

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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Leslie comment

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media with explanations of why the golf courses in that state were not in top-notch condition. The blame was displaced from superintendents to its rightful place, the weather.

"The GAM has done a great job communicating, with the advent of Brett Marshall as the director," he said. "He has a definite feel for golf courses and superintendents and he just does a marvelous job in communications."

This could be a lesson for state golf and superintendents' associations to take forward in the future. News releases are easy to do, and phone calls easy to make. Most sports editors will lend a caring ear to your side of the story — even as the snows rage outside their window.

...

In our interview (see page 35) it was gratifying to hear that even an icon like Arnold Palmer, as busy as he is, reads *Golf Course News* each month.

"I enjoy *Golf Course News* very much," Arnold said. "I know all of us at Palmer Course Design enjoy it as well. It provides current and accurate information in every publication."

In fact, Arnold helped *Golf Course News* kick off our Public Golf Expo in 1994 in Orlando, Fla., when he keynoted the national event. And his company has supported our ventures into Asia-Pacific, from our newspaper to the regional golf shows with which we are affiliated.

For more than 30 years he has captured the nation's attention — and adulation — and his appeal has not lessened even with the drop in Tour victories. The reason? The answer is multifaceted, but every single person who has ever relived with me a meeting with Arnold Palmer — be it a for a round of golf at a pro-am tournament, or at some other sort of event — mentions his humility and kindness.

"It's as if he'd known me for years," folks are apt to say.

Arnold exemplifies the great qualities that we all love about golf and the best characteristics of those who play it.

Too bad more would-be icons do not act that way. Will the next generation of Americans miss having an Arnold Palmer?

...

When Palmer's design partner, Ed Seay, was asked his advice for superintendents interested in working in Asia-Pacific, he replied: "If you get the opportunity, take it. First, it's going to put the superintendent on his own. In most cases, what is mundane and a daily routine in the U.S. becomes major over there. He is going to have to be inventive and creative. Whereas here he will have tools to do a job, over there he's going to have to make the tools. What we do in a week here may take 60 or 90 days over here. And that's even at an upscale new golf course

that has a lot of financial support. Then, he can have a marvelous five- or seven-gang mowing unit or triplex, but no one to run it besides himself. So he gets the education of training people.

"When a guy goes over there, he's going to be put under a tremendous amount of individual performance. He's got the opportunity to make some money. And when he gets ready to go back home, he could almost take any job in the world, because the opportunities and situations he will face will be a piece of cake to him. It is very trying."

...

Golf Course Builders Association of America (GCBA) President Paul Eldredge can't explain the continuing golf course construction boom, but he doesn't see "any great letup, either."

The president of Wadsworth Golf Construction Co. in Plainville, Ill., Eldredge said: "All the architects I talk to have work and have a lot prospects are being held up by environmental issues and/or money. I don't know that we'll be building 500 golf courses a year for the next five or six years, but I see a good next couple of years coming."

The growing retirement com-

munity, he said, "is certainly driving a little bit of the golf. Our economy has been running good the last few years, and people who have done well in business and are buying resort homes in golf course communities; that helps."

Eldredge also said the marked increase in new high-end daily-fee facilities is a fallout from the tax-law change removing private club membership costs as a deduction.

Those former private club members "still want the quality and it's a little cheaper to play the high-end courses than join private club," he said. "A lot of the private

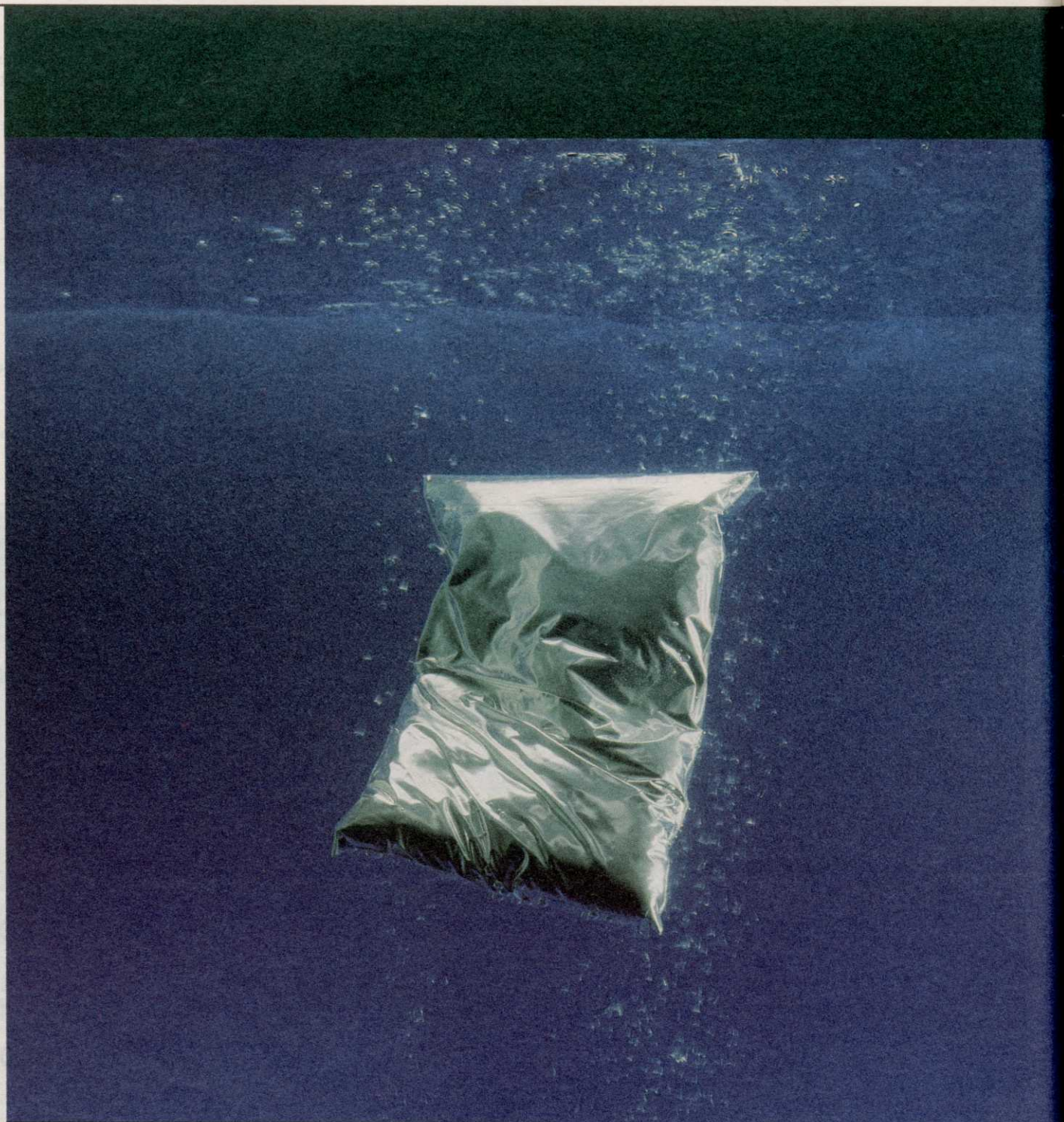
courses we used to build in connection with developments are now going high-end daily-fee."

...

Can you name the most deadly weather phenomenon in the United States? Hurricanes? Floods? Tornadoes? Uh-uh.

Lightning takes an average of about four lives a week, killing more people than hurricanes, floods and tornadoes combined. Global Atmospheric, the lightning guru, says 180-200 deaths are annually attributed to lightning.

For more help, check out our report on weather stations on pages 31-34.



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