

Audubon chief speaks out on Ocean Course debacle

The following letter has been reprinted here with permission of the author, Ronald Dodson, president of the Audubon Society of New York State.

Dear Vice President Gore: I write to you today because of an effort in which the Audubon Society of New York State (ASNY) has been involved during the past 12 months and because of your interest in the protection of the environment. During 1994, provisions of the Coastal Barrier Improvement Act (CBIA) led to the opportunity for ASNY to participate in the bidding process for the Ocean Course on Kiawah Island, S.C. The Ocean Course has received international recognition as the site of the 1991 Ryder Cup championship and because it is purported to be built in an environmentally sensitive manner.

ASNY is the creator of the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary System (ACSS). Of the various program components of the ACSS, the golf program has been the most visible and successful. To date, over 1,600 golf courses in all 50 states and several other countries have joined this program. The golf program was created because of the large number of golf courses in existence,

the substantial number of acres and space utilized by courses, and the ASNY mission statement which is "to work toward the improvement in the quality of the environment by involving people in programs and projects that will benefit the quality of the environment." It is common knowledge that golf courses use chemical products and water in quantities that should be of concern. ASNY has developed the golf program to allow us to determine what that level of concern should be, and to offer alternatives to management of courses that will benefit the environment and wildlife.

Because of our programs and international experience with golf and the environment, Virginia Investment Trust (VIT) sought ASNY out in an effort to establish a "partnership" toward purchase of the Ocean Course, through the Resolution Trust Corp. (RTC) and in accordance with the provisions of the CBIA. A legal agreement was set in place between ASNY and VIT stipulating the terms of the partnership and the short-and long-term environmental conservation goals for the property. The financial and legal



Ronald Dodson

details of this agreement were received and approved by not only ASNY and VIT, but by RTC the Internal Revenue Service, independent auditors and others.

One area that was extremely important to ASNY was a provision which stated that, if the efforts that were

being made to acquire the Ocean Course failed, but in the future VIT "acquires an ownership interest in the Ocean Course either pursuant to the RTC's Ocean Course Purchase Agreement or otherwise, directly or indirectly, with any other person, entity or qualified organization participating in the auction," VIT agrees to provide a grant to ASNY to conduct a study of the course property. This study would result in a complete inventory of the habitats, flora and fauna of the course, and serve as the basis for establishing the long-term management of the course and surrounding environments.

During the entire process of developing the agreement, VIT expressed publicly how much they desired to work with ASNY. Both VIT and RTC expressed in the media how pleased they were to be doing something to protect the special environment on and around the Ocean Course. As a matter of fact, it was the CBIA that set into place the requirements under which the RTC was working with not-for-profits and governmental organizations to protect the Ocean Course in this manner.

In September 1994, ASNY was the lone high bidder for the Ocean Course. This set into motion a series of court hearings relative the bankruptcy of the Ocean Course, the RTC's attempt to sell it, and the contract that ASNY had signed with RTC. In the end, the Bankruptcy Court did not approve the sale because, in the 11th hour, RTC attempted to place two additional

restrictions on the operations of the course. The judge's ruling was based upon the belief that these two additional restrictions would cause the financial partners in the acquisition to fail to come forth with the funding for the purchase. So, months of work essentially went down the drain all because the RTC supposedly wanted to increase the conservation restrictions on the course even further than ASNY wanted to.

On May 18, 1995, the RTC went back to public bid for the Ocean Course. In this auction, VIT was the successful bidder. ASNY contacted VIT to congratulate them and to discuss plans for the court proceedings, closing date, and the commencement of the ASNY study period.

VIT has indicated that they do not wish to honor the terms of this agreement nor to work with ASNY.

ASNY finds it very interesting that the RTC did not follow the provisions as set forth by the CBIA for the most recent auction, but instead negotiated directly with for-profit entities. Now that the RTC has done this, VIT is attempting to renege on a contractual obligation with ASNY. We urge you to direct an immediate investigation of this sale, the motives of the RTC in regard to the apparent violation of CBIA provisions and any potential irregular connections between RTC and VIT in regard to this latest sale.

At present it is the position of ASNY that both ASNY and the CBIA were used and misused in regard to nothing more than a publicity campaign to acquire the course in the total interest of a private business and with actual disregard for the environment of the Ocean Course and the coastal environment of South Carolina. We are presently weighing our legal options, but in the meantime the proposed sale moves forward.

Ronald G. Dodson
President and CEO
Audubon Society of New York State
Selkirk, N.Y.

Leslie comment

Continued from previous page

Three cheers for this Foy of Florida!

We've got an Evans in Maine we'd like to clone, too. That's Kyle Evans, the superintendent at highly rated Waterville Country Club. Evans has taken up the call to public education, arming himself with an array of slides, stories and vast knowledge and speaking to various civic organizations and school audiences.

Hail to another one of my fellow Mainers, superintendent Dick Fahey of Poland Spring Country Club, for a great environmentally and financially sound idea. Fahey deals with cutworms in a way that eliminates an insecticide application. When they become a problem, he sends a headlight-equipped triplex out in the wee hours to chop up the worms while they are actively feeding.

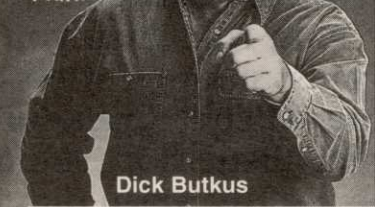
Stop the impeachment! Odd that a couple of years ago Vice President Al Gore said sayonara to a Tom Fazio-designed putting green that had been installed at the behest of his predecessor, Dan Quayle. Now President Clinton has restored a green built for President Eisenhower in the 1950s. Guess our two top honchos will never be playing partners (see page 3)

As for his part, course architect (and, you'd think, political creature) Robert Trent Jones Jr., who oversaw the restoration, stayed out of the politics. Saying he donated his efforts not for the president but for "the peoples' home," Jones added: "It is a great honor. I've always been a dedicated public person. It's important for people to donate their time and energies whenever they can and in whatever public service they can. And in this case it was my pleasure to restore something that belongs at the White House."

Our Q&A subject for the month (see page 29), Ron Forse, a fan of the classic old-time designers, on controversial modern-time architect Pete Dye: "He is the best at making good golfers think. He's a genius."

Greg Norman reportedly has agreed to represent the Audubon Society of New York in public service announcements saying, roughly: "Golf is trying hard to do its part to protect the environment and preserve our resources. Schools and corporations, you should follow our lead. Join the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary System."

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