

# Reflecting back and looking forward for GCN

By Charles von Brecht

As I write this column on a flight, heading home to St. Petersburg, Fla., after barely escaping an all-night snowstorm in Maine, I reflect on the last few years of *Golf Course News*.



Charles von Brecht

Less than three years ago, it was a non-entity. We launched with a premiere issue at the '89 GCSAA show in Anaheim, Calif. I will remember that particular event forever with both fondness and

sadness.

Sadly, I buried my father just a day or two before we headed west and, quite frankly, I'm sorry that he is not here to share with me the success that *Golf Course News* has enjoyed. My fond memories of the show were the consistent positive comments from prospective readers and advertisers on the need for a publication like ours. That positive reaction has come to fruition as we end the year and begin a new one with this issue.

What's in store for 1992? You will see some consistent, though subtle, changes. Our commitment to the industry is stronger than ever, and our goal is to be the Number One publica-

tion in the industry. We're not far from that goal. Our average qualified circulation already has surpassed *Golf Course Management*, and we're growing significantly in ad pages as they decline.

We will introduce new editorial features in an ongoing effort to bring to our readers all the important news of the industry. We most likely will expand our staff to enhance our editorial quality and credibility. And we will add at least one more industry-related conference to our schedule in the coming year.

Many industries are suffering during this recession, and golf is not immune. But courses still are being

planned and opened coast to coast. The National Golf Foundation and our editors say 250-300 new courses will open in 1992. Added to that are many major renovations. It all adds up to increased business for suppliers and employment opportunities. Several of our advertisers tell me 1991 was their best year ever and they are planning for another good year in 1992.

A lot can happen in a year — and a year from now I will look back on this report and see just how we're doing at that time. I look forward to another positive update.

Have a happy and prosperous New Year!

COMMENT

## Some tids and bits from a great year — 1991

By Mark Leslie

Some odds and ends, favorites and not-so-favorites picked up from the wonderful year of 1991.

Some of my favorite tidbits come from the fall hurricane season. Here are a few:

*How do they get those ships in the bottles?*

My favorite story from Hurricane



Mark Leslie

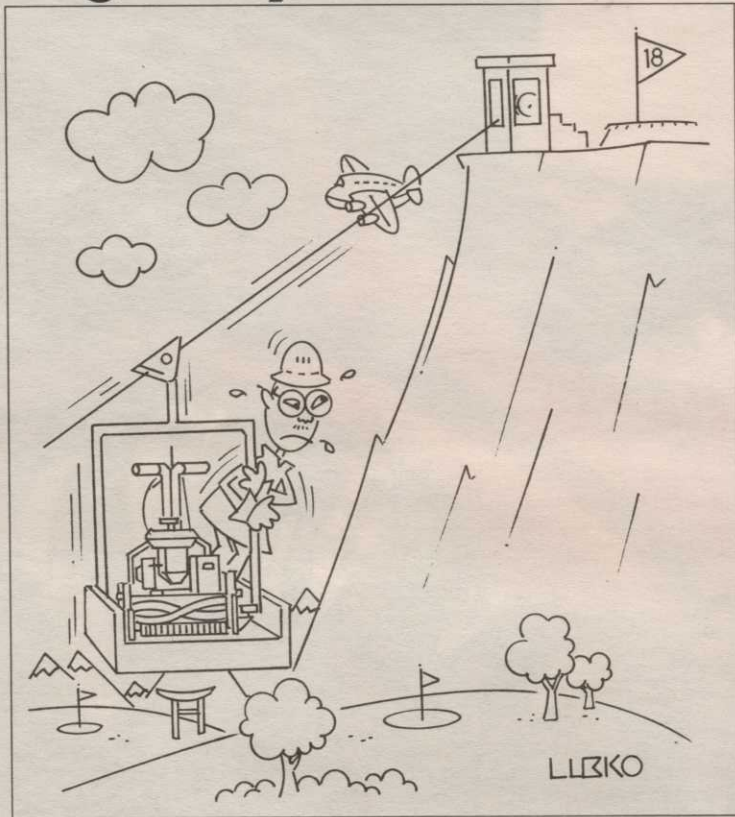
Grace, which tore into the Atlantic Coast last fall, came from Cape Cod, Massachusetts. The story goes like this: Driven by 78-mph winds, ferocious waves crashed ashore and drove a house partially off its foundation. Another wave deposited a boat in the basement, and yet another moved the house back close to its original position on the foundation. When the owner arrived and walked down the cellar steps, what to his wondering eyes should

appear? A boat sitting in deep water in his basement!

