

Nothing's changed, everything's changed

This issue was truly a treat to put together. Along with the breaking industry news that you've grown accustomed to gleaming from these pages over the past 10 years, this issue contains a special 14-page section celebrating our 10th anniversary.



Michael Levans,
editor

When we sat down to brainstorm how to present such a section, we couldn't think of a better way than letting the industry speak for itself. In turn, we asked two or three illuminaries representing each of our departments (Maintenance, Design & Development, Management and Supplier Business) to weigh in and offer us their perspective on the 10 years just past.

But more importantly, we asked them consider where we're headed now that we have 10 more years tucked neatly under the collective belt. Not to my surprise, the columns and writing styles where as diverse as the participants, complete with witty repartee and solemn calls for increased industry awareness.

These writers include superintendents, course architects, course management professionals as well as the supplier's who have provided the tools for the job. It's a fun trip down memory lane and a good gaze into the crystal ball. The section kicks off on page 21 with an conversation between business partners Arnold Palmer and Ed Seay on the state of industry and travels along for 13 pages which include an extensive timeline summarizing the decade.

What do we learn from all of this?

GPS. Autonomous vehicles. Slow-release fertilizers. The HydroJect. Growth regulators. The World Wide Web. The tools of the golf course superintendent have changed — are changing — but the goal of the superintendent remains the same.

Over the past 10 years the game of golf has embedded itself into the North American psyche — I'd even go as far as saying that it's *the* default outdoor activity. The golf shirt has become "business casual." Golf has certainly *arrived*, but the game has remained the same.

In 10 years the golf course business became an industry then morphed into a booming industry with the hopes of sustaining its unprecedented growth. How does it do this?

The answer may never change. Twenty years ago my grandfather, a retired millworker turned house painter, was charged with keeping an eye on me during the summer months while Dad worked and Mom finished school. On the days there was

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Drought, flood, fire ants and mussel invasions, yet GCN prevails

Have you ever thought about time being compressed? I'd like to talk to Mr. Einstein about this because it certainly seems like the past 10 years have swiftly passed. Wars and rumors of wars. Hurricanes and earthquakes. Droughts and floods. (Sometimes, as Texas discovered last year, droughts followed immediately by floods.) Fire ant invasions from the south and mussel invasions from the north. Attacks from raving madmen from the far left (read *Earth Firsters*) and the simply misled from the not-so-far left (read Sierra Clubites).

They have all come and gone, and yet we remain. I could get deeply philosophical here, but those who know me realize I usually poke fun at deep philosophers. Natural and manmade disasters aside, I'd rather remember the fun, and funny, things about this past decade. After all, golf is a fun game filled with fun people.

It is an industry that remains probably more insulated from changes in society than any other industry. Character may not matter in the White House, but it does in golf. Honesty and integrity may have vanished to a great degree around the country, but they are Standard Operating Procedure in golf. At least, that's my take.

What other industry could compare icons to our Arnold Palmer, Jack Nicklaus and Tom Fazio? (Or name your top three.)

What other industry has the character, and characters, as our Pete and Alice Dye, Brent Wadsworth and Ted Horton?

What other holds its traditions, and tradition-makers, in such high esteem as does golf in the names of Old Tom Morris, Bobby Jones, Ben Hogan and Donald Ross and in such places as St. Andrews and Cypress Point?

Every day, racial hatred is evident in the news somewhere. But there was only one Shoal Creek incident that made golf news in 10 years. What other industry has so wholly — and wholeheartedly — supported anything approaching The First Tee program, reaching out, in great part, to inner-city youths?

Every day, vitriolic diatribes are in the news somewhere, about something or someone. People don't get attacked in golf, yet golf is always being attacked. Does that seem odd to you?

Ten years and myriad topics have passed. I've written of:

- Societal Deviation: This broke through golf's barriers when what I called "Potty Parity legislation" in some states demanded that new construction build as much as twice as much women's room space as men's room.

- Political Correctness: "Are you Politically Correct? Are you socially 'with it'? Are you caffeine-free, yogurt-loving and driving a recyclable utility vehicle? ... Remember, you must say 'tree butcher' but not 'lumberjack.' Or 'counterfactual proposition' but not 'lie.' (Hey, this was Clinton-speak before we ever heard of the man.)"

