

Amid flag-waving, a couple caveats give industry pause



Hal Phillips,
editor

It's always an education to report on the previous year's course openings (see story page 1), as reactions never seem to match up with the data — good or bad.

The 442 facilities unveiled during 1996 constitute the second highest total in history, trailing only 1995's total of 468. However, several people I interviewed for this month's story could hardly believe the 434 figure was accurate. Of course, I assured them the National Golf Foundation (NGF) numbers were reliable — I mean, a course either opens or it doesn't. If anything, the number is low, as certain new course owners surely failed to inform the NGF of their activities.

In any case, several architects I interviewed for the story asked how many courses are currently under construction. When I answered, "more than 800," they were somewhat incredulous.

"Well, that's a healthy number," said one. "But it's hard to believe when I have construction firms calling me looking for jobs."

Another said: "I just don't believe that number. If it's that busy, why are construction people writing my office to get work? Also, there are a lot of architects out there who are really struggling. I guess the market is better for those of us who have established reputations. But the up-and-coming guys are having a real tough time."

Most of the architects interviewed for this story admitted they, too, had fielded calls from course builders eager for work. They also agreed that touring professionals dabbling in design have taken work away from "legitimate" architects.

Two troubling indicators in a sea of rosy market outlooks.

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Ron Dodson, the president and force behind Audubon International, will chuckle when he reads Barry Mothes' interesting trend story on the proliferation of golf courses on or near airport properties (see page 59).

In the story, a developer notes that course placement is crucial to airport projects, as birds have been known to dangerously fowl up (!) jet engines. Indeed, a Federal Aviation Administration employee testified at a hearing that a golf course proposed for land adjacent to a Sacramento-area airport would attract too many birds, making it dangerous for air traffic!

When it comes to the contention that golf courses are natural havens for avian populations, Audubon International

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Sadly, back-40 18 gets deep six

My favorite golf course is shutting down. I say "favorite course" in terms of concept. I never actually saw Bob Spiwak's Whispering Rattlesnakes Golf Course — only photographs and word pictures from its creator. Bob built Whispering Rattlesnakes on his Back 40 in Winthrop, Wash., because he plain loves to golf and plain loves to hike and canoe the land made by the Creator.

A teacher-gone-rustic, a philosopher and freelance writer/photographer, Bob in 1986 turned a bit of wilderness into a bit of wilderness with 18 tees and nine small putting greens. One signature hole carried 64 yards over a pond to a little 16- by 38-foot green; and the other required a chip shot to an island green. The longest hole was a 100-yarder from a 20- by 40-foot tee area set back among trees straight-away to a sharply banked 2,200-square-foot green. We're talking Penncross, Penneagle and SR19/SR20 bentgrass greens here — one of them built to official USGA specs — not your backyard push-up mush.

Bob — whose story on another Washington state development appears on page 59 — then opened this 860-yard walk in the woods to Winthrop-area folks for the Mazama Invitational, an annual charity fund-raiser that attracted more than 70 golfers and raised a good deal of cash for the Montessori School. Friends, neighbors and compatriot photojournalists came from as far away as Maine to visit Bob and play Whispering Rattlesnakes.



Mark Leslie,
managing editor

Wiffi Smith, an LPGA star of the late 1950s, who as an amateur won the U.S., British, French and Mexican Amateurs, visited Whispering Rattlesnakes, became fast friends with Bob and took the title of teaching pro for

the course. How many courses can match that catch?

All the while, Bob has mowed every second or third day and otherwise cared for the course. He had a 1973 Toro walk-behind greens mower. He gained agronomic knowledge. And, nearly from the start, he learned he would rather "superintend" these nine greens than play them. Indeed, the time it took caring for them often precluded him playing them.

Well, Whispering Rattlesnakes is silent. All but two holes are closed. Bob is using those two to teach beginning and intermediate golfers and returning the rest of the land to native habitat (The island-green hole is now a Japanese meditation garden, very sparsely planted with a false creek flowing through it).

The people of Methow Valley are in mourning, as witnessed by the January cover story in the local *Okanogan Ruralite* entitled: "So Long, Whispering Rattlesnakes."

I recall a tale or two from Bob about these nine "children." And so I mourn, too. I wish this time were not over for Bob Spiwak.

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Letters

JAKE LOYALTIES DIVIDED DURING PLAYOFFS

To the editor:

Everyone at Jacobsen was truly entertained by the recent Green Bay Packer/Carolina Panther NFC Championship game. Everyone except the folks in charge of Jake's computers.

The game drew special interest because Jacobsen has its headquarters in Racine, Wis. (Packer Country), and a manufacturing facility and parts distribution in Charlotte, N.C. (Panther Country). The week prior to the game, fans on both sides began sending "friendly" e-mail messages on the company system regarding the projected outcome of the contest.

All well and good until one Packer Backer decided to broadcast color photos. As one former computer source said: "Wow, when that file hit the server, you could probably hear it all the way down in accounting."

Shortly after the Packer Photo Essay made its way to hundreds

of users, the coaches from Jake's computer team put out an APB: "No more big files!!!"

Short ones were okay and the rivalry continued.

Funny thing happened on Monday, Jan. 13, after another lopsided Packer victory — the e-mail from Charlotte was pretty quiet. All you heard was a little meow!

John Mielke
Jacobsen Division of Textron
Racine, Wis.

Ed. — When this issue of Golf Course News went to press, the Super Bowl had not yet been played. Because the GCN staff is entirely comprised of Patriots fans, we wanted to take this belated opportunity to taunt golf industry Packer fans across the nation. Indeed, we have it on good authority that Jacobsen's computers were not bogged down by color photos. In reality, the offending employee crashed the computer trying to send an enormous block of cheese as an e-mail enclosure. So there.

CLEAT MANUFACTURER ADDRESSES TRADEMARK ISSUE

To the editor:

On behalf of Softspikes®, Inc., I want to thank you for the continued coverage *Golf Course News* has given to the spikeless movement and, in particular, to Softspikes, Inc. We are proud of our contributions to help make golf a better game, and we appreciate your efforts to educate the golf industry about this major story.

I did want to bring to your attention the fact that we are concerned about the use of our trademark, Softspikes®, as a generic term (i.e., "soft spikes" or "softspikes").

Softspikes, Inc. pioneered the category of plastic cleats and we remain the leading brand in that category. We manufacture plastic cleats, not "soft spikes." To help your readers better understand the difference between our products and those of our competitors, I ask that *Golf Course News* only use our trademark to

refer to our brand of cleats. By example, you might say "Softspikes® brand plastic cleats," "Softspikes® plastic cleats" or "Softspikes® cleats" in any story or mention of our products.

You should refrain from using soft spikes, softspikes or soft spikes when referring to the classification of products or when referring to any of our competitors' products. The classification is plastic cleats.

I hope this helps clarify the correct use of our trademark and how it should be used when it concerns our company's products.

Kelly Elbin
Softspikes, Inc.
Rockville, Md.

Ed. — We prefer and endeavor to use "spike alternative" or "plastic cleat" whenever possible. However, when quoting sources in stories, trademark protections often go the way of kleenex and refrigerators — the price paid by market pioneers.

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