

One more look back at 1993, the year in golf...

The only thing more irksome than a New Year's Day hangover is the glut of year-end retrospectives that clutter newspapers and magazines from December of the closing year straight through to June of the new one. But they're hard to avoid — just like the hangover.

I read these years in review. In fact, I read them all with relish. Polls, surveys, Top Ten lists, best of this, worst of that. I love 'em.

You may have noticed this from the contents of our past two editions. January was filled with our annual "Best of the Best" awards, and this issue names the Best Mountain Course to open since 1988 — Robert Trent Jones Jr.'s Squaw Creek (see pages 1 and 35).



Hal Phillips, editor

I've included in this column the final, complete results of our Best Maintained Course on the LPGA Tour survey, as voted by LPGA touring professionals. Further, in honor of *Golf Course News*' fifth anniversary, Publisher Charles von Brecht (see below) has weighed in with his assessment of our first five years — complete with his Top Ten news stories of 1988-93.

Had enough? Well, slap me silly with a bag o' mulch, we're not done yet! Not without handing out my personal Golf Industry Awards for the calendar year, 1993.

Raquel, the envelopes please:

The John Bobbit Ridiculous New Product Award goes to... the golf club and urine receptacle in one. I've avoided using the brand name and manufacturer to keep a straight face and stay out of court. But somebody out there is actually trying to sell a hollow golf club (with screw-off top) into which one can relieve him (or her?) self to avoid "embarrassing" situations.

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BEST MAINTAINED COURSE ON THE LPGA TOUR 1993

As voted by the players/Conducted by *Golf Course News*

Mission Hills (Old Course) CC, Rancho Mirage, Calif.	22
Columbia-Edgewater Golf Club, Portland, Ore.	10
Dupont Country Country Club, Wilmington, Del.	4
Moon Valley, Phoenix, Ariz.	3
Highland Meadows Golf Club, Sylvania, Ohio	2
Walnut Hills Country Club, E. Lansing, Mich.	2
London Hunt & Country Club, London, Ontario, Canada	1
Hermitage Golf Course, Old Hickory, Tenn.	1
Wykagyl Golf Club, New Rochelle, N.Y.	1
Killearn Country Club, Tallahassee, Fla.	1

Innovations in service and management at Public Golf

Just as greens fees drive profits at a golf course, so does innovative management and marketing steer the vehicle. Ideas that fit this scenario overflowed at *Golf Course News*' recent Public Golf '93 conference in Charleston, S.C.

From American Golf Co. Vice President Kenneth James' wisdom in filling tee times to National Golf Course Owners Association President Vince Alfonso Jr.'s admonitions to give to the community, attendees from Florida to Hawaii learned a spate of money-making ideas.

We share a fraction of them here, suggesting, as Lansbrook Golf Club General Manager Gregg Gagliardi did: "Every area has ideas that work. You have to find your own promotional opportunities within your market. If you're going to make money, you've got to push and drive business. Flexibility in your operations is a must. Service is number one."



Mark Leslie, managing editor

To better serve the golf course industry, *Golf Course News* has expanded the annual Public Golf conference into a trade show and three-tracked educational symposium for superintendents, owners, managers and developers. It's called Golf Course Expo, and it's scheduled for Nov. 10-11, 1994, in Orlando, Fla. In addition to a management program, Golf Course Expo will offer educational programs in agronomy and development.

HAVES, HAVE NOTS

One theme that rang out at Public Golf '93 was that golf course operators *have* not because they *ask* not.

"People wonder how we got all this help. It's because we asked," said Elaine Fitzgerald of Fitzgerald Promotions, Inc. near Ft. Lauderdale, Fla. Not only has Fitzgerald obtained hundreds of thousands of dollars in free advertising for two golf courses by tying them into promotions of area hotels, she has gotten major mileage by placing brochures in visitors bureaus and chambers of commerce — at little or no cost.

Bobby Vaughn, president of Sunbelt Corp., which has opened the 18-course Jones Trail in Alabama, supported Fitzgerald's stance.