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Mark Leslie,
managing editor

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Tennis anyone? Is there a weak backhand on golf's horizon?

By PETER BLAIS • Associate Editor

I drive by the municipal tennis courts in our area and what do I see? Cracked asphalt, ratty netting, tilted posts, patched fences, broken light bulbs. Heck, even golf cars from a neighboring course using one of the courts as a temporary storage area.

What's even more depressing is what I don't see. Players. At least none under 35. Just an occasional pair of older knee- and elbow-braced hackers who speak warmly of Rod Laver and Roy Emerson, but don't know, or much less care, who are the world's top-10 ATP-ranked players in 1999.

And I — a once-fanatical tennis player — begin to wonder. Am I looking at golf's future?

Backed by a seemingly inexhaustible financial spigot of federal funding, municipalities from Maine to California poured out thousands of public tennis courts in the 1960s and 1970s. I spent countless hours on some of those courts. I'd occasionally check out the local upscale public courts and the private facilities at local golf and tennis clubs. But as a youth with limited funds, I never felt quite welcome there.

As I grew older and my wallet somewhat larger, my interest in tennis waned. The upscale public and private courts that had little interest in me as a teenager, now held little interest for me as a

young adult beginning to understand the concept and choices involved in discretionary income.

As the federal funding that built them dried up and the municipalities that maintained them tightened their financial belts, the municipal courts fell into disrepair. The upscale public courts closed their doors and became warehouses. The private tennis clubs lost members and tennis became a secondary amenity at golf and tennis clubs.

In 1987 there were 17 million tennis players, according to the National Sporting Goods Association. By 1997, the number had dropped to 11 million, a 4.1-percent annual decrease.

I've been driving by the local municipal golf course lately. I see young kids — a lot of them — with bags slung over their shoulders, making their way to a clubhouse, where they pay \$6 to play all day on a well-kept course. Then I drive a few miles past the private course. Few kids there. A few miles farther on is an upscale public course. Even fewer youngsters there.

I wonder how welcome the \$6 youngsters at the local muni would feel if they showed up at the local private and upscale public layouts? I wonder what those kids will be doing for recreation 10 years from now, when their wallets start to grow?

I've been with *Golf Course News* almost since its inception a decade

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*I drive by the municipal
tennis courts in our area
and what do I see?
Cracked asphalt, ratty
netting, tilted posts,
patched fences, broken
light bulbs.*

Leslie commentary

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My solution? "Start another movement. Call it Socially Moral. Or Legitimately Truthful. Or Unabridgedly Right... Then concentrate on our similarities, on those things that pull us together, not divide. Even if it hurts, let's tell the truth, not distort it with unbridled rhetoric."

• Acronymphobia: What are the signs of acronymphobia? Overlapping duties, duplication to the quadruplicate, tongue-twisting departmentese... just a general confusion, diffusion, evasion, paperwork profusion. We won't even guestimate the cost to Mr. Taxpayer America. When I

wrote about acronymphobia, my latest run-in came with my shoes just cooling from a trip to cover the GCSAA conference and GCBAA banquet, then heading out for the ASGCA meeting wondering if a representative would be there from the EPA, or perhaps the state DEP. I just knew that on the plane, the pilot was concerned about the FAA. An NBC film crew was on board, probably contemplating actions by the FCC.

• AHA! Herewith, I created one more acronym to the industry parlance. AHA! stands for American Hyper-Activist. That is the type of person who will stop at no deviant behavior (like spiking trees or pouring chlorine on a golf course) to stop

another person from imposing his will on the environment.

• *Earth First!ers*: So, the Sierra Club is a bunch of wimps who've sold out to The Establishment. Factories don't burn down by themselves; they need your help. And President Clinton is environmentally "spineless." Welcome to the world of Earth First! ... And pray they don't visit **your** golf course.

• The media taking pot shots at each other: Case-in-Point: ABC-TV consumer reporter John Stossel, admitting that "in many ways I've been part of the problem," added: "Here is where we in the press have done such a bad job... We practically run from scare to scare. We say this kills people, that kills people. We have focused on the dramatic in an interesting way — economics. It sells newspapers. It gets more people to watch our programming..."

