maintained greens, tee's and fairway landings also could save on water use and pumping cost. For example, water use of an average size course could be cut from 220,000 gallons a day to 87,000 gallons a day using natural terrain.

Low maintenance natural terrain requires less herbicides, fungicides and insecticides. There are other ways to lower construction and operating costs without lowering the quality of the course. Designers, he said, should be choosy about site selection, keeping in mind the high cost of excavation. A good designer could cut down on the acreage needed for a course without sacrificing the quality of play. Green sizes could be cut down as well.

"Sand traps are status symbols" Finger said and proposed that 90% of them could be eliminated at a \$30,000 to \$75,000 savings in construction cost. In their place could go grass traps and mounds which would be more challenging to the golfer.

Finger has built championship courses throughout the United States and Mexico. How about that.

There are those who know the price of everything and the value of nothing



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