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Editorial Office
Golf Course News
PO Box 997
38 Lafayette Street
Yarmouth, ME 04096
(207) 846-0600

Advertising Office
National Sales:
Charles E. von Brecht

Marketplace Sales:
Simone M. Lewis

Golf Course News
7901 Fourth St. North
Suite 311
St. Petersburg, FL 33702
(813) 576-7077

West Coast Sales
Wayne Roche
James G. Elliott Co.
714 W. Olympic Blvd.
Suite 1120
Los Angeles, CA 90015
(213) 746-8800

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Wide range of public courses needed

During the past month, I've had the opportunity to play two levels of public golf in my home state of Florida. I say two levels because these courses, although both public, are on nearly opposite ends of the public golf spectrum.

Buffalo Creek is a municipal course operated by Manatee County. It's out in the sticks, where rattlesnakes and armadillos still thrive, and gators sun their backsides in the shallows and on the banks of water hazards. It's a wide open links-style course with plenty of water, plenty of length and in decent condition (the greens were in great condition). The cost to play this fine course is approximately \$25 with cart (per person). Buffalo Creek has a comfortable pro shop and coffee shop, and was fun to

play.

On the other end of the spectrum is Emerald Dunes, located a half mile from the Florida Turnpike in the middle of Palm Beach County. Designed by Tom Fazio and opened a year or so ago by Ray Finch to be an upscale public facility, it is truly a spectacular golf facility.

As you arrive, the attendants at the bag drop are cordial, and direct you to parking and the pro shop. The locker room facilities equal many private facilities and the locker room attendant was terrific. The



Charles von Brecht
publisher

course is a tough but fair test of golf in excellent condition. For a day, Emerald Dunes makes you feel you're a member of a private club. For \$94 (including cart and tax) you can enjoy a round at this great facility. I might add that Palm Beach County residents pay less, and out-of-season rates are lower.

The point is, here are two extremes. I enjoyed each equally for different reasons. Although the majority of us can not afford the upscale fees of the new breed of public facility, I believe there is a market for these courses. The TPC courses have been very successful in promoting public participation of their facilities around the country for a high greens fee.

The major point I'm making is the continued need for public golf

— whether it be the Emerald Dunes/TPC concept, municipal facilities like Buffalo Creek, or nine-hole executive courses. We need more public facilities of all types.

In case you missed the National Golf Foundation's reply to the *Forbes* article, "Extrapolation Madness," you should get a copy through the NGF. Joe Beditz responded with expertise and specific numbers that will dispel any concern the *Forbes* story may have raised.

There is no question the golf industry has taken some hits in this recession, but I'm convinced it will come back strong, and perhaps sooner than many other leisure industries.

You can reach the National Golf Foundation by calling 407-744-6006.

COMMENTARY

The tongue: Quieting or creating the storm

The tongue.

The more we talk with superintendents, their mechanics and crew members, club professionals and others in the industry, the more we hear about the importance of that little organ.

The quality of communication between people in the golf course industry is the most critical factor in their jobs, they say. Superintendent Ken Flisek's guest commentary in April focused on communication between the super and the pro. Mechanical technician Dave Franz's commentary below zeroes in on the super-mechanic relationship. And a poll of USGA agronomists (see page 1 story) showed they felt communication was the No. One problem in the world of golf course maintenance.

You might think the worst problem would concern agronomics. Or pesticides. Or mechanics. Or just about anything... But communication?

Communication has to do with speaking and listening—the latter being a major problem with too many of us. We should practice listening, make an art of it. All too often, though, we are just anxious for others to finish speaking so we can say what's on our own mind; and thus we never hear what they're saying.



Mark Leslie
managing editor

Eighteenth-century English essayist Sydney Smith once said of a man: "He has occasional flashes of silence that make his conversation perfectly delightful."

And British author Samuel Johnson said: "That is the happiest conversation where there is no competition, no vanity, but a calm quiet interchange of sentiments."

But the tongue is the center of the most illustrative comment I can recall to improve communication.

St. James wrote: "It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison... It is a fire, a world of iniquity ... so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell." (James 3: 6,8)

The tongue is the smallest, yet by far the strongest, muscle in the

body.

With it, we can destroy another person just as surely and powerfully as we can by physical violence. We can set a forest ablaze if we let it go unmuzzled. We can destroy friendships. We can wreck reputations. We can do immeasurable harm to people we do not even know.

Yet, we can do a world of good with it as well—if we bridle it. By keeping it under control, thinking before we speak, we can maintain lines of communication—even in the midst of disagreements—and work cooperatively with employers and employees. Just as unpleasant words do evil, pleasant words are a powerful source for good, improving the entire atmosphere of a workplace.

Let's exercise that muscle for the good of one another, not for harm.

GUEST COMMENTARY

Mechanics deserve more respect

By David Franz

Have you ever wondered what the golf club member thinks when he sees a meticulously manicured course? Does he think the superintendent is the best professional around? Or does he think the turf equipment technicians have their act together?

I think the superintendent probably receives the accolades, while the equipment technicians are left wondering if they are doing the job this member expects of them for his "enormous" greens fees.

I feel it is high time turf equipment technicians of this industry stand up and take a bow for the tremendous task of maintaining today's complex and vast variety of equipment.

Turf equipment is a lot more precise and complicated than 15 to 25 years ago.

Years ago, superintendents realized they weren't qualified to re-

pair the new equipment. So they found "mechanics" to do the job. At that time, anyone who was mechanically inclined could be a golf course mechanic.

But, like the industry itself, times have changed. The turf mechanic of 1965 would have a tough time keeping up with the turf technicians of 1990.

The evolution of more complex equipment and technology to meet the changing desires of golfers has increased the demand for skilled technicians.

Technicians have to constantly update their knowledge of troubleshooting and repairing equipment through schooling or practical experience.



David Franz

A major industry change has come from low cuts on turf. Greens are mowed at one-eighth inch, tees are mowed at one-fourth to three-eighths, and fairways are mowed at seven-sixteenths to one-half inch.

This makes for fine putting, but also for headaches for the technician.

When I started in this business 10 years ago, golfers wanted fast greens, and greens that looked good to boot.

So one-fourth inch was acceptable. Not any more. Not for the members, and they are the ones we have to impress, since they ultimately pay our salaries.

COST CRUNCH

As golfers want better conditions and faster greens, we as technicians have to step up our maintenance routine to keep the equipment in perfect condition.

The intensified mowing routine,

along with all the other aspects of equipment repair and maintenance, causes scheduling problems. Equipment is in the shop for repair or maintenance when it should be out on the course mowing, vacuuming, etc.

Thus the need for overtime on a budget that might not allow for overtime.

With the budget not increasing as fast as technology and the price of equipment, pay scales did not rise enough to attract skilled persons. So equipment got (and still does get) abused.

If it weren't for the technicians, the equipment wouldn't stay in working condition, the course would start to suffer, and the superintendent would start to look bad.

Technicians deserve credit for doing the job they do—not only keeping the equipment running,

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