

NGF report reveals a host of hidden trends worth watching

There is always room between the lines, even when the lines are crammed with numerical analysis. Case in point: The "Golf Facilities in the U.S." report just released by the National Golf Foundation (see page 1).

The report doesn't spell it out, but it doesn't take a genius to see that golf course development continues to defy nationwide lending trends. When the bulk of last year's new courses were conceived, in 1991-92, *recessionitis* gripped American financial institutions, and few — especially golf course projects — could secure funding.

But somehow these projects *were* financed and built, which proves a couple things: That funding was probably secured from local sources, and golf's perceived "profit potential" remained high through the worst of economic times.

Despite the recession, despite the difficulty in securing financing, despite overbuilding in certain metropolitan areas, and despite the supposed prevailing wisdom that said golf can't possibly maintain its current course-a-day pace — loads of folks believed they could make money by building daily-fee golf courses.

They still believe it. There are 671 courses now under construction, about half of which will come on line during 1994.

That brings us to another trend: While golf courses are being opened at record pace, an overwhelming portion of them — 80 percent — are public.

Public-access golf development — daily-fee and municipal — is dwarfing private course construction. Why? Because the demand for public golf is clearly there and money to finance new private courses isn't. Apparently, lenders believe there are enough private courses — and they're probably right.

A full two-thirds of the nation's 14,000-odd golf courses are now public-access. And get this: 80 percent of the 1,360 that opened between 1990 and '93 are either daily-fee or municipal.

I believe these two figures will meet during the next



Hal Phillips,
editor

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Okay, the game's over... Close down the courses

Editor's note: I am herewith adding one more acronym to the industry parlance. *AHA!* now stands for American hyper-activist. That is the type of person who will stop at no deviant behavior (like spiking trees or pouring chlorine on a golf course) to stop another person from imposing his will on the environment.

"To a pure ecologist, there's no such thing as a pest. Instead, they're competing organisms," said Prof. Karl Danneberger. That pure ecologist could easily fit the mold of the *AHA!*

Some people make things happen. Some people ask, "What happened?" In the ongoing battle against certain vocal hyper-activists (*AHA!*), it seems the golf industry too often throws up its hands and collectively sighs: "What happened?"

Thank God for those stalwarts who don't — who stand up, present the facts (not the *AHA!*'s factoids) and stomp down on opinion with science. But let's, for a moment, play **What If**.

The proposition: What if Golf Nation collectively succumbed to all the *AHA!* demands and declared: "Okay. The game's over. The gig's up. We're tossing in the towel."

"No more fighting in board meetings and the courts to win approval for golf course developments. No more clashes over fertilizer and pesticide use. Go ahead, folks. Outlaw fertilizers, fungicides, insecticides, rodenticides. Close down golf courses the country over."

All you *AHA!*s out there, here's a sampling of what would happen if you had your way:

- **Get out the help wanted ads and dig deeper into that bottomless welfare till:** Golf course operations pay \$6.1 billion annually to more than 380,000 full- and part-time employees.

- **Get ready to ante up more of your paycheck; you won't miss it:** Golf courses five years ago paid \$1.8 billion in federal taxes, \$530 million in state taxes and \$350 million in local taxes.

And Clinton economic adviser Laura D'Andrea Tyson told congressmen the United States is "an undertaxed nation." There is "no relationship between a nation's tax burden and its rate of economic growth," she said (*Reason*, Aug.-Sept 1993).

- **Discover some new technologies and open some busi-**



Mark Leslie,
managing editor

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Letters

EPA CHIEF BROWNER REFUTED BY RISE

To the editor:

The guest commentary by U.S. EPA administrator Carol Browner in the January issue of *Golf Course News* contains a surprising amount of misinformation regarding golf course use of pest control.

We share the Administrator's interest in a clean environment, as well as in the safety and health of all our citizens, including golfers. And, we support her recommendations regarding Integrated

Pest Management (IPM) — practices to which members of RISE ascribe.

Unfortunately, however, many of Ms. Browner's comments skirt the facts, deal heavily in innuendo, and serve only to raise unwarranted fears. Presumably, her commentary is written to advance a questionable agenda which stresses reduced pesticide use solely for reduced use's sake, rather than a program which emphasizes responsible use and reduced risk. One would like to believe that these comments were

BROWNER POINTS? ...HARDLY

To the editor:

Your newest guest commentator, Carol Browner, shows great ignorance about the golf course industry in her January piece. She should get her facts and her thinking straight! "Thousands of geese" dropping dead could not possibly fit onto one green! It is a typical exaggeration for the sake of scaring her audience.

Ms. Browner's admonition that "pesticide run-off can severely threaten the drinking water supply," is old hat to golf course superintendents. Obviously, in her ignorance she has never heard of the Cape Cod Study or Dr.

Watschke's work at Penn State.

Golf course superintendents practiced IPM long before the word was invented. We chuckle when the GCSAA and the USGA come on the bandwagon and obviously convince the EPA what a good bunch we are. Now that you have a president who plays golf and we a prime minister who does likewise, we no longer have anything to worry about. Except that both gentlemen of the same stripe tend to make appointments based on quotas rather than merit.

