

What's Audubon and what's not

This month's front-page story on the once-and-future golf course in Jacksonville, with its complex, compelling political battles, was long enough without delving into the curious relationship between the local Duval County Audubon Society and the Audubon Society of New York State. New York Audubon, of course, administers the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary System (ACSS) and Signature Program, widely hailed inside the golf industry for their practical marriage of business, recreational and environmental concerns. Duval Audubon is a chapter of National Audubon, which doesn't necessarily look fondly upon New York Audubon and the ACSS.

Every year or so, I think it's important for golf to take a reality check with regard to the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary System. It's a fantastic program, but folks must recognize that ACSS participation doesn't necessarily earn your course environmental legitimacy outside the golf universe.

Indeed, there are 550 organizations with the word "Audubon" in their title, and only one — New York Audubon, the system founder — has thrown its full support to ACSS. In other words, just because your course is an ACSS participant, or even a Signature member, don't expect other Audubon organizations or members of the environmental movement at large to throw you their undying support.

"It's kind of frustrating," says Ron Dodson, executive director of Audubon International, the golf-oriented umbrella organization founded by New York Audubon. "I tell everyone interested in our Signature Program, during the first visit: If you think that because you follow our program you're going to bring all of Audubon in behind you, you're wrong."

This concept is easier to grasp when you understand how

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Hal Phillips,
editor

After tough winter, the virtue is communicating patience

An old Dutch proverb tells us "A handful of patience is worth more than a bushel of brains." GCSAA President Bruce Williams concurred in saying that golf course superintendents should not feel rushed into applying this fertilizer or that chemical to hasten winter-damaged turfgrass back to its green, lush old self (see story page 1).

Now, we can just hope golfers in the North Central United States can do the same: Be patient. Last year that was not always the case, and in the wake of major turf damage, a number of Midwestern superintendents lost their jobs. Why, they had the audacity to not control the weather.

"Unfortunately," Williams said, "when spring ends, people historically watch the Masters on television, or return home from winters down South and expect the golf courses up here [Illinois] to look like the ones they left down South: in wonderful condition."

The problem is — from Illinois and Kansas to Minnesota and Michigan — it has been a cold, wet, raw spring. Summer has seemed a distant dream. So how do superintendents counter the prevailing attitude in many places (usually private clubs) that they should be little gods creating perfect playing fields?

"We can't do anything to accelerate the soil temperatures," Williams said, "so the best thing we can do is be patient and use public-relations skills ... to encourage members to be patient."

If a course has a newsletter, use it. If it has bulletin boards, use them. If it can make signs to place out on the course, make them. One-to-one contact with members can't be beat.

Michigan may have gone one better.

"Golfers here seem to be quite understanding," said Gerry Faubel from his club in Saginaw. He credited Michigan State University and the Golf Association of Michigan [GAM] for approaching the



Mark Leslie,
managing editor

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Letters

DISTRIBUTORS WILL SURVIVE THROUGH SERVICE

To the editor:

I would appreciate the opportunity to respond to your article "Manufacturers hedge bets on distribution" [GCN April 1996]. I strongly oppose the statement by Mr. Phillips that "ten years from now, golf courses will likely purchase their accessories directly from the factory."

I feel that the professional turf equipment distributor will still be the primary supply channel for accessories for the same reasons we are now: the local distributor's ability to most effectively and cost-efficiently market and deliver these products to the customer.

My company is fortunate to distribute Standard Golf and Par-Aide accessories in Louisiana and Mississippi, and through aggressive stocking and marketing strategies, we have shown significant sales increases in our accessory sales over the past several years. I will not argue that every distributor aggressively promotes accessories, but in our market we do not have the luxury of selling every customer a "\$15,000 mower" on every sales call. Those customers, however, will routinely need a set of flags, tee markers, water coolers, etc., which allows us the opportunity to serve their needs between capital-equipment purchases.

Because the cost of entry to become a golf course accessory "manufacturer" is minimal, there has certainly been an exponen-

tial increase in the number of companies marketing these products in a variety of ways (distribution, sales reps., factory direct, etc.). The majority of golf courses in Louisiana and Mississippi trust the quality of Standard Golf and Par-Aide accessories and the service and support they receive from their local full-service turf-equipment distributor.

Independent turf-equipment distributors exist only because we can sell more of a manufacturer's product in a given market more cost-effectively than can the manufacturer. And I believe that, while some exceptions will continue, we will continue to be the primary provider of golf course accessories in the future.

Kim E. Robertson,
president
Delta States Turf, Inc.
Baton Rouge, La.

LISTENING TO ALL VOICES

To the editor:

Thanks for being sensitive to our needs and issues; and, to let the "little" voices be heard that are still trying to define what constitutes REAL golf course management ["Determined: All sprinklers are not created equal," GCN April 1996].

