

Q&A: Phelps

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Friends tell me they can't devote a whole day to a round of golf. Add the drive there and back, warming up, the 5-hour round, settling the bets, and it's an 8-hour-plus day for some. A lot of folks trying to get into this game have a young family and other things they have to do.

GCN: What should be done about it, and by whom?

DP: We need to build more affordable courses, first of all, and more player-friendly courses. But that's difficult since many developers don't want that kind of course because they don't think it will sell adjacent lots. The course architects themselves are a little leery of doing that type of course because it won't make the magazines and rankings and so on.

GCN: There used to be a much higher percentage of projects driven by housing. The figures show more courses are stand-alone now. Why isn't that bringing lower-cost courses onto the market?

DP: That's a good question. We still jump for joy when we get a pure golf course — a core course without housing around it. Those are still fairly rare — at least in this part of the country.

GCN: What's it like having your son Rick working with you?

DP: It's been great. As a youngster of 8, he'd be out on the site with me holding the survey rod.

Rick adds a breath of fresh air to the office. I've been doing this 37 years and Rick has some different ideas. And he has brought me into the computer age. I'm still scared to death of them myself.

GCN: Give us an example of what "fresh new ideas" in design would entail.

DP: Let me give you, first, an example of why we want to do it. I have done so many projects in Colorado that on occasion we hear the comment, "We know you have been successful and have done profitable and fun golf courses, but we want a fresh face." That has always been disturbing because they always preface it with the fact that we've done such a great job.

So, Rick for the last several years, has said, "Hey, I'm a fresh face." And we just added Kevin Atkinson, a young man who has been with Tom Clark and Brian Ault. Kevin brings in more fresh ideas and I think he will be an excellent designer.

But with the fresh face, the younger approach, I think we're still going to have to be very cautious on costs. I've worked on golf course crews, so I've always been careful not to create a lot of hand maintenance, steep slopes, and dangerous things. Yet that's what gets the attention.

I was at a golf course in Texas,

touring with the superintendent, when a call came over the radio that one of the guys had slipped on a bank early in the morning and gone underneath the old Flymo and cut off three toes. Things like that caused them to redesign the Flymo.

GCN: Rick just got voted in as an associate member of the ASGCA. Are you proud of him?

DP: Absolutely. It's wonderful to have him in the society. He

will be doing a lot of contributions to the society. He has a strong interest in it and in golf course architecture.

I was president in 1980-81, when we made our first trip to Scotland. Rick's first official meeting will be in Ireland next year.

GCN: Are you personally going to cut back now?

DP: I'm going to stay active. My whole future has changed since I lost my wife a year ago. I

had looked forward to slowing down and traveling with her. But to lose her suddenly... I don't want to give it up... I enjoy it too much.

We're trying to take a bit of a new tack on our design. We want to step up a notch or two and really strike out here in a fresh direction with Rick and Kevin. And what I'm seeing is exciting. We think it will open a new page for us — not just being Rocky Mountain architects.

COLO. HALL INDUCTS PHELPS

Dick Phelps has been inducted into the Colorado Golf Hall of Fame. While most of his 250 golf course designs have been in Colorado, Phelps has designed or remodeled courses in 22 states. Eight are ranked in the respective states' top 10 courses.

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