

Red tape in Minnesota ... Weenies on parade

Several times during the course of writing my story on Jeff Brauer's project in Biwabik, Minn. (see page 1), I fell into deeper, more broad conversations with various people involved in the erstwhile development. More than once they posed the question, "Geez, from now on, do you think every project in Minnesota will be so fiercely opposed?"

Invariably, the long-delayed Homestead project came up and the same question was bandied about in reference to Michigan.

It's important, I believe, to consider these examples of bogged down projects on their own and not as indicators of any larger trends — positive or negative — relating to golf course development.

Even more important is making the separation between the reality of politics and actual opposition.

There's a journalist here in Maine who writes a column each week entitled "Politics and Other Mistakes." Readers would be wise to remember that politics sit at the core of nearly all such disputes, whereas the fates of various endangered marigolds and ladybugs usually show up once the battle has been joined.

On the surface, the Biwabik project looks to be a large-scale hoo-hah over rare strawberries, pesticide fates and the decline of Minnesota's song bird population. But after a few calls to the half-dozen people driving each side of the controversy, the political struggle comes shining through.

To wit: The course was approved by the St. Louis county Planning Commission. Bigwigs at the state Department of Natural Resources, miffed they were not consulted thoroughly, motioned for an Environmental Impact Study (EIS) prior to construction.

Again, this doesn't seem unusual. However, in Minnesota, never has a golf course project been subjected to the scrutiny of



Hal Phillips, editor

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Bravo! Browner and EPA tackle muddled peer-review process

It is said that Oliver Wendall Holmes once led President Lincoln through the battle lines. At one point, the President exposed himself to enemy fire and Holmes shouted, "Get down, you fool!"

Now, I don't think Holmes was disrespectful of the President. He was just reacting to the dangerous situation. In the same way, for years scientists have been saying to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA): "Get down, you fools!"

Now, it appears, EPA has finally "gotten down." EPA Administrator Carol Browner has, for instance, declared that science peer-review procedures (until now non-existent) will be in effect Sept. 30 (See story, page 1). She has apparently dedicated her administration to "good science" and directed her division leaders to the process of getting the peer-review mechanism done. Could this be a sign of better things to come?

Let's hope so, because whose information have the leaders at EPA been relying on, anyhow?

Obviously not their own research. They seem unaware of the Cape Cod Study, for instance, and they were in charge of that effort. Remember the Alar scare? The dioxin misinformation? The 2,4,5-T fallacy?

Indeed, a panel of scientists appointed by the General Accounting Office told the EPA in March 1992: "The science at EPA is of uneven quality, and as a result, the agency's policies are frequently perceived as lacking strong scientific support." Lack of a solid peer review process has held the agency hostage to that "uneven science," the GAO said.

While some people may call our friends at EPA "eco-gestapo," I don't think these maligned folks are "bad people." There are explanations for the sometimes muddled, sometimes baffling, sometimes curious, sometimes unrelentingly foolhardy behavior emanating from the offices of EPA. At times, some of them may have been misinformed or misled, and did not realize what they were doing. Some may have been blinded by power and/or political ideology. Some may have been pawns.



Mark Leslie, managing editor

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Letters

AN ENVIRONMENTAL APPEAL

To the editor:

I have been in the golf business as a course owner for 15 years. I have always tried to keep up with golf course equipment, chemicals and environmental developments.

It irritates me to hear or read "the sky is falling" comments regarding the application of chemicals on golf courses and how bad golf courses are on the environment. It's frustrating to read that golf course operators don't care about the environment.

I have not personally applied any chemicals to my golf course. I've always left that to my expert golf course superintendent. I've never directed him to apply more of any chemical than was absolutely necessary.

I'm involved with a small group who is making a golf facility proposal to the city council of a small California city. The proposal includes a large driving range and nine short golf holes ranging between 80-150 yards. All the top soil will be imported.

This project would be a good possibility as a long-term test site to study the residue from chemical application to turf grasses. It is possible to engineer the entire site to collect the excess water for testing and reuse. Please understand I know just enough about this to get myself into lots of trouble.

I have a question for you.

Can you please direct me to companies, universities, associations, environmental groups and/or individuals who may be interested in participating in such a project?

Incidentally, I read every copy of *Golf Course News* almost cover-to-cover.

Dan James
Foster City, Calif.

Ed. If readers have ideas on where Mr. James should look for answers, contact the *Golf Course News* office.

VERTI-DRAIN PRESIDENT ADDRESSES ATTACHMENT

To the editor:

As a long-time reader and advertiser in *Golf Course News*, we have always had respect for the timeliness and appropriateness of the articles that appear in your publication.

However, we would like to clarify some points regarding an article that appeared in your April issue by Patrick O'Brien [director of the USGA Green Section, Southeast Section] entitled "Burns' invention greatly increases deep aeration."

Mr. Burns developed an attachment that fits on our Verti-Drain and has had great success with it; we applaud his initiative. We have numerous other accounts of satisfied customers who have

adapted the Verti-Drain to unusual applications and developed special attachments. Not all of these cases are as successful as Mr. Burns' case seems to be.

