

Q&A: Griffiths

Continued from page 37

have been there longer. It's quite a challenge to try to sort out the different ideas and philosophies of the society and where the business is going.

I personally have a major concern of where the golf industry is going. We have been very fortunate to have been in a golf boom since 1986. We had a lot of ups and downs through the 1970s and '80s. And I look with a bit of guarded optimism to where we're going.

If we can keep golf affordable and keep the market growing, then my concerns aren't as paramount. The more affordable golf is, the bigger our market is.

GCN: Much of it hinges on the green fee, then? Is that scary?

DG: If you look closely right now, to me it's a little scary. Our bread-and-butter is the more expensive golf courses.

GCN: Do you feel the cost of green fees is driving some people out of the game, and in the same way, a lower cost would draw those people into the game?

DG: I don't think it's driving them out of the game, but they're playing less than they would if it were more affordable.

The biggest challenge facing golf development is cost — no question. There are numerous things that are driving the costs up that aren't necessarily due to the architects' flair or flippancy. A lot of the increased costs relate to the difficulty of the sites we're working on. We're working on properties that deal with floodplain, environmentally sensitive areas, landfills, quarries, segmented parcels and other limitations that add to the time and permitting costs. If only every site were 200 acres of gentle, rolling meadow land that is partially open and partially cleared. It wasn't that many years ago that many of our courses were. But in the urban areas, where the majority of courses are being built, land is less and less available and you get technical difficulties as to how to design a golf course that's enjoyable, playable and maintainable.

GCN: Is it getting any easier to obtain

environmental approvals on the local level?

DG: I don't think so. If anything, it's probably getting more difficult — even though we are better prepared. We've been dealing with it longer and the majority of us are far better prepared than seven or eight years ago. We better understand how to work with the different individuals and integrate golf with environmentally sensitive areas. There is still a very strong green movement here in the U.S. I don't know how much they have accepted scientific findings showing the environmental friendliness of golf courses.

The USGA [U.S. Golf Association], GCSAA [Golf Course Superintendents Association of America], PGA [Professional Golfers' Association] and NGF [National Golf Foundation] have all really worked on promoting golf as a good partner with the environment. Laymen and the green movement don't necessarily agree with what we are advocating.

GCN: But shouldn't the agencies be better educated than the general public?

DG: For the most part, those individuals within the agencies are far better educated concerning environmental issues than the general public. But education is not necessarily the issue.

The society has pushed the last two years, and I will push subtly, that the golf industry has a tremendous challenge in promoting that golf is good, producing recreation and relaxation and preserving open spaces. Responsible golf maintenance certainly enhances the environment. It is not detrimental.

These are basic issues we can't back off. If you were to poll kids through junior high school, most people would be very surprised at the perception younger people have for development and golf development. You'd find many perceive that it is not positive. And you certainly do not change that perception with facts and figures.

It's very important that we do everything we can to promote that responsible golf development is good. This is not always done with facts, figures and tables.

To get across to the general public, we continually need to campaign for what we're doing. Golf development and parking lots are one in the same in many peoples' mind.

GCN: [Golf architect] Ed Seay said we will be seeing six-, eight- and 10-hole golf courses, depending on how much land is available. What do you think of that idea?

DG: I don't have a good answer. We looked at alternative facilities for varying acreage for years, those varying from par-3 to executive to nine-hole to a combination. We've done less than 18 [holes] or less than nine [holes]. But, still, you have to deal with the general public's perception and how they are accustomed to playing golf.

I would pose the question: "Are we allowed to have brown grass fairways and bump-and-run and all the nuances of Ireland and Scotland? Are they acceptable by the U.S. golfing market?" No. So, we as designers have some wonderful alternative solutions, but I doubt they will be accepted by the golfing public.

Two things here: I feel strongly that golf can be an excellent business venture. We work very diligently to make the facilities we design viable business ventures for our clients.

So when I talk about perception and will people use it, that's where I'm coming from. If I've got 30 acres and I want an 18-hole golf course and I'm able to support that out of my pocket book, that's a different issue.

We once did a course for a client who could afford it. He had 15 acres. We built five greens and 11 tees and have a wonderful 18 holes of golf.

Facilities like that are fun. They're built with small amounts of money, and they could be a great place to learn and to make golf available on properties that can't contain a regulation-sized course.

GCN: You may be best known for Bent Tree, Chateau Elan, Pole Creek and Fox Hollow. But what do you believe is your greatest accomplishment in design?

DG: Still being here. A peer said, "Our golf courses are like your children. Each one has its intricacies, something that's

special and it's unfair to pick a favorite."

GCN: What has been your toughest engineering challenge?

DG: The Legends at Chateau Elan [in Georgia] is one of my favorites because when we walked the property I said to [developer] Don Paintos: "It's a wonderful property and you've given us a relatively free hand in routing it to get the best golf course. We're getting ready to do a traditional golf course. We have these fantastic personalities who are going to work with us, and we are going to place restrictions on ourselves. Like the early 1900s, we will not use any scrapers to move dirt. So logistically we can't move dirt more than 150 feet." He said, "OK, and I'll do you one more. You won't knock down any trees. We'll move them all with a tree spade." We essentially did, and the process was great.

GCN: Working with Gene Sarazen, Sam Snead and Kathy Whitworth must have been fun.

DG: It was memorable, a wonderful opportunity. They were all great to work with. I couldn't learn enough from those three.

GCN: The course was to be a collection of their favorite holes. How did that work out?

DG: When we talked design and what they would like to see, in many cases they had very distinct, memorable images of golf holes — positive memories they wanted to pass on to the golfers.

GCN: More and more people are jumping into the field of course design — from Tour pros to former lead designers like Roger Rulewich and your own Tom Johnson. Is there enough work for everyone?

DG: No. It's very simple. In the 26 years I've been in business that's always been the case.

There is that individual who is going to do one golf course in his lifetime — whether he is a landscape architect, golf pro, or golf course owner. That segment has been there and will always be there. But to survive today just doing golf course design is going to be very difficult with all these people in the industry.



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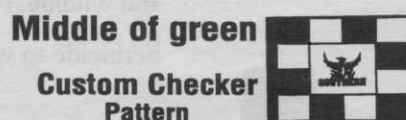
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The Ledges finally under construction

YORK, Maine — Construction could begin in April on The Ledges, an 18-hole, daily-fee course in this Southern Maine coastal community. Developer Pat Rocheleau hopes to complete a least nine holes this fall and open them late next spring or early summer. Bradley Booth is the course architect. No residential component is planned.

Booth is also beginning work this fall renovating two holes at Lincoln, (R.I.) Country Club.

Family builds public 9

HAMMOND, La. — Ponchatoula residents Art and Gus Zieske are building a small-scale, nine-hole public golf course in Hammond. The Zieskes planned to open Ironwood Golf Club for play in April.

The course has been carved out of a 35-acre tract of land about a mile east of the of the Zieskes' old Ironwood Driving Range. The new Ironwood course will include two par-4 holes and seven par-3 holes ranging in length from 100 to 230 yards.