

ASGCA, GCSAA, PGA reps spell out recommendations for handicapped access

By PETER BLAIS

What do ski areas and golf courses have in common?

Hopefully, a lot in the eyes of the federal government if the American Society of Golf Course Architects has its way.

"We'd like to see courses equated with ski areas," said architect Richard Phelps. "Ski areas provide access to the lift and the top of the mountain. It's up to the disabled skier to figure a way to get himself back down. We contend that golf courses should make the tee and green handicapped accessible. But it should be up to disabled golfers to get themselves over the rest of the course."

The fear in the golf industry is that new federal guidelines due out next year to meet the Americans with Disabilities Act could require all or most of a course to be handicapped accessible. Given the nature of the game, the American Society of Golf Course Architects and other industry associations feel it is an unreasonable burden.

Phelps is the ASGCA's representative working with the golf subcommittee to the federal government's Recreation Access Advisory Committee. The committee consists of representatives from numerous recreational businesses whose job is to make recommendations that will help the U.S. Architectural and Transportation Barriers Compliance Board develop handicapped accessibility guidelines.

Phelps said most in the disabled community understand golf's dilemma and aren't seeking an all-or-nothing solution. But the disabled and the federal government are demanding improved access.

Design and maintenance changes will have to be made at both new and existing courses, the Colorado designer said. But they can be done without sacrificing a quality design, he added.

Denis Griffith-designed Fox Hollow at Lakewood near Denver is a perfect example of a quality design that is 95-percent handicapped-accessible, Phelps said.

"The important thing for course owners today is to go out on their course and take inventory of potential problem areas," Phelps said. "If they will make corrections and make certain the pro shop and maintenance crews are trained to be courteous and helpful, they will take a giant step in diffusing an otherwise explosive issue."

"People must realize that 99 percent of the disabled community just want to be treated properly and given the opportunity to enjoy the great game of golf."

Phelps, Henry Thrower of the Professional Golfers Association, and the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America's George Renault are on the recreation committee's golf subcommittee. Their recommendations for new construction include:

- A golf course would not be required to have an accessible route for play of the game through the green. Golf car paths should not be considered an accessible route, using the ADAAG definition.

- Practice areas shall be accessible from golf car paths or parking areas.

- Where practice tees, bunkers, putting and chipping greens are provided, at least one of each will be accessible.

- Each teaching practice area shall have a minimum of one

accessible practice tee.

- A practice sand bunker (if provided) shall be accessible — 52 inches wide, no steeper than 5 percent grade, cross slope no greater than 2 percent, maximum 2-inch lip height.

- Most course amenities must be accessible from the golf car path or golf car parking area.

- Toilet rooms on the course must be accessible from golf car paths, where provided.

- Weather shelters (where provided) shall have a minimum

clearance of 5 feet by 8 feet to allow room for a golf car.

- No technical provisions are recommended for golf car paths.

- At least one tee on each hole, and as many as possible, shall be accessible.

- There shall not be grade or cross-slope regulations governing fairways or roughs through the greens.

- There should be at least one accessible route to all putting greens, except where extreme safety and terrain issues are

involved.

- There should be no design issues for putting surfaces.

- Course hazards (bunkers and water) are not required to be accessible.

- There should not be special design issues for course bunkers.

- New stand-alone practice facilities shall be accessible.

- Where continuous access on the fairway is not possible because of natural barriers, access to the fairways shall be provided at

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Accessibility issues face designers

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maximum distances of every 75 yards from golf car paths if terrain permits.

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Special recommendations for altered courses include:

- Existing practice areas at courses or stand-alone practice areas, if altered, shall be made accessible.
- If practice bunkers or greens are provided at practice areas, they would not have to be altered just because the practice tee area is altered.
- Repair of existing golf car paths would not constitute alterations.

• If an existing teeing ground is altered on one or more holes, one tee on that hole shall be made accessible.

• Alteration of a teeing ground means changing the physical dimensions—length, width or elevation.

• Resodding, reseeding, changing grass types or adding sprinklers on tees are not considered alterations.

• Altering the tee or green on one hole does not require altering tees or greens on all other holes.

• There should not be any alteration design issues for rebuilding putting surfaces on existing greens.

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Banks seeing the light

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Bond financing also will continue to be an important source of new capital for public courses, according to Matthews. This will happen for two reasons. First, cities and counties have access to land that private developers cannot afford to buy. Second, yield requirements from the projects are typically lower for a public body than a private investor because the venture is not profit-driven.

Another source of new capital is the "mezzanine" or "second-tier" corporate lenders, said Matthews. Large corporations, such as Textron and GATX, established financial units that provide many of the same services as banks, but are not bound by the same regulations. These financial arms can function as debt lenders or equity partners, or both.

These corporate lenders are also creating new programs that actually participate with banks, insurance companies and other financial institutions to fund mortgages for golf courses.

Lower returns from traditional sources have encouraged pension fund managers to re-think their investment philosophies, Matthews said.

Currently, most long-term investments are not providing fund managers with acceptable returns. Thus, he said, some state pension funds are considering other investments.

Large golf projects, such as the Robert Trent Jones Trail in Alabama, may become attractive to more fund managers in the future.

Oak Grove Island

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but laced with creeks, marshes and lagoons.

Ten acres of the golf course site were officially designated as wetland areas.

Every hole offers marsh and lagoon views, and on many holes the water comes directly into play.

The fact that the site offered more above-sea-level area to work with than most locations of its kind gave Young the leeway necessary to create a course that is flowing rather than flat.

Most holes have four sets of tees and at its longest, the par-72 course will play 7,050 yards.

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