"We've spent less than \$150 per hole per year for the last three years promoting and marketing this concept," he said. "Much of our publicity was done for free because we asked. And now we have finally given people a reason to come to Alabama."

Among the Jones Trail's successes:

- As a major tourist attraction, it had the highway department put up 84 Interstate signs all over Alabama.
- It worked a deal with AAA in which it is featured on the cover

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Thanks for five years of news, views, people and places

Don't be alarmed! I'm not resuming my monthly column, which we "axed" a couple of year's ago when Editor Hal Phillips came on board. I am taking space this month to thank our loyal readers and advertising clients for supporting *Golf Course News* on what could be considered a minor milestone in publishing.

Five years ago this month, I showed up in Anaheim at the GCSAA Show with a couple thousand copies of *Golf Course News* filled with *free* advertising. Joining me were our chairman, Ted Gordon, and managing editor Mark Leslie. Also with us was an idea that this booming industry needed a news source that could offer wide-ranging information focusing on maintenance, development, management, design and supplier business.

I am pleased to say that, in

this short five-year period, this idea has become a full-blown, successful reality.

Shortly after the '89 show, Peter Blais came on board as associate editor and, of course, Vern Putney was hammering out stories until some health problems sidelined him (he's back, in fine "fettle," as contributing editor). Our editorial staff found a leader in Hal Phillips, who joined us at the New Orleans show in '92. All of the original staff is still with us and continuing to provide you news for the industry.

During these five years, there have been many interesting happenings in the industry. I'll never compete with Letterman, but with an assist from our editors, I've come up with a few "Top Ten" or "Best of" lists. I'm sure we've missed a few of your



Charles von Brecht, publisher

favorite items or names in the *News*, so please send along any additions. Here we go:

Top Ten News Stories

- 10) Weather-related disasters affecting golf facilities: Hugo, Andrew, Iniki, quakes, floods, drought — and the incredible resilience of the nation's superintendents
- 9) Real attention paid to the speed-of-play issue
- 8) Emergence of golf course management companies
- 7) Rapid rise of the Asia-Pacific market
- 6) Major reorganization at top of GCSAA (for the better!)
- 5) Boom in daily-fee/public-access facilities
- 4) RTC liquidation of properties, Landmark foremost among them
- 3) Mergers and acquisitions on the supplier side, as the

industry continues to mature

2) EPA and state regulation, along with chemical reregistration under FIFRA

... And the number-one news story from the year 1988 to 1993...

1) More than 1,700 new golf courses open for play. The NGF was right: That's nearly one per day!

One of my lasting impressions from that first show in Anaheim was how personable people are in this industry. Along with the new leaders at GCSAA, a slew of personalities has emerged in the golf world over the past five years. Here's my list, in no particular order:

• Mike Hughes, executive director, National Golf Course Owners Association — the growth of the NCGOA speaks volumes

• Perry Dye, Dye Designs — single-handedly kept the

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THE NEWSPAPER FOR THE GOLF COURSE INDUSTRY

Publisher
Charles E. von Brecht

Editorial Director
Brook Taliaferro

Editor
Hal Phillips

Managing Editor
Mark A. Leslie

Associate Editor
Peter Blais

Contributing Editors
Terry Buchen, CGCS
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Kevin Ross, CGCS
Falmouth Country Club
Brent Wadsworth
Wadsworth Construction

Production Manager
Joline V. Gilman

Circulation Manager
Brenda Boothby

Editorial Office
Golf Course News
PO Box 997
38 Lafayette Street
Yarmouth, ME 04096
207-846-0600; Fax: 207-846-0657

Advertising Office
National Sales:
Charles E. von Brecht
227 Second Avenue North
St. Petersburg, FL 33701
813-898-7077; Fax: 813-825-0923

Western Sales:
Robert Sanner
Western Territory Manager
2141 Vermont
Lawrence, KS 66046
913-842-3969; Fax: 913-842-4304

Golf Course Expo Sales:
Michael Lafaso
207-846-0600; Fax: 207-846-0657

Marketplace Sales:
Mary Anderson
813-898-7077; Fax: 813-825-0923

Subscription Information
Golf Course News
P.O. Box 3047
Langhorne, PA 19047
215-788-7112

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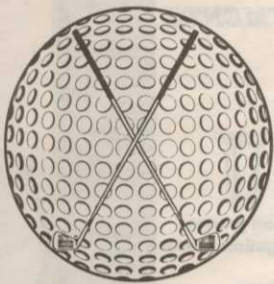
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CIRCLE #177

Leslie on Public Golf

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of the new tour book, which will be distributed to 33 million members worldwide. "It didn't cost us anything. We give up a 15-percent discount on our green fee," Vaughn said.

