

During its annual Executive Board meeting last month, the American Society of Golf Course Architects (ASGCA) agreed to a group interview conducted by the Golf Course News staff. The results appear below. Participating ASGCA officers included President Denis Griffiths, Vice President Alice O'Neal Dye, Treasurer John LaFoy, Secretary Robert Lohmann and Immediate Past President Jeff Brauer.

ASGCA directors discuss the future

Golf Course News: There is a huge crop of young golf course architects entering the field. Are they affecting fees and taking away business?

John LaFoy: There has always been a sort of food chain in any business. There are always [clients] out there who are going to hire somebody whose fee is less

and who is perhaps not qualified. But I wouldn't say they are stealing business. I've always told my clients to hire the best architects they can afford, whether it's me or Jack Nicklaus or the guy down the street who has just hung out a shingle.

GCN: Is there enough work for everybody?

LaFoy: We're all salesmen and it's my job to sell myself. If I lose a job I look at it as being my fault, or else the client was looking for something else. I've always felt that I match up with my clients. And sometimes you just don't feel comfortable with a client, and it's best for you and for them that you don't get the job. If someone gets

a job for half your fee, well, I wasn't going to work for that amount anyhow. I compete with people on my own level. I didn't lose that job; someone else won it.

GCN: It hasn't affected you getting the jobs?

Jeff Brauer: In my case, the hit rate seems to be the same. It's tough out there. There are a lot of good people out there doing a lot of good work.

Alice Dye: A lot of these young architects are already working for members of the ASGCA. That's how they're learning, because our [entrance] qualifications are quite stringent. They have to build a number of courses and they have to do quality work before they can even become a member of the society. I think a lot of us have been very instrumental in helping a lot of these young architects get started because we want them in our society.

LaFoy: A number of people in our society — Lee Schmidt and Bobby Weed, for two — have trained under Pete and Alice. So that is a good point.

Denis Griffiths: One of the concerns all of us in the society have is, what's the impact of younger architects with less experience doing projects where they don't understand the complexity of what is involved in golf course design today. Twenty years ago a routing plan, a good idea of what a golf course should look like, and a scale in your back pocket were about all the credentials you needed to do a pretty good job. But today the intricacy of getting a project from start to finish is far more complex. It's a bit scary... and I feel it is a major concern.

GCN: So you are saying a person needs an apprenticeship rather than, say, jumping from landscape architecture school into golf course design?

LaFoy: That is absolutely right. One thing that isn't talked about is architectural roots. It's awful hard to establish any kind of roots without serving an apprenticeship. For example, both Bob [Lohmann] and Jeff [Brauer] have roots attached to Robert Bruce Harris and beyond. My old boss, George Cobb, went back to Fred Finley, a Scotsman. Dan Maples' roots go back to Donald Ross. Pete and Alice did extensive research in Scotland and Ireland before they even attempted a job. A lot of the newer architects just hanging out a shingle have no roots and nothing to take hold as far as architectural style. That's why you see, I'd guess, about 75 percent of the new architects trying to copy the Dyes, or Fazio, or others. And in those cases you only get a cheap imitation.

Brauer: Bob and I came through [Ken] Killian and [Dick] Nugent, great technical architects. We went through the '80s

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ASGCA OFFERS REMODELING GUIDELINES IN BROCHURE

The American Society of golf Course Architects (ASGCA) has introduced a new brochure, "Remodeling Your Golf Course," to help owners, managers, superintendents, green committee members and others who might be involved in remodeling a golf course. To obtain a free copy, phone the ASGCA at 312-372-7090, or visit its website at www.golfdesign.org.

Q&A: ASGCA directors

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and experimented with changes of styles and I find my work going right back to what Nugent told me Robert Bruce Harris told him in 1949.

GCN: Alice, you said you were wondering how young architects can make it today. Are those who are coming in and getting one or two jobs a year surviving?

Dye: I wish I could answer that, but I don't know. We have been instrumental in helping quite a few people get started and we're continuing to do that. We get a

lot of letters from people asking to work for our firm. A lot are trying to get into this field. And I don't know how they can do it unless they do join a firm and serve an apprenticeship.

Bob Lohmann: A lot of people, often landscape architects, work for [golf course] builders as foremen or job superintendents. They get an opportunity to work with architects and with construction plans. There's no better way to learn than that. I did that with Ken [Killian] and Dick [Nugent].

GCN: Baby Boomers are starting to turn 50. How will the aging of the population, in particular the Baby Boomers,

impact design, if at all?

Brauer: I think we've seen some of the changes have already taken place. The Baby Boomer generation is less "clubby" than previous generations and that's led to the public golf boom. They have disposable income at the peak of their career, and that has led to the upscale public golf course. When you talk about physical design, you try to research the market. I researched myself. I turn 42 in a month and I notice very specific design changes. For example, I pay a lot more attention to climbs up onto the tee and make sure you don't have to go through 30 mounds to get to the greens... Look at the access points to the greens and tees as they relate to the cart path. Thirty years ago, you looked at the access points to the green coming from the front. Now you see them coming in from the side.

Dye: I think Baby Boomers are going to want to play different golf courses. Whereas before, people belonged to one club and stayed and played there... They will travel.

GCN: The older generation plays more golf than the younger population. Is it going to drive the building of more courses and mean more work?

Lohmann: An example of remodeling: Mike Hurdzan is designing a new course in Peoria, Weaver Ridge, a public course. The two private clubs in town — Mount Holly and Peoria Country Club — have been doing nothing [for improvements] for years. And all of a sudden they both went into major remodeling. I think you will see a lot of that all over the place, existing courses deciding they have to keep up with the newer courses...

LaFoy: Birmingham, Ala., has always been a big golf city. After Shoal Creek was built, Mountain Brook Club, an old Ross club rebuilt. Then Pete and Alice redid the old West Course at Birmingham Country Club; then they redid the East Course. Vestavia rebuilt; Green Valley rebuilt. Probably three or four other clubs in Birmingham rebuilt. In a period of five years, almost every country club in Birmingham rebuilt after Shoal Creek moved in. I think you will continue to see that. There will be more clubs competing for the Baby Boomer business in addition to the upscale daily-fee courses.

GCN: Eighty percent of today's new courses are public. Do you see this trend continuing?

Brauer: I don't think it's a new trend. I think starting in 1897 it's been going. I pulled out some old minutes of ASGCA meetings. In its second or third year, [the society] was talking about creating more access to public golf.

Dye: Public golf has changed from just municipal golf, where the courses were miserable, up to the point where some are very nice now.

GCN: What is being done and what can be done to develop less costly golf courses?

Griffiths: I haven't seen a trend yet. We're still going up. I think a lot of it is perception: This goes to the Baby Boomers, who feel they have to play on an upscale daily-fee golf course. Why? What's wrong with just a good, quality golf course that doesn't have waterfalls or lakes but has a medium amount of maintenance and is an enjoyable experience? I think our perception of what is a "quality game of golf" today is a bit twisted. Just because I didn't have a perfect lie doesn't mean my game was ruined.

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