To be clear to our other customers and to our many distributors around the country, we must state that we have never tested or physically seen Mr. Burns' invention. Therefore we cannot, with certainty, attest to its results or its compatibility with our machines. As you can well imagine, the tolerances for a machine that drives tines deep into the soil, and then pitches (heaves) the tines forward is very critical. Therefore it is our policy to field test and have our engineering staff review all attachments so that we can stand behind our products with confidence.

Of course, we would be happy to test Mr. Burns' invention for approval, but until that time it cannot be officially endorsed or authorized as a factory-approved product attachment.

As you can imagine, many superintendents rely on our machines to relieve severe turf problems, so we are very critical of ourselves because we know thousands of customers are depending on us and the Verti-Drain.

Thanks for your understanding of our position on this issue.

Charles J. Otto, president
Emrex, Inc., North American Representatives for Verti-Drain

BOAT MISSED ON LEGENDS GROUP STORY?

To the editor:

Before I chastise you for what I believe to be major omissions in an extremely important story, I want you to know that I have been a big fan of *Golf Course News* for quite a while, and will continue to be.

My concern is that your writer, Peter Blais, and you, really missed the boat in reporting the announcement by The Legends Group, of Myrtle Beach, S.C., that they are starting construction on, not one, but two golf courses in Williamsburg, Va. (*Golf Course News*, June 1994). Furthermore, they went on to say that they will continue to build golf courses there, until they have built as many as seven new courses.

With the continued sad state of golf course financing and new starts for golf courses, especially resort courses, this story should have been a front-page feature article, with editorial support. Instead, your piece came across, at least to me, as rather "Ho hum! Some guys from Myrtle Beach are going to build a couple of courses with some big landowner in Williamsburg."

Mr. Blais did include the basic facts of the story, and he obviously made an attempt at interviewing the principals. There are,

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A tale of two projects: North, South, fast-forward & slow-going

By A. JOHN HARVEY

The Robert Trent Jones Cos. — consisting of Mr. Jones, Roger Rulewich and myself — were lead designers for Anglebrook Golf Club in Somers, N.Y., and the 18-course Robert Trent Jones Trail in Alabama. It took half the time (about three years) for our office to design, build and open eighteen, 18-hole courses in Alabama along the Trail as it took to receive the mere approvals for construction of Anglebrook.

The Trail and Anglebrook represent two polar opposites when it comes to planning, approvals and timing. Planning and design of the Somers project evolved slowly due to the number of regulatory agencies involved and negative public perception of the course. Conversely, the Trail involved alliances with local governments and the public for development of what was positively perceived as Alabama's tourism savior.

Yes, there are merits to a formal environmental review process. But much of the outcry against building and managing golf courses is emotional, non-scientific-based subjectivity.

•••

In September 1988, RTJ helped the partnership of Mitsui Fudosan (New York), Inc., and Kajima International, Inc. evaluate potential golf course properties in Westchester County, N.Y. After an exhaustive search, a 240-acre parcel was chosen for a private, 18-hole course in the town of Somers.

On Sept. 28, 1989, our office was commissioned to design the course for the newly formed partnership, Somers Golf Associates (SGA). As we developed routings in coordination with the client's engineers, Divney Consulting of White Plains, N.Y., we soon learned of the site's environmental sensitivity and how these limitations, in effect, compartmentalized the site into uplands and lowland basins. Uplands were composed mainly of wooded expanses and abandon agricultural fields isolated by rock walls, while lowland basins lay at the bottom of the two major watersheds.

In Alabama, on several occasions our

A. John Harvey is an architect with Robert Trent Jones Sr., based in Montclair, N.J.

office toured a proposed site, met with the owner, public officials, received detailed topo and aerial mapping of property, developed a routing, and started construction all within one month. On a number of sites, our company already had field representatives, shapers and equipment at the job site before a plan was sketched out.

A wetlands consultant, DRU and Associates of Glen Cove, N.Y. was hired on by SGA to assist in analyzing and evaluating the environmental constraints of the site. Initially, DRU flagged three different wetland jurisdictional lines, including U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE), New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) and the town of Somers wetlands, each with their own set of criteria. The most inclusive, restrictive and largest in total site area were the town's approximately 60 acres. Dr. A. Martin Petrovic from Cornell University was retained to prepare a turfgrass management program for maintenance of the course. Leggette Brashears & Graham, Inc., (LBG) of Wilton, Conn. was commissioned to study hydrology and geology, and report their findings to the partnership.

The Trail properties were all large land tracts of varying description, each unique and diverse within themselves. Several included wetlands which required on-site delineations by the ACOE. On many occasions, all such adjustments for golf holes were made directly in the field by our office during the wetland flagging process.

Another site investigation required at the Somers site was an archaeological review and field survey of historic artifacts. An extensive investigation by Ernest A. Wiegand II of Norwalk, Conn. revealed significant man-made features such as a fire pit and numerous hunting and cooking implements. These areas evidently served as a hunting and fishing encampments some 10,000 years ago. In September 1990, after a layout was selected by the partnership and the necessary environmental studies, surveys and tests were completed, and a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) was delivered to the town, which

eventually declared itself lead agency for the project. After an extensive review by the agencies and local citizens, the team assembled all questions concerning the proposal and answered each and every one with a written response or refinement of the plan. The team then submitted the revised layout and documentation in the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) in May 1991.

