

## A little optimism wouldn't kill us

When I joined *Golf Course News* in early 1992, one of the first stories I wrote concerned the record

number of courses that had opened for play the previous year. Three hundred and fifty one, to be exact. Frankly, I had expected a great deal of flag-waving from the various industry sources. I mean, who could possibly find something negative to say about a new course coming on line virtually every day?

Nevertheless, because I was new, I was determined to write a straight and sober business story concerning the industry's future prospects. To my shock and surprise, experts from all corners of the market made my job remarkably easy, as they were nearly unanimous in their caution. Further, their lockstep explanations of the aberrational boom and coming downturn were positively eerie; as if Marlin Fitzwater had briefed them all before my call.

"The industry really can't sustain this type of growth every year," they explained with great reserve. "It would be wise to view 1991 as a peak year, after which the annual openings should slide off to about 250, which is a far more sustainable figure. You see, it was very difficult to secure financing in the early 1990s, which should significantly affect the pipeline in years to come."

Ah, the infamous pipeline: That mysterious road down which all golf course projects must pass — some more quickly than others, some more slowly. I would soon learn how the pipeline could be used to rationalize almost anything that takes place during the development process.

A year later, in 1993, the staff here learned another 354 golf courses had opened for play the previous year. Certainly no market correction there, but the pundits steadfastly refused to be seduced by optimism.

"The pipeline takes at least two or three years," they reminded me. "The courses opening now were funded before the financing troubles of 1991 and '92. Besides, the environmental permitting restrictions are becoming tougher and tougher every year. This 354 figure probably constitutes our high-water mark. In the years to come, 250 openings a year is a more reasonable goal."

This, of course, sounded vaguely familiar. But who was I to argue? So what if there were record numbers of courses under construction, strongly implying that openings would continue apace? The pipeline is an enigmatic marvel, I was told, and can't be relied upon to deliver a consistent flow of new courses.

Miracle of miracles, another "peak" year was to follow. Here's the lead from my 1994 story: "A whopping 358 golf courses opened for play during 1993, as public-access development continues to dominate a market that — despite a bevy of cool-headed forecasts — has sustained its considerable momentum."

I vividly remember writing that story because 1) I really like the word "whopping," and 2) I was beginning to get wise. Indeed, further along in the same story I actually tried to pin down the soothsayers by politely confronting them with their

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Hal Phillips,  
editor

## New PGA product noted for its reserve & civility

"I can live for two months on a good compliment."

— Mark Twain

Pros and superintendents. Superintendents and pros. There were days and golf courses where the twain (get it?) never met — unless they were the same person. But in more and more places in these modern days, pros recognize the importance of the superintendent to the survival of their golf club.

Nowhere is this better exemplified than at PGA Golf Club at the Reserve in Port St. Lucie, Fla., where PGA Golf Properties has opened its first home course for club professionals as well as the public (see story page 1).

Listen to this; isn't this refreshing? "We are very proud of the dollars we expended on the maintenance complex," said Senior Director of Operations Marty Kavanaugh.

"The maintenance complex is always an afterthought. But we built the maintenance complex before we built the PGA golf professional's golf shop."

Pointing to Turf Operations Manager Rick Wise, a certified golf course superintendent, Kavanaugh said: "This [The Reserve] is really a partnership with the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America. The GCSAA can take pride in this facility, too."

Explaining that at The Reserve each person is responsible for "the PGA experience," Kavanaugh added: "We recognize that in most golf operations, golf professionals and superintendents don't have compatible goals. Golf pros are compensated on income and rounds played. Superintendents are compensated on quality of the golf course. Here, they are compensated on the PGA experience and the ability of the club to make money.

"So, the goals are very, very compatible. And, when the golf course is closed, you'll know it has to be closed..."

From joining the facility in the Audubon Signature Program to overseeing construction of a magnificent maintenance complex that is a model for environmental protection, Wise is as much a beacon for superintendents around the country as Kavanaugh and Head Golf Professional Bill Cioffoletti are for pros.

Congratulations is due them all. Pros and superintendents working in concert... What a concept!

If a person plays golf every day for 70 years, his chemical exposure level is one-third below the federal "no-effect" levels. That according to a University of Florida risk assessment.

The USGA Green Section's Jim Moore has coined a new term: "Hydromagnetism." His definition? "The sprinkler closest to the control box is most likely aimed at you."

Moore, director of the Mid-Continent Region, also has this observation: "Whenever you have an area of a green that will be

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Mark Leslie,  
managing editor

## GOLF COURSE NEWS

THE NEWSPAPER FOR THE GOLF COURSE INDUSTRY

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## Letters

### PRaise for Golf Course Expo

To the editor:

It was a pleasure to meet you at the 1995 Golf Course Expo in Orlando. I have come to rely heavily on your publication to keep abreast of the golf industry, and have found it a very useful source for products and services that my company needs to be competitive in today's market. Please keep up the good work with the magazine.

I was extremely pleased with Golf Course Expo. The topics covered in the seminars were very informative, and the quality of the speakers was excellent. I took two of my staff members with me so we could cover all of the things we wanted to hear. I would highly recommend this event to others in the golf course industry. Both the Dye family and Mr. Robert Dedman were fantastic keynote speakers, and

the entire atmosphere of the event was conducive to exchange of information and interaction with others in the business.

Thanks again for the excellent work. I am looking forward to receiving your magazine in the future.

Del Ratcliffe  
President  
Ratcliffe Golf Services, Inc.

### IS THAT LEADERSHIP?

To the editor:

I would like to congratulate you on your October "Members, General Managers: Summer of Their Discontent?" [Leslie commentary, page 8]

You posed some very interesting comments. It is unfortunate that the American golfing public and those possessing leadership roles have such minimal understanding of golf course management-related issues.

