

USGA a true steward of earth

"People will say, 'Don't do that study. Let sleeping dogs lay.' But I don't understand that thinking. I look at it as if you're off in the rough and move the ball. Do you call a penalty on yourself, or don't you? Working for the USGA, you call the penalty."

— Dr. Mike Kenna,
USGA Director of Research

A "steward," according to Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, is a person who manages a household, who supervises provisions, who actively directs affairs.

The golf industry has, in recent years at least, prided itself on being an "environmental steward of the earth." This attention to wildlife ecology, habitat and water quality has spawned the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary System for Golf Courses, the evolution of the biological control manufacturing industry, such technology as the BioJect — and extensive research into the impact of course maintenance.

This aggressive awareness creates enormous weight for golf representatives when walking in that world occupied by members of such groups as the Sierra Club and Audubon Society and by such government agencies as the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and state Departments of Natural Resources. Golf can now point to its positives.

Witness the Valderrama Declaration, which brought together (this winter in Spain) officials from such diverse groups as the United States and European golf associations, Audubon International, International Olympic Committee, World Wide Fund for Nature, United Nations and European Commission. The signatures on that document reminded me of the Declaration of Independence. They were bold. They were aggressive.

They were obviously not signed by timid "let-us-wait-and-see'ers." They were not signed by "don't-rock-the-boat'ers." Those signatures spoke volumes — about the officials on both sides of the environmental issue.

With its annual pronouncements of research funding, the U.S. Golf Association declares — in no uncertain terms — that golf will not only take environmental activists' best shot, it will fund the research to provide that fodder. The golf industry does want to know if any maintenance practices pose danger, if any chemical would be more safely applied by an alternative method, if a natural predator of mole crickets could better fight them than a pesticide could.

This is proof that the USGA and superintendents are truly stewards of the environment.

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Speaking of the severe drought in Texas (see story page 29), Jack Swayze of Terra Turf Trees in Houston warned: "Trees that went to sleep won't wake up."

When combined with construction damage, significant renovation, root cutting, irrigation installation, cut-and-fill damage, etc., the severe drought could bring major problems, Swayze said.



Mark Leslie, editor

Will this new course growth ever slow? Who knows

During most of the 1980s, the United States opened between 150 and 200 courses a year, according to the National Golf Foundation. Golf course construction was a relatively quiet industry.

That all changed with the dawn of the 1990s. In 1991, the United States gave birth to 351 new courses. In 1992, the figure reached 354. A year later it was 358.

New golf course construction companies opened up. Individual architects at large firms left their employers to hang up their own shingles.

Despite the boom times, headlines like "Golf bubble set to burst" were showing up in major publications.

Most of those gathered at the National Golf Foundation 1992 Golf Summit in Orlando were a bit more optimistic. They generally saw 350 as a sustainable figure. It might move up or down a few courses each year as the 1990s continued, they predicted. But even the golf industry's most enthusiastic cheerleaders didn't foresee what has come to pass.

The numbers continued to grow, topping the 400 mark in 1995 with a then-record 468 new courses teeing off. Now 400 new course openings a year was the benchmark. And the industry maintained it. The number of new course openings never dipped below 400 through the second half of the 1990s. And in 1999, it exceeded 500 for the first time with 509 new course openings (see story page 1) around the country.

"I never expected it to keep growing like this," said Allan MacCurrach, whose firm, MacCurrach Golf Construction, won this year's Golf Course News Big Builder of the Year award.

Neither did anyone else. And with another 958 under construction and 823 in planning, who's to say how long the new record might last.

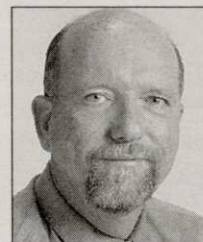
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For years the golf course management industry had its Big Two — American Golf Corp. and ClubCorp. With more than 200 courses apiece, these two far outstripped the rest of the industry in terms of total courses.

Well, the Big Two has become the Big Three. With its recent acquisition of KSL Fairway's 30 courses [see page 1], Meadowbrook now operates roughly 100 golf facilities through Meadowbrook and its IGM subsidiary.

But the Beverly Hills-based firm doesn't plan to stop there. The conversion of its preferred stock into common stock "cleared the balance sheet for additional acquisitions in the future," explained Meadowbrook Chairman Arnold Rosenstein.

The consolidation of the golf course management industry continues. Don't be surprised to see a few other firms top the century mark in the coming years.



Peter Blais,
managing editor

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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

There is more to course design than length

To the editor:

Rarely do I ever comment on what I read in various newspapers because almost everything is newsworthy — to someone. But once in a while you see something that is so ridiculous that it requires a little response. And here I am referring to the article in your January 2000 issue "Gibbs bringing longest hole to United States."

One hopes that the state of golf course design, construction and marketing has not gotten to the stage that everything has to have a gimmick. The only thing that a 950-plus-yard hole needs is a dinosaur, windmill, etc. to be complete.

Think about this. What is fun

about a hole that requires, even from the normal 720-yard tees, the average player to hit (and hit them pretty good) a driver, 3-wood, 3-wood, and then approach shot? There is no strategy to that. There is nothing interesting. It's just long.

This almost reminds me of the golf courses that advertise the replicas of famous holes. It seems that the designer suffered from a great lack of creativity and had to fall back on someone else's ideas. At least those copy holes are closer to real golf than a 965-yard par-whatever.

I guess this means that I am something of a traditionalist when it comes to golf. The fact that I think that Pinehurst #2



"This course must have been designed for a gorilla!"

and Prairie Dunes are great courses that have no gimmicks, no funky holes, no par-7s, but are just great fun to play over and over again. Hopefully our

industry and this great sport can survive such weak ideas as "the longest golf hole in the world."

Thanks for listening.

David L. Whelchel