You and *Golf Course News* are a class act. Sending me copies of the April issue and a note of thanks was special.

Because we are certain that sprinkler systems, from resi-

dential through golf courses, are really the Achilles Heel of the green industry, more information will be shared.

Enclosed are a few pictures. We think this is a great and worthwhile industry. Our concern: too much "lip service," not enough "hands on".

Al Kline, CGCS
UNM Championship GC
UNM North GC
Albuquerque, N.M.

NAME DESIGNS MORE COSTLY

To the editor:

Peter Blais' cover story for April, "Name designers pull higher dues and green fees," restates the obvious part of the story. But what about the other side of the ledger?

So-called "signature" designs cost way more to build than other courses, too. It's much more than just the difference in the architects' fees. The architects named tend to require higher budgets across the board — in everything from earth moving to bulkheads to irrigation to sod — than those of us who the study didn't represent. As just one example, we completed Stonewall, near Philadelphia, three years ago for a budget of \$2.8 million, whereas Tom Fazio had estimated the construction of a course on the same site at \$4.1 million (not counting the difference in our respective fees).

As a result, while many "signature" courses are forced to charge higher fees, they don't necessarily make a higher profit than anyone else's designs. And when the development costs are higher, the risk of catastrophic failure is much greater.

We've never had a golf course go through the Resolution Trust Corp. — a statement few of those "name" designers can match. I hope Mr. Hirsh will take these factors into account before he pronounces his study complete.

Tom Doak, president
Renaissance Golf Design, Inc.
Traverse City, Mich.

STUDY'S AUTHOR RESPONDS

Dear Tom Doak:

I just received the copy of your letter of April 16, to Hal Phillips.

You're right! The cost of "signature" courses is often higher than that of other "non-signature" facilities ["Study shows: Name designers pull higher dues and green fees," GCN April 1996]. Not only that, but many are more expensive to maintain and sometimes, like with any type of investment, there are problems associated with increased costs. While we would like to consider the cost of the courses in ultimately analyzing the value of "signature" architects, the combination of adjustments for time (date of construction) and the resulting small size of the sample (due to the necessity of limiting the study to local markets) makes the consideration of cost difficult at best.

Our study to this point has only indicated that, in the markets studied, greens fees and dues were higher. Other things that need to be addressed are absorption period of memberships (or daily-fee play), effect

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Phillips comment

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National Audubon manages its own membership and chapter affiliation. And who better to explain it than Dodson, a former regional representative for National Audubon.

Here's how it works: Suppose you live in Kalamazoo, Mich., and you want to join the Kalamazoo Audubon Society (KAS). The KAS is an official Audubon chapter, which means it publishes a newsletter, elects designated officers, holds at

least nine meetings a year, and issues an annual report to National Audubon.

In exchange for these stipulations, Kalamazoo Audubon receives national affiliation plus a predetermined cash amount for every National Audubon member with a Kalamazoo-area zip code. In other words, when someone from the Kalamazoo area joins National Audubon, they pay the \$25 annual dues, of which KAS receives \$5.

You simply cannot join Kalamazoo Audubon or Duval Audubon without joining

National Audubon first. Why? Well, this system allows National to claim 550 chapters and more than 550,000 members. That's why.

Further, there are 15 state Audubon groups that have no affiliation whatever to National Audubon. New York is one. Florida is another. In fact, as an Audubon society in its own right, the Florida organization has finagled its own deal: When you join Audubon in Florida, one-third of the \$25 dues goes to national, one-third goes to Florida Audubon, and another third goes to a

local zip-code chapter, like Duval.

Here's another important factor: While state and local Audubon chapters have been around since the late 1800s, National Audubon wasn't organized until the 1940s.

"Many people believe that national was first, and that all the other chapters are subervient and affiliated with the national. It's not true," Dodson explains. "All the different societies have their own boards of directors and bylaws, and are free to take any position they like on any issue."

"We have many Audubon chapters around the country working with us. But we have many that don't, and it usually comes down to one or two individuals who are against everything, all development, looking for anything they can do to throw a monkey wrench into the government permitting process."

In Jacksonville, for example, Duval Audubon has opposed the restoration of golf at Blue Cypress. In public meetings, Duval Audubon member Pat Anderson is on record as opposed to all golf development anywhere in Florida.

"Even we haven't endorsed the Jacksonville project," Dodson points out. "I haven't even been on the site. But we're encouraged that, if a golf course is developed there, it will be done under the Signature Program. Things are going to be developed in this country and it's our responsibility to make sure it's done properly. So if a golf course is developed, we prefer developers follow Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary guidelines."

"If you compare a well-sited, well-maintained golf course to any sort of development — any kind! — I'm telling you, it's the best kind of development. I'm not saying there should be golf courses on every street corner. In fact, I think there are places there should be no golf courses at all."