• It worked with its state travel and tourism department.

• It produced 100,000 license plates for clients cars. "Now there are 100,000 advertisements in circulation."

Fitzgerald said brochures have proved to be "a pipeline of business" for the properties she consults. One generic brochure was placed in welcome centers and on the Florida turnpike, costing \$250 per quarter. Other brochures, placed in the pro shops, included coupons for \$10 off per round in the winter and \$5 off in the summer. A third version left a black space on the front for hotels to place their logos and announced that they "happily present the Carolina Club and Deer Creek Golf Club and outlining their packages.

"We have 25 major hotels working with us. It's a win-win situation for everybody," Fitzgerald said. "We literally have 25 sales departments going to all their trade shows domestically and internationally, doing mailings several times a year to corporate clients. Our program for their guests is: lowest guaranteed green fees; we allow guests to book tee times up to a month before arrival; and we give guests a VIP package including range balls, a locker, a second cocktail."

"The media is like having an advertising budget that you don't pay for. Those are the guys you have to take care of like they're your parents," added Dave Richards, president of Golf Marketing Services in Michigan. "Because it costs money to send a writer and photographer somewhere to do a story, most publications will accept a story you provide."

THE DRIVER: GREENS FEES

"Just as debt service often determines just how profitable you are going to be on an annual basis, don't ever forget the greens fees are what drives the money," said Steve Lesnik, chief executive officer of Kemper Lesnik Organization in Chicago.

R. Tary Kettle, president of Masters Golf Corp. in Winter Park, Fla., supported that statement, saying greens and cart fees represent 70 percent of a course's revenues and 90 to 100 percent of its profits.

Bemoaning the fact that 15 percent of people who prearrange tee times don't show, AGC's James suggested using credit card guarantees, particularly at courses that charge a high-dollar green fee and don't have many walk-ups.

Those who don't honor their tee times "represents big money" and "no one in the industry has really paid attention to this," James said.

By using credit card guarantees, he said, "You're saying to the customer, 'This is serious. I have a perishable commodity called a starting time. If you're not here to use it, I am going to lose. That's not fair to me. I only need to know that you're committed to using it, so give me your credit card number.'"

What do you do when you're so good, 100-percent of your tee times are used?

James cited Arrowhead Golf Course in Littleton, Colo., which charges a \$75 combination green and cart fee and last year made an extra \$20,000 selling the back nine before the players who started on the front nine came around.

"Price-sensitive, time-sensitive people will use it, as well as inexperienced players who don't want to be thrust in there with everybody else," James said. "Sell it at

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Leslie on Public Golf

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what you can get. It isn't going to cost you a dime more to put another player on the golf course."

HOT BUT HEAVY

To fill tee times during Florida's hot days, Lansbrook's Gagliardi improved his rounds from 114 to 164 per day on Terrific Thursdays promotions in July and August. Enlisting cooperation from area hotels, restaurants and other businesses, Gagliardi ran closest-to-the-pin contests on every par-3, two long-drive contests and a daily grand prize drawing, plus specials in the restaurants. He developed a mailing list using the registrations for the drawing.

SATISFYING THE CUSTOMER

"Grass and people: Those are the two things you have to spend your time thinking about," said Lesnik.

While saying a golf course should "spend what you have to spend on turfgrass maintenance — you'll get it back in the long run," Lesnik added: "We're as concerned that the people who play the \$9 round [at one of our courses] feel they got value for their money as we are about the person who paid \$95 [at another course]. It could have been a larger percentage of the ex-

pendable income of the person who spent \$9 than it was of the person who spent \$95."

