

Having flirted with fame, Viola takes aim on the design market

By MARK LESLIE

From arranging Jack Nicklaus' home gardens to designing golf courses in the exotic West Indies, Lorrie Viola has made the quantum leap into golf course architecture that many young landscape architects merely dream about. Yet, after 10 years of working with the likes of Gary Player, George and Jim Fazio, and Karl Litten, Viola is still looking for the big break that will propel her into the ranks of "recognized" architects.

While the number of women in her profession can be counted on one hand, Viola has great expectations.

"I think everyone's a little leery about being a guinea pig by hiring me," said Viola, who has established L.A. Links Inc. in Farmington Hills, Mich. "It's going to take a couple of courses by myself to start, and more people may follow suit."

It's a field she wants to remain in. "I always wanted to work in design. And I wanted to develop recreational-type facilities. Golf course architecture fits perfectly," she said.

Increased public course development could open doors, she said, adding: "The guys who are charging \$500,000 and \$1 million [design fees] aren't going to really be able to get into that market. People can't afford that type of facility with those fees. So, hopefully things will start to pick up soon."

A par-3 nine-holer called Northfield in Haverhill, Mass., opened last summer. And she is busy doing a lot of planning and feasibility studies for several Michigan developers, building a course in Penn Lake (Pa.) Golf Club, and Jolly Harbour Golf Club in Antiga, West Indies, with Litten.

In Michigan, she said, "there's a lot of farmland that's inexpensive. Put up a little golf course and people line up down the road to play it."

"We're saying, 'Here's some acreage. What kind of residential development can we get in there?' I'm working as a developer almost."

Viola feels her background sets her apart. She earned a landscape architecture degree from Michigan State University in 1983. Nothing new there. But in 1992 she earned a master's degree in business administration from Florida Atlantic

University, culminating seven years of part-time study. "It made my BA more well-rounded," she said. "Going into the business world, I have a better idea how to do marketing and management, whereas landscape architecture gave me no business background whatever."

In between, she worked for golf course architect Bill Newcomb in 1983; moved to South Florida to work for two years with Nicklaus including his beloved gardens on his estate; worked another two years with George and Jim Fazio; then joined Player-Litten in 1987.

Though still working occasionally with Litten, Viola went out on her own in 1991. "Karl supported it. He provided renovation jobs he didn't want to be involved with," she said.

...

Viola, whose older sister Sherry, 36, broke into a male-dominated field as a physician before her, credits others with breaking the barrier in golf course design.

"People like Jan Beljan [of Fazio Golf Course Designers, Inc.] have opened the door for the rest of us to say, 'There is no reason we cannot do the same things the male architects have been doing all these years,'" Viola said. "Jan's had some nice support from Tom Fazio and has been able to do a lot of things because of working for him. What I'm crediting is Tom's allowing her the same opportunity as the rest of the people in his company. If your company doesn't support you equally with your male counterparts, you'll never get anywhere."

...

Viola has no "fingerprint" trait in her designs. Rather, "What I've learned is, if you can make one hole on every project stand out from the rest, you can say that's your signature hole for that course."

Most important, she said, is to "meet your client's needs. If he is a public entity, certainly you can't create a golf course that's not playable by all levels, and that's not affordable to build, maintain and operate."

"The fewer alterations you can do and still maintain a challenging golf course, the better. If you have wetlands, you have to work with and around them. A lot of people feel the wetlands issue is ridiculous and crazy and they're fighting against authorities. It's obvious, because history has shown us, there's nothing we can do about it. So address the



Lorrie Viola, right, routes one of her golf courses, which include Northfield, above, in Haverhill, Mass.



environmental issues up front and work with the environmental people."

Viola's strong suit as a designer is her land-planning skills, she said, "something a lot of other designers don't have. And that is something I understand well. I always look at that availability in case a project calls for it. Basically, you have to consider how the developer is going to make his money back... whether it's residential, a family recreation area, or something else."

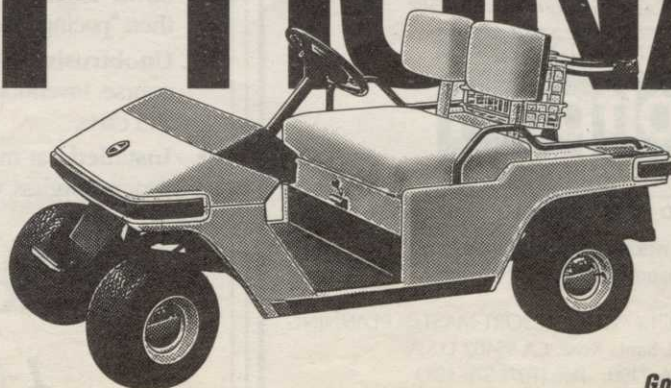
<p>AMERICA'S PREMIUM HEAT-TREATED TOP-DRESSINGS</p>	<p>Time-Turn USA MADE, NOT IMPORTED</p>	<p>HIGHLIGHT GOLF HOLES, IMPROVE VISIBILITY, and SPEED UP PLAY with</p>
<p>PARTAC GOLF COURSE TOP-DRESSING</p>	<p>SOIL CONDITIONER IMPROVES AERATION AND DRAINAGE BETTER THAN SAND YET RETAINS NUTRIENTS & MOISTURE!</p>	<p>U.S. GOLF HOLE TARGETS™</p>
	<p>PARTAC GREEN SAND FOR DIVOT REPAIRS</p> <p>The Ultimate Solution to Unsightly Divots at Televised Golf Tournaments and other Sports Events!</p>	
<p>PLUS CONSTRUCTION, CART PATH, SAND TRAP, AND DIVOT REPAIR MIXES</p> <p>TYPAR GEOTEXTILES & TURF BLANKETS</p>	<p>AVAILABLE NATIONWIDE 800-247-2326 IN N.J. 908-637-4191 PARTAC PEAT CORPORATION KELSEY PARK, GREAT MEADOWS, N.J. 07838 ORLANDO (FL) MEMPHIS (TN) RENO (NV)</p>	<p>GREENGRAPHICS® GREEN PERMANENT TURF COLORANT SAND TRAP PUMPS RAKES, PLUG PUSHERS, SQUEEGEES AND MANY MORE GOLF SPECIALTY PRODUCTS</p>

CIRCLE #143

MELEXCEPTIONAL

What You Expect Your Golf Car To Be.
What Every Melex Golf Car Is.

We've been building golf cars for 20 years. Always improving, always seeking a better, more dependable design. Let us impress you. Call 1-800-334-8665 to find a dealer near you. Melex USA, Inc.



MELEX
GOLF CARS

Golf's Most Dependable Drive