In general, a correlation can be made between the amount of paperwork required to secure approvals and the speed of construction. The route plan and approval documents for Anglebrook were refined, re-routed and reworked in concept and detail, many times at the will of agencies and the team's consultants, whereas a route plan for the Trail was all that was necessary.

In April of this year SGA received its final construction approvals, three years after submission of the FEIS. During the intervening years, refinement of the Somers plan was primarily due to the extent proposed golf course features were located within the two archaeologically significant sites; restrictions on grading of steep slopes; and grading or tree clearing required in wetland areas. In addition, the town of Somers required the team to prepare a construction phasing program which listed activities in a chronological sequence of operations from clearing to grassing. Together with Divney Consulting, our office devised an extensive erosion-control plan using a series of catchment, diversion and filter treatment devices around the perimeter of wetlands, golf construction corridors and within grading areas as progression of construction warrants. As a condition of the approvals, the town stipulated that construction could disturb less than four acres of wetlands and replace or enhance 14 acres of wetlands within these areas. The town further required SGA to institute an on-site water monitoring program.

The massive scale afforded many benefits and economics to the Trail developer, SunBelt Development Corp. All the land and infrastructure required for

you missed them. Please try to be more diligent in the future.

George Dennis
Virginia Beach, Va.

Ed. While we applaud the efforts of The Legends Group, Chesapeake Corp. and Donald Wizeman, as well as Mr. Dennis' unbounded enthusiasm for the Virginia projects, please keep in mind that *Golf Course News* is a business newspaper. We must remain objective in our coverage or we lose credibility with our audience. Mr. Dennis' assertions that Myrtle Beach is "The Golf Capital of the World," and The Legends Group "considered throughout the golf industry to be the very best in daily-fee/resort golf development and operation" are subjective judgments that would be challenged by many other golf destinations, developers and management companies. Such statements are better left to chambers of commerce, advertising agencies, public relations firms and private boosters. We feel the June story accurately reflected the information provided by company representatives; and, incidentally, it did appear on the front page.



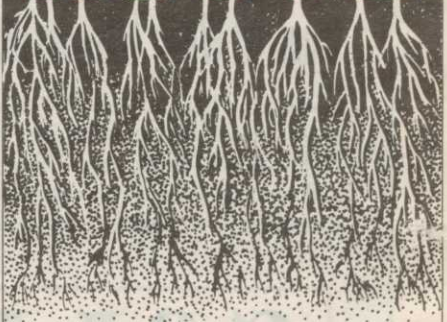
A. John Harvey

these courses were given to SunBelt by private landholders, developers or municipalities. A few courses were built along ecologically fragile environments without jeopardizing their landscape value. For example, the Auburn/Opelika course was built on heavily wooded property surrounding Lake Saugahatchee, owned by the Opelika Water Works Board. The surface area of the lake is about 400 acres and was formed to supplement the city's water supply. Today, during the second year of regular maintenance of the golf complex, lake water tests indicate no elevated levels of sediment or turfgrass chemicals as a result of the operation. No wetlands were filled; however, three acres were created.

A full six years after RTJ joined the Somers project, construction at Anglebrook is scheduled to begin this September.

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Dennis letter

Continued from previous page

however, what I believe to be critical omissions in his effort. They are:

1. The Legends Group, even though they only own six of the more than 80 golf courses in Myrtle Beach... "The Golf Capital of the World," their courses are the top rated courses there, hosting well over 300,000 golfers each year.

2. The Legends Group is considered, throughout the golf industry, to be the very best in daily-fee/resort golf development and operation. For years they have been courted by virtually every resort community begging them to develop golf courses in their areas. For them to select the Williamsburg area as their first venture outside Myrtle Beach is a major coup for the Williamsburg community.

3. The individual solely responsible for introducing The Legends Group to the Williamsburg area, and in particular, the Chesapeake Corp., was Donald Wizeman, with International Golf Resources in Myrtle Beach. Mr. Wizeman's efforts have made

the Williamsburg Golf Committee's "dream" of golf expansion there a reality in less than eight months. The Fortune 500 Chesapeake Corp. now have the best group as their golf partner. The Legends Group has secured probably the best deal in the recent history of the golf industry, and the Williamsburg tourist economy is assured of becoming "A Major Golf Destination." All thanks to Donald Wizeman.

4. The Counties of New Kent and James City have likewise opened a new, and exciting, chapter in golf development by aggressively pursuing every avenue to expand golf opportunities. They worked long, and hard, "TOGETHER" to make the Legends, and Chesapeake projects a reality. From an initial meeting in early January, to the breaking of ground on two golf courses, in two different municipalities, in July is unheard of in the industry. The staffs at James City County, and New Kent County, are truly innovators with a "can do" attitude that is sadly missing elsewhere in our bureaucratic world.

Obviously, each of these omissions are important stories in and of themselves, and I am very surprised, and disappointed, that