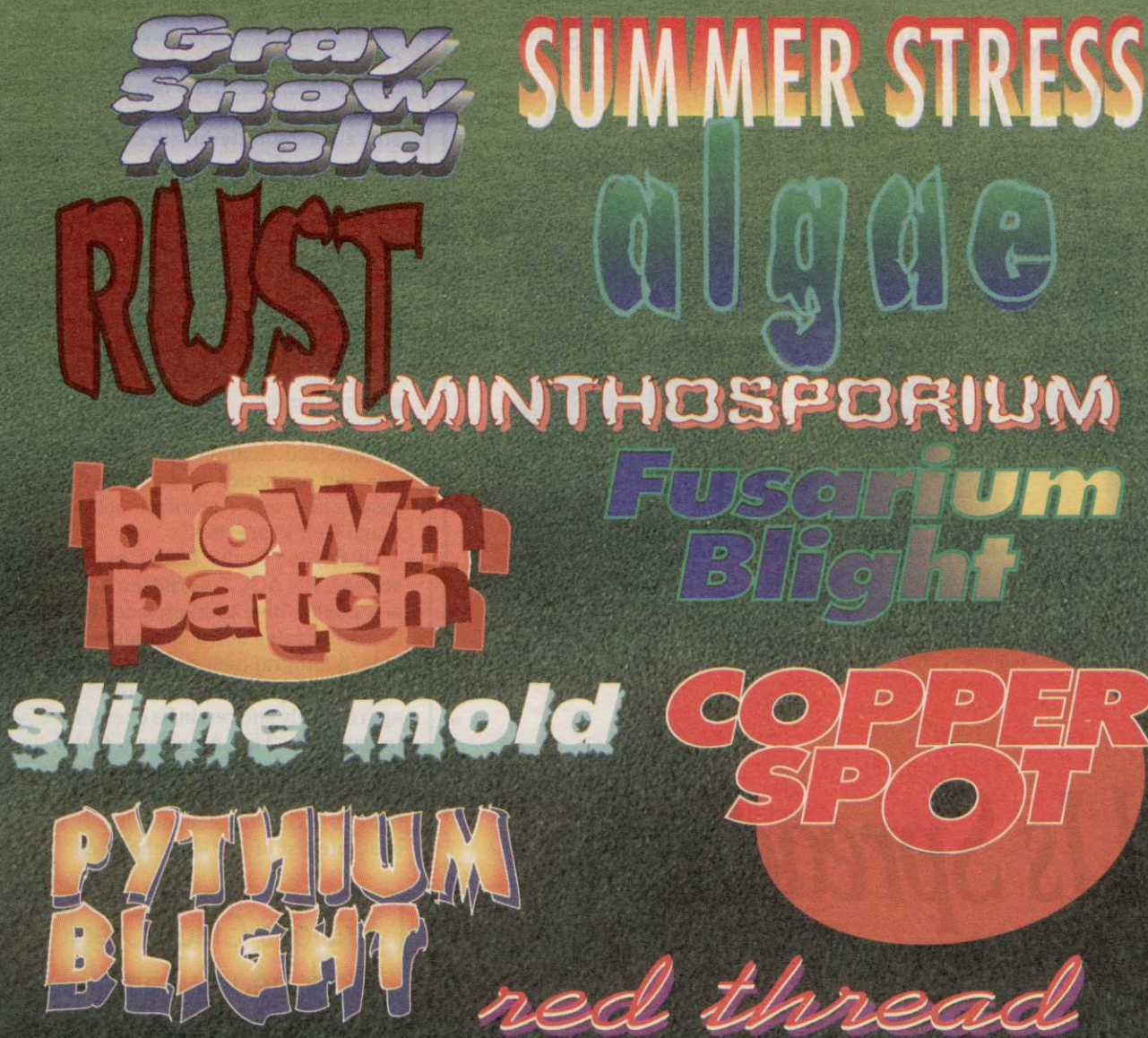
"Despite this, the Audubon Society of New York State and Audubon International are somehow suspect by other Audubon groups because we choose to pursue conservation agendas that are positive in nature. Instead of saying things we're against, we talk about what we favor. Instead of running around the country talking about who's hurting the environment, we talk about ways to enhance and protect it."

Despite the chasm that separates New York Audubon and its estranged sister organizations, there is a chance Audubon's disjointed cold war will thaw sometime in the future. Last month, according to Dodson, members of National Audubon had an extremely productive meeting with representatives of the ACSS.

"When they left our building they said, 'Ron, we think there's light at the end of the tunnel. I think we can work together. We think you're doing good work here.'"

"I don't think there will ever be a time when National runs around the country telling people to join Audubon Sanctuary. They have no vested interest in seeing us get any bigger. But there may be a time when a memo is issued that might say, 'Let's stop the bad-mouthing. Let's get on with life.'"

"I'm hopeful."



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