

Rosty and the Golf - Environment Relationship

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Perspective

Over the last two years I have enjoyed reading the variety of viewpoints expressed each month in the **Bull Sheet**. I have written many articles for the **Bull Sheet** in my head, yet, not one has made it out of head, through my hands and onto paper. Mindful of my desire to contribute to the **Bull Sheet**, I was driving on one of my many extension trips through Wisconsin. I had just read the now infamous *Wall Street Journal* (WSJ) article with miles to think about a response. As I wondered about the weaknesses in the WSJ opinion, I was listening to Dan Rostenkowski (AKA Rosty) proclaim his innocence with respect to numerous claims of impropriety. In a moment, I was overcome with a sense of symmetry between Rosty and the environmental concerns with golf course management.

Obvious Connections

The most obvious connection is Rosty's region of political activity — Chicago, home to hundreds of some of the finest golf courses in the world. Also, regardless of your opinion of his politics, one must admire his persistence and commitment to performing the same job for the last 20 or so years. Rosty loomed as a figure larger than life with political clout and afforded privileges not even extended to the executive branch. I liken this to the power that is the Medinah championship course, Butler National or Olympia Fields — persistent, able to meet the most able challengers. And yet, Rosty seemed like a good ole' boy, down to earth and able to enjoy a good cigar. This could be likened to the bounty of daily fee and well kept private courses throughout the region that offer a simple and solid challenge to the average golfer.

Looking Closely

My thesis involves the politicians who have gone after Rosty. I have a very hard time accepting the fact that Rosty was the only politician who behaved in this manner. How many of his accusers have conducted themselves in a manner that is beyond reproach? I think about those politicians and draw a similarity to people who slam golf course management for lack of environmental responsibility. I wonder if the environmental movement was scrutinized as closely as golf course management, how it would fare. I have heard many claims of outrageous behavior by activity groups performed under the guise of recruiting members, making headlines and generating financial support. It seems much easier to criticize than it is to work for real change that brings long term solutions to our environmental challenges. Therefore, the moral of the story to this point is that our perspectives are shaped by how close we look.

I often have these conversations with my friends who are concerned about the environment and exposure to pesticides. As many of you know, I speak of these issues in terms of risk. If the actual risk to the environment and people from golf course management were measured and compared with acts performed by people as a part of daily life such as eating improperly handled meat, buying heavily packaged (non-recyclable) grocery items, riding a bicycle without a helmet, then the risks from

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(Rosty continued)

golf courses do not seem unreasonable. Still, activists argue the non-essentiality of the golf course, attempting to play up the exclusivity of the sport. Just as Rosty is attacked for being a old-time "backroom" kind of politician who is held up like a dinosaur. However, when we look closely, we know there was more to Rosty than the inappropriate behavior we have heard, just as we know today that the majority of golfers are daily fee, resort type golfers.

Looking In

Looking closely works both ways. How many golf courses are managed as environmentally responsible as possible. We always respond to claims, like the WSJ article, by lauding the environmentalism of our industry. Yet, we still have superintendents spraying on calendars, no pesticide containment facility, non-calibrated equipment and some people who think there is no need to be concerned about these issues. Just as Rosty has to realize the rules have changed and what may have been considered acceptable is no longer practiced. It is more than the actual measure of risk, we have learned from our experience that it is the appearance of risk. Similar to how politicians discuss the appearance of impropriety, I think it was Sen. D'Amato from NY who raised the term ethical behavior (as a native New Yorker, I am very familiar with the lack of ethical behavior from the undistinguished Sen. D'Amata).

It has been interesting watching Rosty proclaim his innocence in the face of what appears to be serious charges. But, what if he has explanations that make sense for his actions? If you saw the CBS *Eye on America* story that used data from "Toxic Fairways" (a publication almost 5 years old) to warn the public about the risks of pesticides used on golf courses, as a lay person, wouldn't you wonder? Not to mention Paul Harvey and the rest of the story. When we attempt to explain and clarify our position, do we sound as defensive as Rosty does? Should we be? Why don't we let the golfers answer these questions? How come the golf course management industry is left to defend all of golf? Why doesn't another politician stand up next to Rosty and say I've performed some questionable acts, but, now I am aware of this behavior, I no longer act inappropriately and I'm willing to accept reasonable consequences? Wouldn't that be the most human thing to do? Don't you or I apologize when we make a mistake, **accept the consequences** and vow to change for the better? Seems simple doesn't it, yet, sometimes the simple things are not so easy to do. The final moral to the story is that our judgment is easily impaired by how closely we are **willing** to look.

The High Ground

I know the industry is being attacked by many individuals who would not even consider looking at their own behavior. I know that as a matter of risk assessment and environmental benefits, golf courses are an exceptional asset to our society. I know that our industry is mostly committed to preserving and protecting environmental quality, beyond just lip service (e.g. Tony Rzdzki and the Audubon Program). And finally, I know that unless we tell our side of the story, we could become regulated to the point that actually increases the chance of environmental risk by limiting our decision-making and flexibility.

At the GCSAA meeting in New Orleans, John Stossel said that ultimately the public will decide how the golf-environment relationship plays out. The doom-sayers and advocates will drown each other out and the pendulum will come to rest

somewhere in the middle. I urge you to avoid vehemently defensive positions. Communicate effectively in your everyday dealings with people and the press. Supply factual information, share personal experiences (people need to know we care about the same things they do) and avoid over-emphasizing the benefits of turf. My feeling is that we must take the high ground and avoid over reaction in response to the ridiculous claims of people like Paul Harvey & GAG'M (the Global Anti-Golf Movement) from the WSJ article. If Rosty took the high ground, he might not be in the mess he's in.

Leaves, Limbs, Needles & Boughs



by Fred Opperman

My selection this month is a tree that is not hardy in the Chicagoland area overall. The tree is found just across the lake in Michigan and south 50 to 100 miles. It is one of my favorite trees for its excellent fall color and having three distinct leaf shapes.

This tree was America's first wonder drug. In 1622, the Virginia Company of England, the financial backer of America's first permanent settlement at Jamestown, required the colony to send 30 tons of sassafras root to England each year. It was believed to cure most any ailment and when used as a tea or tonic it became the favorite drink of England. Any settler who did not produce at least 100 pounds of sassafras root for export was fined by the company.

Sassafras albidum or Common Sassafras is usually a small to moderate size tree from 30 to 60 feet in height and with a spread of 25 to 45 feet.

Leaf: Alternate simple, blades of three different shapes, some are 3 lobed, some 2 lobed, and some have no lobes, Leaf color is bright to medium green in the summer, changing to shades of yellow, orange, scarlet and purple in the fall. One of the most colorful of any tree in the autumn.



Bark: Greenish-gray when young, becoming deeply furrowed and dark reddish-brown as it ages.

Buds: Ovoid, scarcely pointed at the tip, greenish, up to one fourth inch long.

Twigs: Slender, green, smooth, leaf scars alternate, small half round, usually with three bundle tracers. The bark of the twigs can be chewed for a refreshing taste. The roots are used to make sassafras tea.

Habitat: Roadsides, old fields and woods. Excellent for naturalizing in plantings and groups.