• Environmentalists taking pot shots at each other: Audubon International President Ron Dodson, speaking on environmental groups: "Many have become top-heavy, bureaucratic, increasingly focused on negative agendas, and seem to oppose anything that anyone proposed at any location. We have seen a solemn attempt to convince the public that the environmental issues we face today are so complex and convoluted, the only meaningful contributions that individuals can make to environmental improvements is in the form of checks..."

• Hiring El Presidente: "Got a great idea for your New Year consideration: When Bill Clinton steps down as president, hire him as the spokesman for the golf industry. Hey, no sneers and jeers, please. Here's a guy — better still, a golfer — who has maintained public support, even stayed out of jail, in the midst of all this chaos. So, just think what he could do working for an ethical, clean, God-fearing sport like golf."

Yes, by the grace of God, it has all been fun. And it could not have happened in another industry. Because there is nothing like golf and the people who make it run.

Blais commentary

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ago. During that time, I've seen a lot of things the golf industry should be proud of:

• The environmental benefits of its association with Audubon International, the Cape Cod Study on pesticide leaching and the efforts of superintendents to reduce pesticide and water use.

• The billions of dollars in economic activity, job creation and tax base golf courses have generated on the local, state and national level.

• The sheer beauty of the 3,500-plus courses sculpted over the past 10 years on everything from mountain-sides to landfills.

But as impressive as that all might be, it will all be for naught if those \$6 youngsters aren't playing on those upscale publics and privates come 2010. And they won't be, unless they are made to feel welcome by 2005, 2004, 2003, 2002, 2001, 2000 and the remainder of 1999.

The First Tee Program is a good start. But it will lean heavily on municipalities. Without upscale public and private facilities willingly opening their doors to young golfers, the First Tee Program will only slow golf's decline. Cracked asphalt and shredded nets will be replaced by dying greens and overgrown bunkers. It's up to the daily-fee and private course operators to see that doesn't happen to the game that has replaced tennis in many a Baby Boomer's heart.

Savvy course operators have figured that out. They know the future depends not only on how they treat today's best customers, but also how they treat the best customers of tomorrow.

One of the savviest is SunCor, a Phoenix-based course development and management company. To keep the game growing and ensure a future supply of golfers, SunCor has stressed junior golf through kid-friendly layouts and affordable fees in an area where the \$100-plus green fee is the norm.

For example, at its Art Hills-designed Palm Valley Golf Club, SunCor operates one of the state's top junior programs and has developed a set of far-forward tees inconspicuously worked into the course design that allows younger players to enjoy the game at a distance they can handle.

Across the Valley of the Sun in Fountain Hills, juniors can play for as little as \$2 a round at Keith Foster-designed SunRidge Canyon when accompanied by a parent.

Not only now, but in the future, which is the only way golf will continue to prosper. I've learned that, if nothing else, over the past 10 years.

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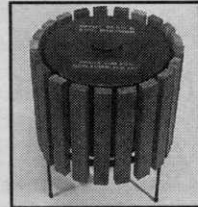
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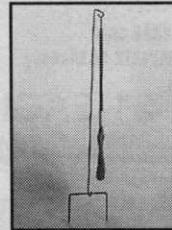
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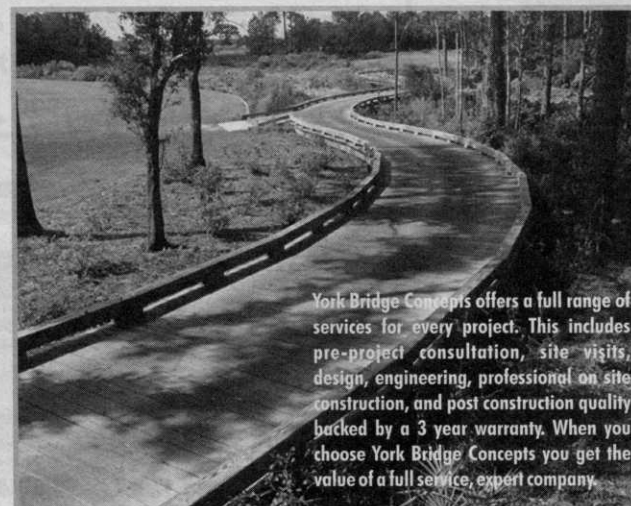
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