

# What's Audubon and what's not

**T**his 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



Hal Phillips,  
editor

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# After tough winter, the virtue is communicating patience

**A**n 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 "Manufactures 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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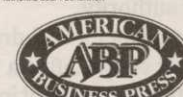
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## Hirsh letter

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on surrounding real-estate development (if applicable) and, if information is available, return on investment analysis.

While I realize that our results to date may be perceived as diminishing the value of "non-signature" architects, this has not been opined.

In fact, the only way to formulate such a conclusion is on a site- or market-specific basis.

We have been asked the question by several clients as to whether a "signature" architect is worth the expense. To many, our advice has been that it is not.

The results of our study show only

averages, only information from a group of architects (not one specific signature architect) and only in the markets studied.

While our study attempts to take a look at the results from different markets (some destination resorts and some primary residential markets), other markets may show different indications.

The purpose of the study is to provoke well thought out decisions on the part of developers, and to illustrate that such a decision is one that can be made objectively through research and analysis.

Another issue we have not considered is the definition of a "signature" architect.

We have tried to identify those perceived as such by the market, but it seems to me that this changes constantly. Are

Greg Norman or Ben Crenshaw now "signature" designers because of their recent successes on and off the golf course? Should Mike Hurdzan, or Jay Morrish, or Tom Doak be considered "signature" because they are well known and respected within the golf industry? I don't know the answer to these questions and only a large survey of the golfing public could answer that.

Your comments to Hal are of great interest to me as I am sure this topic and study will progress and evolve over many years to come.

As a consultant and appraiser I would love to have an instant answer to the signature architect question for my clients.

As a golfer (and *Golf Digest* panelist) I care only about the quality of the golf

experience created.

Maybe someday we could do a survey on the relative financial performances of courses by individual architects.

However, that, too, would be distorted because of the effect of decisions made by the developers and managers of those facilities. Please feel free to call me with any additional comments or questions, or just to "rap" a bit.

By the way, I played and enjoyed Stonewall and hope that if you're in the area sometime you'll call and we can tee it up. Unfortunately, since Stonewall is private and Fazio's Hartefeld National nearby is daily-fee, a financial comparison would be misleading.

Laurence A. Hirsh MAI, SGA  
President, Golf Property Analysts  
Harrisburg, Pa.

## GCBAA reprints cost estimating booklet

CHAPEL HILL, N.C. — The Golf Course Builders Association of America has reprinted its Guide to Estimating Cost for Golf Course Construction, the first printing of which was released in February.

The 18-page document contains descriptions of 25 phases of construction, with charts showing their average costs in four regions of the United States. Worksheets for estimating the cost of a project are included.

They are available for \$25 from GCBAA at 920 Airport Road, Suite 210, Chapel Hill, N.C. 27514; 919-942-8922.

## Jacksonville melee

Continued from previous page

buy or lease Blue Cypress were rendered moot by the IRS rule forbidding for-profit activities on land purchased with tax-exempt bond sales.

"Finally, and less attractively for us, we've discussed a qualified management contract with the city of Jacksonville — 15 years, whereby we won't participate in the gross revenues or profits of the project," said Melnyk. "Of course, all this is premature because the FCT has to sign off and then it goes back to the City Council."

Crescimbeni noted that if the golf course is restored, an open bid for the course management contract would be mandatory.

The situation is further complicated by two of the city's other golf facilities, the now-defunct Dunes and Mill Cove. The Dunes closed several years ago but has subsequently been transformed into an extremely successful non-golf sports complex, according to Crescimbeni.

However, golfers that may have played at the Dunes and Blue Cypress have moved over to another city golf course, the busy Mill Cove, which is owned by the Jacksonville Port Authority (JPA) and leased to an operator, Wayland T. Coppedge. Not surprisingly, Coppedge — worried his surging revenues at Mill Cove will dip if golf at Blue Cypress returns — has joined Duval Audubon and the Sierra Club in opposing the golf restoration.

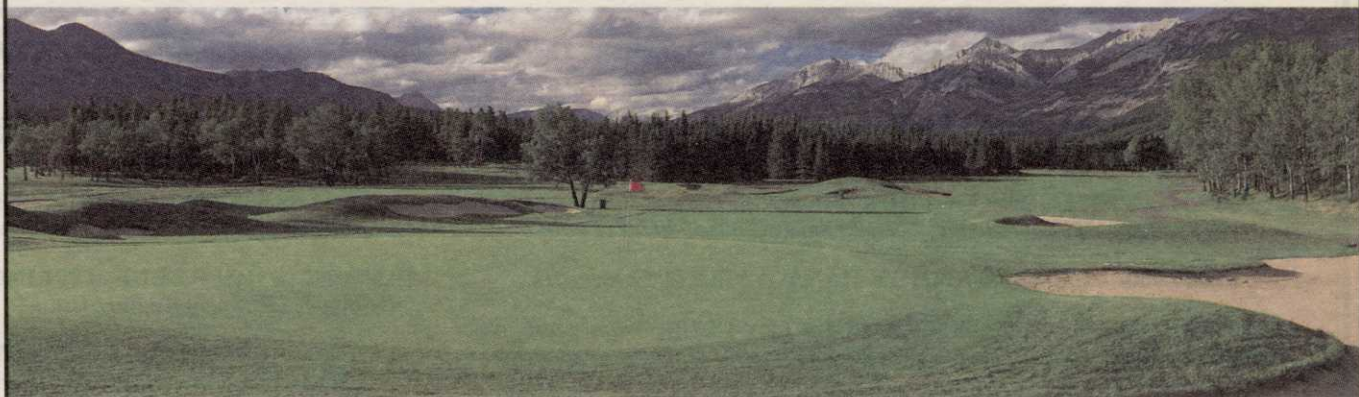
So, even if the FCT okays golf development at Blue Cypress this month, and if the IRS is satisfied Blue Cypress will not be run for profit, expect a full-blown cat fight in City Council chambers come July.



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