

# European development lacks long-term focus

By RON FREAM

Golf development in Europe is not a growth industry today. The present economic slowdown (recession, or worse) throughout Europe has only added to the problems of many golf course operators. The boom years of the mid- to late 1980s saw an explosion in golf development from the United Kingdom to southern Portugal to middle Finland. As with other opportunistic endeavors of that period, many golf courses were built with little foresight or concern for the long-range economics of the project.

The explosive growth of the '80s encouraged golf developers who lacked the necessary combination of experience, vision and an understanding of the demands and requirements to see a project through from conception to operation. All too often, these were but neophyte developers lacking both the personal knowledge and access to others with prior experience to properly grasp the financial situation. Lack of players,

*Golf course architect Ron Fream is president of Golfplan — Ron Fream Design Group, Ltd. He recently completed Kerigolf in Kerimaa-Savonlinna, Finland. He is currently working on a project with EuroDisney.*



Ron Fream

declining levels of greens fees, slack membership sales, bankruptcies and empty clubhouses are the all-too-frequent results.

While new golf development is generally on hold in Europe today, the sport is still a popular one which is attracting more players than it is losing each year. In light of this, the overall demand for golf facilities will resume or continue to grow at a rate of perhaps 3 to 5 percent a year — definitely less than before, but growth which must be accommodated nonetheless.

One significant fact which has emerged from the trauma of recent and ongoing European economic realignment is the need for future developers of golf projects to more clearly and precisely define both their market and its long-term financial capacity. Examples of poorly designed, cheaply built, miserably maintained golf courses which are little more than cow pastures are common. Lavish, prestige- or ego-driven "name" or signature projects are suffering now too, on occasion, due to enormously high levels of expenditure not necessarily spent wisely or efficiently.

It is easy to spend too little on golf construction. It is perhaps even easier to spend too much on golf construction.

Unfortunately, many would-be developers of golf courses in Europe and Scandinavia are first-time players in what really is a complex, no-holds-barred business. Naive developers, opportunistic would-be golf architects, contractors of questionable knowledge and ability, and greenskeepers of modest capabilities have frequently attempted projects themselves or served as "consultants" on projects where the developer, promoter or money-man perhaps knew more than his "consultants". At worst, the financial side was no more experienced than the neophyte consultants.

Financial feasibility studies, market analysis and market targeting can help to guide the planning and design of a project. It is simple economic analysis which points out that a creatively-designed golf facility which cost the equivalent of 4 or 5 million US dollars to build, and plays to full capacity of approximately 150 or 200 rounds per day will generate more profits than a signature or "name" course costing 2 to 3 times more which can only realize half the play with significantly higher greens fees.

It is becoming obvious, almost worldwide, that making the numbers add up favorably in the long-term may not be a sure thing when big name, big budget,

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Review

## Not much balance in Gore's environmental treatise

By DR. ELIOT C. ROBERTS

Public concern for the state of our environment is real. Golfers, course superintendents, and neighbors must know that practices followed in managing resources are environmentally sound and in the best public interest. This can be difficult when so much gloom and doom is associated with land, air and water quality.

Sen. Al Gore's book, "Earth in the Balance: Ecology and the Human Spirit," is must reading to understand more about the serious environmental issues confronting humankind. But please temper it by reading "Out of the Earth: Civilization and the Life of the Soil" by Daniel I. Hillel, professor of Soil Physics at the University of Massachusetts, published in 1991 by The Free Press. Hillel's book is parallel but he writes as a scientist and doesn't get

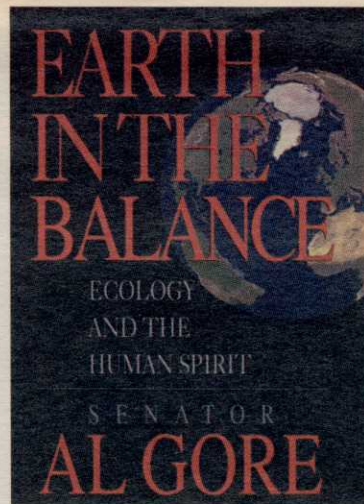
*Dr. Eliot Roberts, the former Lawn Institute executive director, is a former department chairman at the universities of Florida (ornamental horticulture) and Rhode Island (soil science).*

involved in the politics.

The strongest part of Gore's book has nothing to do with ecology but with the human spirit and how lost we are in terms of caring for the land around us, as God would have us.

Beware of one thing: There's no question that landfills, solid waste, and pollution of streams and rivers. It's a lot easier to talk about those kinds of pollution and be accurate with scientific detail. But Gore mixes this with changes in the atmosphere; and, despite what he says, no one has near conclusive evidence in that area.

When expedient, he downplays opponents of his views in the scientific community. He suggests only 2 percent disagree with his claim of the dangers of global warming. Indeed, among the agricultural scientists, few agree with



him. Because of Gore's emphasis on ecology and the human spirit we need to review some of his thinking.

Gore states, "The ecological perspective begins with a view of the whole, an understanding of how the various parts of nature interact in patterns that tend toward balance and persist over time."

He adds, "Ecology is the study of balance, and some of the same principles that govern the healthy balance of

elements in the global environment also apply to forces making up our political system."

But the fact is that ecological principles have nothing to do with balances. Life forms flourish or perish in response to environmental fluctuations as they adjust or fail to adjust to never-ending change. It's only when humankind places value on one life form over another that the element of balance comes into play.

Politically, we tend to place supreme importance on perpetuating our standard of living and quality of life at all cost.

Gore defines politics broadly as "the means by which we make collective decisions and choices."

