

# GOLF COURSE NEWS

THE NEWSPAPER FOR THE GOLF COURSE INDUSTRY

**Spotlight on Utility Vehicles**  
Product Feature, pages 24-25

A UNITED PUBLICATION  
VOLUME 5, NUMBER 4  
APRIL 1993

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Britain's Prince Andrew (right) presents American William Montague with his Master Greenkeeper Certificate, the highest international honor of its kind. See page 18.

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## Study: Course maintenance costs up 4.9%

By PETER BLAIS

Course managers have done an excellent job trimming budgets while maintaining quality in the face of an ongoing recession, said a private country club industry consultant.

Golf course maintenance expenses rose just 4.9 percent in 1992 at private country clubs, compared to 9.8 percent the year before, according to a preliminary study of 90 courses by the accounting firm Pannell Kerr Forster. The survey is part of its annual *Clubs in Town & Country* report involving hundreds of private clubs nationwide.

Payroll and related costs (which make up about two-thirds of course maintenance budgets) rose a mere 3

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#### WHEN LIGHTNING STRIKES...

Who's liable? Golf course owners and managers want to know. One man's legal opinion can be found on page 43.

## Bridging the 'market gap' with design technology

By MARK LESLIE

Walt Disney animators, move over. Larry Hawkins is center stage at his easel, and while his rendering of Mickey may not compare, his animation of prospective golf courses could win him an Emmy.

You know those televised fly-overs of golfholes? Hawkins' Geoscience Golf Development Services has developed a computer program to create similar three-dimensional animations of proposed golf courses. The digitized animations are transferred to videotape, creating a VHS-ready fly-over before dirt is ever moved.

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The celebrated Winged Foot elm was taken down in February.

## Effective treatment for Dutch elm emerges too late for Winged Foot

By MARK LESLIE

MAMARONECK, N.Y. — Had it been available for public use earlier, a new fungicide may have saved the life of the famous American elm tree that until recently dominated the 10th green at Winged Foot Country Club's East Course.

Dr. R.J. Stipes of Virginia Tech in Blacksburg, Va., one of the leading American tree scientists, said the new compound, called Alamo, is effective against Dutch elm disease, which is believed to have killed the Winged Foot tree. Alamo — the ornamental

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## EPA insights on Browner, from fellow Floridians

By HAL PHILLIPS

WASHINGTON, D.C. — With 100 days of the Clinton Administration behind them, members of the golf course industry are still looking for clues as to how Carol Browner will conduct her business as head of the federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

However, Florida land planners, superintendents, engineers and chemical suppliers are plenty familiar with Browner, who led the state's Department of Environmental Regulation (DER) for just under two years. Opinions vary, but most agree Browner is an aggressive, intelligent, politically motivated person whose views on the environment are essentially protectionist, but not necessarily set in stone.

"We had a lot of clashes with her. She has a very strong personality," said Bobby Brantley, former lieutenant governor and state representative who served as the first executive

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## PKF report: Number of members fell 1 percent; dues increased 6 percent

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percent a year ago, as opposed to the double-digit hikes of recent years.

Meanwhile, the recession has slowed membership growth. The average number of members fell 1 percent in 1992, compared to a 1.4 percent increase the year before. Dues increased 6 percent, down from the 7.3 percent jump in 1991.

Rising costs and falling memberships have left club manag-

ers in a monetary squeeze.

"In response to a difficult financial environment, managers have had to cut payroll costs by eliminating waste. They have held back on raises, limited new hires and occasionally eliminated positions," said PKF Consulting Director John Crow, who presented the Country Clubs 1992 Flash Report at February's Club Managers Association of America Annual Conference in Nashville, Tenn.

Course supplies, contracts

and other expenses rose faster than payroll costs, but not as much as in past years, Crow added.

As a result of their frugality, managers were able to cut their clubs' average net loss in half from \$21,000 in 1991 to \$10,500 in 1992.

"The good news is clubs have reduced their losses. The bad news is they are still losing money," Crow said.

"Many clubs were set up as not-for-profit operations. But

you have a lot of [private] facilities that were supposed to make money that aren't."

The short-term economic outlook gives managers little chance of further reducing their losses, Crow said. If anything, the red ink is likely to flow more freely.

Having cut about all they can, few financial efficiencies remain, the PKF consultant explained.

"If you start cutting back on the quality of the golf course, it makes it even more difficult

to sell memberships," Crow said.

Memberships are likely to remain flat as the economy slowly improves. A soft market will make it more difficult to raise dues than it was a year or two ago, he said.

Inflation will continue to drive operating costs up somewhat. But even more ominous are the payroll- and energy-related bills Congress is considering, Crow explained.

"New taxes will force up the price of petroleum and anything that is petroleum-based, which is the case with many course chemicals," Crow said.

Proposed legislation to reduce the deduction for business meals from 80 percent down to 50 percent would hit hard at food and beverage revenues, which already dropped 1 percent last year, Crow noted.

Many clubs have reduced their dining room service to further cut costs. Others have allowed outside play on their courses and created new membership classes to add revenue.

The silver lining might be the fact that little new private club development has taken place recently because of the difficulty developers are having obtaining financing.

"If the economy starts to improve, members will begin stepping up to the plate again," Crow predicted.

The full *Clubs in Town & Country* report should be available this summer, Crow said. In response to managers' demands, the survey should grow to 300 to 400 country clubs, up from the 250 sampled last year.

Past reports have concentrated on member-owned country clubs. Reflecting the changing marketplace, the 1993 survey will include more real estate developments and management company-operated facilities, Crow said.

The new clubs will undoubtedly change the figures compared to past years. But breaking them into more categories will allow readers to "compare apples to apples," he added.

Because of the additional clubs, the report will cost somewhat more than the \$50 charged a year ago, Crow said. Copies will be available by calling PKF at 404-842-1150.

### KEMPER, AMERICAN GOLF SQUARE OFF IN CHICAGO

CHICAGO — American Golf Corp. and the Kemper Lesnik Organization are vying for the right to manage the golf courses contained in Chicago's Park District. Chicago-based Kemper appeared to have the inside track before citizen groups cried foul, claiming the process was not put out to open bid. In jumped AGC, which is based in Santa Monica, Calif. A decision is due any day.

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