Just as debt service often determines just how profitable you are going to be on an annual basis, don't ever forget the greens fees are where it's at. That's what drives the money.

One of several Lesnik suggestions: "If you sell permanent tee times at a public golf course, a lot of people are discouraged from coming. Sell every second, third or fourth tee time. If people want to play your course, they will pay a premium for a tee time. And if you stagger them in a way that is convenient for you, you won't discourage other play."

SOW AND REAP

"Have fun and ... make a difference. The key to that is give, give, give, said Alfonso, who is part-owner of The Rail in Springfield, Ill. "We can all make a difference in our lives — to the people around us, to our communities..."

What you sow in goodwill will return manifold to you in increased business, Alfonso said, adding that key to his business is building lasting relationships. He cited a study that found that "winning over a new customer is five times more expensive than selling a product to somebody who's already your customer."

Five years of GCN

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builders association alive, and stayed very busy in Asia-Pacific

- Phil Arnold, executive director, GCBAA — the guiding hand
- Jim Snow, director, USGA Green Section — now, more than ever, the turf authority
- Carol Browner, administrator, Environmental Protection Agency — like her or not, she's a force to be reckoned with
- Steve Mona, executive director, GC-SAA — a new beginning
- Randy Nichols, outgoing president, GCSAA — oversaw the passing of the torch
- Tom Fazio, architect — solidified his reputation as golf's top designer
- Mike Shannon, head of KSL — made big splash on management side by snapping up La Quinta and PGA West, then acquiring Fairways
- Craig Price, president, American Golf Corp. — led AGC on acquisition binge, then formed publicly held acquisition wing, National Golf Properties.

From a publisher's point of view, it's interesting to note a large number of publications have entered this market over the past five years. If I miss one, I apologize to any of my peers. But here's a sampling:

- Golf Course News
- Golf Course New Asia-Pacific
- Northern Turf Management
- Southern Turf Management
- Western Turf Management
- Golf Business Today (and yesterday...)
- Turf (North & South)
- Golf & Grounds Trade
- Golf, Inc.
- GolfWeek (new format/circulation)

Last, but certainly not least, I offer a list of new products, trends and services which have emerged during the past five years or so — let me know if I've left any out:

- Water-injected aeration
- Computerized weather stations
- Soil blending
- Lightweight greens mowers
- Wetting agents
- Growth regulators
- Integrated pumping stations
- Slow-release fertilizers
- Composting
- Biological alternatives
- Endophytes

Thanks again to our readers and advertisers for your continued support. *Golf Course News* is proud to be involved in this industry, and I look forward to reporting back to you in my next column — on our 10th anniversary.

Environmental Summit

Continued from page 3

Management, founded 12 years ago by actor Robert Redford, specializes in bringing together the forces of environmentalism and industry. According to Director Terry Minger, the Center — a 501-C3, or non-profit organization — has staged "meaningful, productive" conferences on oil drilling in the Bering Sea, reauthorization of the Clean Air Act, the ozone debate and global warming.

"We're an organization that builds bridges," said Minger. "We're not an advocacy group. When we brought people together for the Bering Sea seminar, we had 18 oil companies there, as well as environmental groups."

Minger said he expects no more than 65 or 70 attendees, equally representative of the golf/resort industry and environmental groups. Minger added that he possesses a solid grounding in the golf world, having been city manager in Vail, Colo., during con-

struction of a Pete Dye course there. Minger was also involved in the development of Desert Mountain and the Palmer course in Whistler, British Columbia, Canada.

"Golf has been given a bad name because of the mega-developments," Minger said. "It was a way of selling property instead of playing the game as it was originally constituted. We aim to invite people from the golf industry to show the green side, to show the good examples."

"Instead of sniping at each other and filing lawsuits, we're going to sit down and talk. We'll see what the environmental groups find wanting and how the golf course industry can respond and, in the past, I believe golf has shown itself to be very responsive."

Patterson said a preconference meeting is scheduled for June or July, when speakers and conference organizers can devise a first-draft program and walk through it.

"We've contacted more than 25 key individuals and organizations on both sides

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