In another sense, politics is the art and science of the possible. When you or I believe a certain course of action is possible and we desire to see change, we become political in our effort to make something happen. Politics has nothing to do with right or wrong, fact or fiction, good

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## X.G. Hassenplug, 84

PITTSBURGH — X.G. "Xen" Hassenplug, 84, a golf course architect who practiced primarily in the Northeast, died Sept. 24, from cancer.

A fellow of the American Society of Golf Course Architects, Hassenplug designed Overbrook Golf Club in Radnor, Pa.; Seven Springs in Champion, Pa.; Lone Pine Golf Club in Washington, Pa.; Seven Oaks Country Club in Beaver, Pa.; and Coonskin Park in Charleston, W. Va.

A civil engineer, Hassenplug began his golf career on the construction side in 1946. When architect I.B. McGovern died during construction of Overbrook Country Club, he finished the



X.G. Hassenplug

project. He then went on to work with architect Dick Wilson on two high-profile projects in Pennsylvania — Radnor Valley near Philadelphia and Westmoreland Country Club near Pittsburgh.

Upon completion of these projects, Hassenplug entered private practice, combining golf course design with his knowledge of land planning, irrigation and civil engineering. He designed 30 courses and remodeled another 17 — mostly in Pennsylvania and Ohio.

He is survived by his wife, Grace; son, John; two grandchildren; and his sister, Betty Ink.

Memorial donations should be sent to Fox Chapel Presbyterian Church, 385 Fox Chapel Road, Pittsburgh, Pa. 15238.

## Clifford L. Demming, 84

BRIDGTON, Maine — Clifford L. Demming, 84, a golf course architect, superintendent, and musician, died at a local hospital after a brief illness.

Mr. Demming got his start at designing and building golf courses in the early 1920s, when as a teen-ager he helped his father, Grant Wilson Demming, in the design and construction of Grantwood Golf Course in Solon, Ohio. Right after high school, Mr. Demming went to work maintaining his father's golf course, and by age 20 he was head greenskeeper at Grantwood, a job he held until 1940.

After his family sold Grantwood, Mr. Demming went to Aurora (Ohio) Country Club as superintendent. In 1943 he designed and built Sleepy Hollow Country Club on the Chagrin River near Cleveland, and was superintendent there for many years. He spent most winters in Florida and during the 1950s and 1960s he designed and built Mount Dora (Fla.) Country Club.

Mr. Demming was a member of the Golf Course Greenskeepers of America and the All States Club of Eustis, Fla. He retired in 1970 and moved to Bridgton, where he was a drummer in the Bridgton Town Band.

Surviving are his wife of 54 years, Esther S. Smith Demming of Bridgton; a son, of Fort Devens, Mass.; a daughter, of Bridgton; a brother, of Richmond, Va.; five grandchildren, and a great-granddaughter.

## Golf Course News earns design award

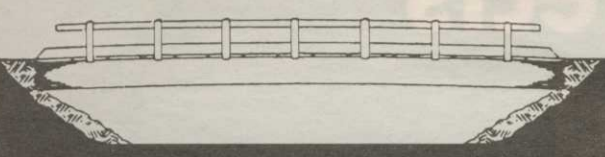
YARMOUTH, Maine — *Golf Course News* has been awarded an Ozzie Award for Design Excellence, bestowed by the editors of *Magazine Design & Production*.

*Golf Course News* received an honorable mention in the category of "Best Overall Design, Tabloid or Business Newspaper." More than 1,500 entries from publications across the United States and Canada were received in this class.

According to *Magazine Design & Publisher*, Michael Kreiter: "Each and every entry was carefully screened, reviewed, and evaluated by a nationwide panel of judges — demanding professionals who have won scores of national design awards themselves. And the judges agreed: This year's competition was the toughest ever."

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## Fream on Europe

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big maintenance cost courses are in operation. Attracting players to a big name course may only work for the first visit. Return players, or players willing to spend large sums on the greens fee, may become a decreasing occurrence, unfortunately for the developer or operator of the project. By this time the "name" or signature architect has been paid, but who is going to cover the mortgage payment or the on-going maintenance costs?

The golf architect and project master planners can help the developer or promoter realize financial and market targeting actions during conception of the project. Excesses in design, construction and maintenance of a golf course all deduct from the net profit. A golf architect who is aware of the financial realities of the project and incorporates financial realism into the planning, design, and construction and into their impact on long-term maintenance is helping to assure the long-term financial success of the project.

Regardless of present economic trauma, a growing standard of living will continue to fuel the need, or market, for golfing facilities throughout Europe and Scandinavia. While the economic reorganization going on in Eastern Europe will be a slow and tedious process, the former Eastern Bloc nations will recognize tourist trade as an excellent potential source of outside income and emerge as attractive locations for golf facilities. Russia and other of the former Soviet states will also evolve as potential locations for golf projects, once the industrial privatization and land ownership issues have been more completely clarified. The Mediterranean coast has considerable potential for expansion of golf facilities, so long as intelligent land use planning, environmental protection and pollution control become stronger factors in coastal development thought processes.

Long-term growth would appear to indicate "daily fee", open-to-the-public courses and resort destination projects as those with the most favorable prospects.

The success of existing and future golf courses in Europe will revolve around knowledgeable planning, creative and thoughtful design, quality construction and proper levels of turfgrass maintenance. The course may be called public daily-fee, country club, or resort, but the basic fundamentals for financial success remain the same.

## Roberts on Gore

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economics that will place a higher value on environmental quality. He identifies hidden costs that we overlook when calculating the true value of products and services. In a way, for generations, we have subsidized production to the detriment of natural resource sustainability and without adequate concern for the health and safety of society at many levels.

Gore and other authors who have written on earth science and civilization have given us much to think about.