*A storm, a cleanup, an auction:* "I've got a propane tank here. Do I hear two? Yes, two, over here. Can anyone raise that? A refrigerator? Yes, a refrigerator over here. Can anyone top a refrigerator? A Catamaran from that man in the red shirt. That's our bid, a Catamaran. Do I hear... A house!?!?" Hurricane Grace left a lot of memories on the East Coast. But most memorable to some golf course superintendents were the things left on their courses by the flooding ocean waters.

*The Mr. Community Service Award:* Step on up and get your plaque, Rich Caughey. The superintendent at Watherly Country Club in North Scituate, Mass., Caughey put his six-man crew to work clearing three feet of sand off the North Scituate and Minot roads so people could return to their homes following Hurricane Grace.

Best quote in the wake (sorry for Continued on page 33



GUEST COMMENTARY

## Golf's 'Megafactors' in the 1990s spelled out

By Steven H. Lesnik

Golf in the 1980s was like John Daly's swing: big, successful and something the game had rarely seen before. It was the "grip it and rip it" decade of easy money. If a project saw any early promise, financing wasn't far behind.



Steven Lesnik

While today's financial conditions are much different, they aren't the only thing affecting golf management. The industry is more complex, more demanding, yet for those who succeed, more rewarding.

If the 1980s was the decade of golf speculation, the 1990s will be the era of the double-edged sword in golf.

The pros and cons of golf as big business will become more apparent than ever in the 1990s as real-

ism replaces euphoria, and economic conditions separate true golf operators from golf speculators. It will be an era that requires sound management.

The need for more stringent business practices and philosophies is caused by a variety of factors that will affect everyone in the business.

These factors are so pervasive I call them "Megafactors." I don't think anyone is likely to escape their impact.

How each of us responds to these Megafactors will ultimately determine our success. Of course, some issues will affect each of us differently. Circumstances may cause one or more of the Megafactors to work in one's favor in one part of the country while they might be to one's disadvantage in another region.

Overall, though, I believe the Megafactors will be a net plus. From potentially most harmful to potentially most helpful, the Megafactors I see are:

- *Scarcity of capital:* Golf devel-

opment is a capital-intensive business. To flourish, it requires patient capital — a plentiful resource a few years ago, but scarce in today's domestic credit market, especially at S&Ls that historically have been the financial backbone of real-estate financing.

Despite less-than-rosy economic circumstances — tight domestic commercial credit, similar financial restrictions in Europe, government policy-makers preparing the economy for an election year, and wary Japanese investors who hang in the balance — it's my view that economically sound projects will nevertheless continue to attract discerning investors.

- *Environment:* Environmental hurdles are rising higher and higher. Golf course development is a visible enterprise that uses large tracts of virgin land near affluent population centers. It, therefore, attracts interest groups who, like responsible members of the golf industry, are committed to pre-

serving wetlands, wooded conservancies, natural sanctuaries, wildlife habitats and waterways.

As more open space is devoured through urban sprawl, environmental pressures will continue to mount on golf developers.

- *Competition:* The National Golf Foundation says America needs many more golf courses. That's surely true, on a national basis. On a micro basis, however, there is such a condition as too much of a good thing. Parts of the country have become sated, where competition is fierce and another golf course is not a "no-brainer" recipe for success.

Chicago, a golf market that has grown substantially in recent years, is one example. Competition in Chicago's upscale daily-fee market was virtually non-existent a decade ago. Today, that niche boasts a number of fine facilities and is highly competitive.

- *Need for land:* A first-class fa-

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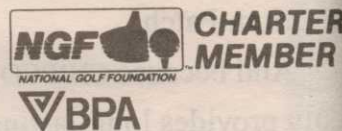
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## In defense of Cape Cod study

To the Editor:

The New York Attorney General's office attacked Long Island golf courses this summer in a report that contained some interesting facts and survey results, much conjecture, and much sensationalist anti-pesticide, anti-golf course verbiage (GCN, Sept. '91 pp. 1, 17, 19).

When Dr. Michael Surgan, a coauthor of the AG's report, criticized the Cape Cod study, I responded with a professionally written, scientific point-by-point defense (GCN, Oct. '91, p. 13). (I was the director of the study, and published the results in February 1990 in two publications.)

Surgan then attacked my defense and some statements made by GCSAA President Stephen Cadenelli (GCN, Dec. '91, p. 11).

Before I soundly rebut Surgan's attack once and for all, I would like to make some general comments.

First, this type of politicized polarization of the golf course issue, which the AG's office began last summer, is becoming passe among many of the elected and career officials with whom I deal around the country.

Increasingly, I find them willing to listen to science. This science takes the form of the state-of-the-art risk assessments and monitoring efforts, coupled with detailed integrated golf course management plans (IGCMPs). The IGCMPs use proven techniques of integrated pest management, fertilization, construction, etc. to maximize the health of turf and minimize the need for pesticides.