Unfortunately for the golf course superintendent, those same members, green chairmen and general managers who are so quick to terminate someone, are the same people that will so readily accept all the credit when things are in peak condition.

As a golf course superintendent, I appreciate you having the insight and understanding and courage to present an editorial of such important subject matter and relevance.

Tommy D. Witt, CGCS  
Wynstone Golf Club  
North Barrington, Ill.

### MEASURING GREEN SIZE PART II

To the editor:

In a recent issue (October 1995), you had an article in *Golf Course News* about the Palmer Maples method of measuring golf greens — a method that

many superintendents have used for 30-some-odd years and still a very good method to get the square footage of a golf green.

I would like to inform you of a newer and easier method of obtaining the square footage of golf greens and the plotting of any type of golf green configurations along with the sand traps, irrigation heads, and drainage systems.

This system was invented by Don Martinez, a senior foreman at the Silverado Country Club in Napa, Calif.

He has come up with a simple way to draw to 1/16th-inch scale any irregular object and apply it directly to drawing paper in the field! With this system you can also transpose from the drawing back out into the field to redefine the perimeter of the golf green as it changes over the years or to design a new golf

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# Management companies have helped more than they've hurt

By ROGER MAXWELL

In the early 1970s the golf industry was witness to the creation of primarily two management companies — American Golf, and ClubCorp of America (CCA) — each of which moved in uniquely different paths in their quest to grow their portfolio of golf management properties. Of course, as we know them, each is highly successful and each plays a major role in our industry today.

In the mid- to late-1980s our industry saw numerous new groups enter the arena seeking opportunities. Much of this surge of new players in the management business came as a result of the National Golf Foundation's (NGF) "State of the Game" report. It cited a need to develop one new golf course per day until the year 2000, in order to keep up with frequent player demands, as estimated by the NGF.

At one point in 1989-90 it was documented that some 30 golf management companies were actively seeking facilities to manage. Indeed, it was a crowded playing field. Then came the early 1990s, when the nation's economy slid, much due to the savings-and-loan debacle and the downturn in real-estate values. The result was an inability of developers, corporations, etc., to locate the financing

A former Marriott Golf executive, Roger Maxwell now operates "In Celebration of Golf," a chain of specialty golf retail stores.



Roger Maxwell

necessary to develop new facilities. Even the most seasoned corporations and golf-savvy groups were unable to secure financing for public golf facilities, not to mention upper-end golf facilities.

This all changed as we moved into the mid-1990s with the emergence of a handful of groups, to include the original pioneers in the golf management area aggressively competing.

At the same time, there was a shake-up of management companies, with some fall-out and consolidation, and with the two original pioneers that began it all in the 1970s gaining strength in numbers and in their management talent.

Today, we find what must be American Golf, CCA, Cobblestone and Brassie Golf as the major players in terms of numbers of facilities either owned or managed. With these follow a host of players, including Hyatt, Marriott, Hilton, TPC, KKR, etc.

Ownership vs. Management seems to be the norm today as compared to earlier years. "Cash" being "King" clearly identifies the major players.

I believe the advent of today's golf management companies to have been extremely positive on both the game and for those who make their living in the golf industry.

They have provided a strong sense of security for young golf professionals and grounds superintendents. They have, in

most cases, provided an infusion of capital improvements to facilities that were in need of improvements. They have instilled a strong sense of business direction to an otherwise cottage industry.

Through clustering of multiple facilities within one metropolitan area, golfers have benefited in terms of their cost to enjoy the game. I also firmly believe that the golf professions have been enhanced through their involvement with management groups and corporate ownership of facilities, as likewise can be said of golf superintendents. No question, the traditional roles of both individuals have been radically altered, causing many onlookers to become critics.

If I were to agree that there were any shortcomings with respect to corporate involvement in golf, it would be that the support structure evident in corporate golf tends to diminish one's "creative spirit" and power to learn all aspects of their respective roles.

Corporate ownership of golf facilities will continue to grow in dramatic proportions. I believe pure management companies not operating under "real-estate investment trusts" will exist and provide a service to many clubs, yet not become any more dominant than they are today.

The golf industry and those involved have benefited because of management companies and corporate golf ownership. Their continued involvement is positive and should be encouraged by all golf organizations and associates.

## Phillips comment

Continued from previous page

low-ball prognostications of years past. They admitted the market was strong, but ...

"... Some areas of the country are seriously overbuilt. Besides, did you know that nearly a third of avid golfers agree that fertilizers and other chemicals used on golf courses pollute lakes and streams?"

This time last year, I stubbornly refused to publish an actual story on the record 381 (!?) courses that opened during 1994. Why bother? Instead, *Golf Course News* ran a chart that spelled it all out in black and white (well, we did throw in some color to spice things up).

This year, after a two-year hiatus, I couldn't resist writing another installment in the "Poor-mouthing Golf's Growth" series (see page 1). Despite the christening of more than 400 courses — an all-time record, for Pete's sake — the general industry outlook remains one of studied practicality. Putting the damper on things this year is a recent study showing that rounds are flat.

"If we keep building courses at this rate and rounds don't increase," the pundits warn, "the whole thing could collapse of its own weight! If that should happen, the industry would be lucky to open 250 blah blah blah..."

Where did these people come from, the tennis industry?

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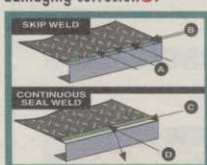


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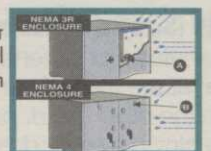
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