Ah well, we'll survive!

Gordon Witteveen
Golf Course Superintendent
Board of Trade Golf Club
Toronto, Ontario, Canada

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submitted, under Ms. Browner's name, by a writer totally unacquainted with the extensive amount of EPA and industry-required pesticide testing and the proper practices followed by golf course management.

- Many may not know — but Ms. Browner certainly should — that all pesticide products used in the United States must have EPA registration and bear an EPA-approved label. To gain EPA registration, each product must undergo eight to 10 years of stringent scrutiny involving as many as 120 separate laboratory and field tests. On average, only one in 20,000 chemicals makes it through this intensive testing. Many of these tests — especially those involving laboratory animals — are specific for the human health and environmental concerns to which Ms. Browner refers. The EPA-approved label sets out the proper, legal instructions for pesticide use which golf course applicators, and other users, follow.

- Ms. Browner's statement that "heavy pesticide use doesn't just affect golfers..." deals in innuendo,

not fact. There is no evidence that pesticide use on golf courses is heavier than that needed for specific pest control, as recommended on the EPA label. Nor is there any evidence that golfers — or their children "who walk the course" — are affected by golf course pest control.

- Ms. Browner's comment that "... pesticide run-off [from golf course] can severely threaten the drinking water supply of the nearby community," is not backed by EPA's own studies. In its extensive survey of the nation's rural and urban drinking water, EPA reported that "concentrations of pesticides... detected were usually well below levels of health concern," and that "greater than 99 percent of the wells tested are free of any pesticide traces exceeding safe drinking water standards." There is no evidence that pesticide run-off from golf courses threatens community water supplies.

The Administrator's concern for a healthful, safe environment is proper and appreciated. That is a goal to which the pesticide industry subscribes, as well, and one to which we are committed.

Allen James
Executive Director
RISE (Responsible Industry
for a Sound Environment)

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Blais comment

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been linked to cancer.

• *Sunshine.* The opportunity to be out in it is the reason many got into the superintendent field. Did it ever occur to you that what your mother sent you outdoors to enjoy could ultimately kill you? Of course it didn't occur to her — and it probably didn't to you when you chose a career — that those ultraviolet rays might cut your life short. But *sunlight* has been linked to cancer.

• *Gasoline and asbestos.* How many superintendents have gas-powered vehicles in their maintenance fleet? How many work out of older maintenance buildings where the asbestos-wrapped pipes were recently sealed or removed? They have been sealed or removed, haven't they? And those funny, black rubber springs they have over the service station gasoline pumps to prevent fumes from escaping. You have got those on your pumps, too. Right? Because, as we all know, *gasoline* fumes and *asbestos* have been linked to cancer.

The point here is not to downplay the potential risks posed by chemicals. There are a lot of things at play and pesticides may be among them. Chemical manufacturers and GCSAA have been preaching for years that the best way to minimize any danger is through careful application and using recommended protective measures. *You* have control over whether you and your staff take those precautions.

That is the point.

You have control over many risk factors that threaten your life.

The stress getting to you? Spend more time with your family and a little less at work. Take a stress-reduction workshop. Exercise.

Still smoking? Quit, for God sakes. Hypnotism, charcoal filters, ear patches, cold turkey. Just do it.

The love handles getting too big? Go for the salad instead of the fries. Join Weight Watchers. Take a nightly walk around the neighborhood with your wife and kids. Re-take up golf.

Lucky enough to be spending more time on the course than in the office? Are you wearing a wide-brimmed hat, long-sleeved shirt and sunscreen when you're out there?

Pesticides *may be* a cancer risk. That's why associations, chemical companies and the government spend billions of dollars on medical research each year.

But you have control over much of the danger they may present, just as you do over other risk factors. So get a handle on them. You owe it to yourself, your family and the golf industry.

In that order.

Phillips commentary

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decade, making the U.S. golf course stock 75 percent public-access.

Why? Well, the private golf course stock is declining as more financially troubled clubs go public or semi-private. Private clubs have also been hammered by the crackdown on dues deductibility and the diminished ability to write off business meals.

And, as noted above, fewer projects are getting financed. Of the 671 courses under construction, only 109 are private — and 56 of those are mere expansions of existing facilities.

One last between-the-lines observation, harking back to what I mentioned about overbuilding. Much to the chagrin of National Golf Foundation Vice President Rick Norton, developers continue to build golf courses in already saturated metropolitan areas, making it harder for *everyone* to make a profit.

Consequently, some daily-fee courses aren't making the

money they and their creditors had anticipated.

The result? Bankruptcies, fire sales and general gettin' while the gettin's good.

There to eagerly snap up the scraps is golf's growing management industry, which can't believe its good fortune. As more golf courses open and fewer owners take the time to research location and market niche, more management firms are picking up salvageable properties for a song.

Why develop your own line of courses when folks will do it for you?

Management companies are booming, in part because they know how to run golf courses efficiently, using economies of scale afforded by their multiple course holdings. But they're growing so rapidly because they're preying — quite legally, mind you — on the failed efforts of individual developers too naive to compete.

That's life, between the lines.

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