It is a developing government/golf industry/citizen partnership that is leaving behind organizations that issue anti-golf course reports

with a questionable basis.

Second, people who really care about the environment should be careful about issuing reports such as "Toxic Fairways" (the AG's report), because others may ignore whatever good recommendations and information the report contains. The AG's report actually contains some good recommendations and useful information, but the average person knowledgeable in this area would probably not take this report seriously since it is mostly just a diatribe. Also, irresponsible attacks such as this can sometimes cause the pendulum to swing in the other direction, away from the environmental cause.

Dr. Surgan's second set of remarks to the press can be rebutted as follows.

*The depths of the monitoring wells were appropriate for detecting shallow contamination.* This was thoroughly explained in my GCN letter (Dec. '91, p. 11), and supported by references to two peer-reviewed publications, one of which presented the results of the Cape Cod study, the other discussed results from Long Island (the subject of "Toxic Fairways"). Surgan skipped right over the science—the peer reviewed literature—and cited a report on our study that was written by people whom I never met and who never participated in the study.

Had he looked in the appendix of that Cape Cod report, he would have noticed that no justification was provided for the statement "... in one case the top of the screen was 11 feet below the water table." This statement is wrong. One need only to look at Table 1 of our Cape Cod

paper published in the peer-reviewed literature (*Ground Water Monitoring Review*, vol. 10 (1), pp. 160-173) to see that the greatest screen-top depth had to be shallower than 9.5 ft, depending on the thickness of the bottom plug and/or well foot. Even the Cape Cod Commission report Surgan cites states "... the tops of the screens mostly range from 2 feet below to 2 feet above the water table."

*The response to Cadenelli's remarks that discuss pesticide use rates was misleading.* While it appears the Surgan's December statement regarding use rates may be true ("... Long Island courses reported annual application rates up to 22 pounds of active ingredient per acre"), Table 1 in the "Toxic Fairways" report, which he coauthored, also contained other relevant information.

For example, it is interesting to note that the average use rate is 7.7 lb/acre. Also, approximately 22 of the 52 golf courses reported in the GA's reports has pesticide use rates within the Cape Cod range quoted by Surgan in his December letter (2.7-4.4 lb/A).

Although I agree that it can be difficult to extrapolate results from one study site to another, one must be careful about making sensationalist remarks regarding pesticide use rates, especially when one represents a government agency.

*Placement of the wells was in or immediately adjacent to managed turf areas.* Wells were placed to maximize the chances of detecting turf chemicals, within the constraints of practical considerations and the need to obtain results from different management areas—tees, greens, fairways, and background.

Although we can't all be geniuses and place the monitoring wells 1800 downgradient of potential contaminant sources all the time, we can try. And in this case we were mostly successful.

Even in those areas where we may have been cross gradient, the influence zones of these wells generally would have been able to capture turf chemical leachate anyway. (Remember that ground water seeps slowly rather than flows quickly, unlike a turbulent stream, and therefore is more susceptible to well capture. Also, note that the wells were installed on the golf courses, not off site.)

The proof is in the results. The detection pattern followed our initial design hypothesis that was tied to turf management strategies—more detections and more different chemicals were found in tee and green wells than in fairway and background wells.

Dr. Surgan's letter was professionally written until the last paragraph. I have have disagreed with some of his points, and he may have been hamstrung by the AG's report, but it could have been one of these issues where professional people just agree to disagree, and walk away without enmity.

Unfortunately, Surgan decided to get personal in the last paragraph. In 11 years as an official with the U. S. Environmental Protection Agency, I never wrote such an arrogant potshot. While I don't pretend to be wise enough to offer career counseling for Dr. Surgan as he has done for me, I would counsel his supervisors to review his correspondence in the future.

However, this can be taken with a grain of salt. For I am still naive enough

to believe that good science will win out over bad politics in the long run, although there may be momentary setbacks along the way.

Sincerely,  
Stuart Z. Cohen, Ph.D.  
Environmental & Turf Services,  
Inc.

## Apathy, excuses are the culprits

To the Editor:

Your trade newspaper does a good job of keeping people up to date on golf course issues, but please spare us your personal views on abortion and prayer in schools. They have no place in this paper. Apathy and excuses instead are leading the country into a reduction in personal rights.

Secondly, don't accuse the research community of apathy and lack of interest. Obviously you are unaware of the demands placed on us. As a student in turfgrass management, I see budget cuts continually reducing research funds and increasing work loads. A researcher is very willing to present the facts "armed with research documentation to help quell the storm." However, the same storm quells up repeatedly with the same arguments, as if the research wasn't presented at all.

Education of the public must be done by everyone in the industry, and not just as a potential marketing angle, but to deal with the real environmental issues we face.

Sincerely,  
Paul G. Johnson  
St. Paul, Minn.

Please mail letters to: *Golf Course News*, P.O. Box 997, Yarmouth, ME 04096.

# 'Megafactors' will drive golf industry through the decade

Continued from page 14

cility requires a minimum of around 150 acres. In urban settings, however, that much land is unavailable, unsuitable or too expensive to develop. Land is becoming scarce in the suburbs ringing our urban centers.

As a result, golf courses are springing up in ever-widening circles outside population centers. The question at hand is, How far out can one afford to go? And how far behind will the players be?

- *Imagery:* Consumers are heavily influenced by imagery and marketing. For almost 50 years the golf industry has been a marketing case study — without even trying. Each of the most recent several decades had signature influences. Ike in the 1950s. Arnie and his army in the '60s. Jack's dominance in the '70s and early '80s. And the Tour and Senior Tour in the late '80s.

It's probably too soon to forecast who or what trend will dominate the '90s. But it's worth noting that while sports TV ratings, including golf, are trending down, sponsorship interest in golf remains strong. Of the five sponsors who didn't extend their relationship with pro events, four have already been re-

placed. And more and more special events fill the airwaves and links.

- *Foreign investment:* A sluggish U.S. economy and the aftereffects of the Persian Gulf War have slowed the pace of foreign investment here. But the allure and prestige of owning a real piece of America, still regarded worldwide as perhaps the safest place for parking cash, will continue to be a powerful motivator to foreign money.

- *The economy:* The economy will eventually pull itself out of the current recession. When that happens, the undisciplined cash of the 1980s undoubtedly will no longer be readily available.

However, even a modestly growing economy should assure a reasonable amount of capital for golf, housing, investment and other capital-dependent ventures.

Overall, it's my view that the economy will help the golf industry more than hurt in the '90s.

- *Leisure time:* Leisure time studies often draw conflicting conclusions. Some, such as one conducted by the University of Maryland and by Michigan's Survey Research Center, say Americans enjoy 39 hours of leisure time weekly. Another, by the National

Research Center of the Arts, found that "Americans report a median 16.6 hours of leisure time each week."

The truth probably lies somewhere in between.

The trend toward longer workday work hours and more overtime has produced a greater emphasis on week-end leisure activities and is likely to result in affluent consumers spending more leisure time and dollars on weekend golf in the '90s. But watch out for those weekday afternoons!

- *Quality:* The indiscriminate excesses of the 1980s are passe. Consumers today demand more value and quality from the things they buy and do.

The quest for basic quality will apply to golf, too. Building quality into both new and existing golf facilities will be more likely to attract players, members, buyers and investors in the '90s than ever.

- *Demographics:* The average age of all golfers, according to the NGF, is 37-1/2 years, which puts more golfers in the middle of the 1990s' most influential group: baby boomer Americans born between 1946 and 1964, who already represent 25 percent of the population and by the

year 2000 will control 40 percent of its purchasing power.

As this enormously powerful generation matures, raises its income and has more time to play golf, the game's growth will accelerate and gather momentum into the next century.

After all, the oldest baby boomers will only be 54 in the year 2000. And when they turn 36 in 2000, the youngest boomers will be entering the "sweet spot" of golf marketing.

- *Management:* Love of the game used to be all a golf manager needed in the 1980s. Easy money distorted the value and need for effective management.

In the 1990s, it's going to take more than luck, love (of the game) and liquidity. Golf is big business that requires rigorous financial and operational management.

Furthermore, golf consumers are more sophisticated than ever, which means the margins for error in serving patrons grows smaller and smaller.

- *The game:* Strip away the spreadsheets, P/L statements and pro formas, and what remains is the game itself, our most important element and advocate. There is something compelling about golf's

enduring simplicity, drama and aestheticism. No other game I know of challenges man to overcome himself and nature in quite the same way as golf.

Since its creation by the Scots (or was it the Chinese?) hundreds of years ago, golf has evolved to become a game that reveals human frailties and strengths: character, perseverance, spirit, anguish, frustration, joy and satisfaction, to name a few.

"What other people may find in poetry or art museums," Arnold Palmer once remarked, "I find in the flight of a good drive — the white ball sailing up into the blue sky, growing smaller and smaller, then suddenly reaching its apex, curving, falling and finally dropping to the turf to roll some more, just the way I planned it."

It is, after all, why we're in this business.

Steve Lesnik is president and chief executive officer of Kemper Sports Management in Northbrook, Ill. Kemper Sports develops and manages golf facilities nationwide, including 1989 PGA Championship site Kemper Lakes. He serves on the Illinois PGA Advisory Committee.