

Management Co. list retooled for 2001

When you turn to page 22 in this month's issue, you'll notice that *Golf Course News'* annual Management Company List looks a bit different. Due to the fact that we added more than 40 new companies this year, we decided to streamline the way we present the information.

This year's list features 141 companies, all ranked by the number of courses in each of the firm's portfolios. The list not only provides an instant snapshot of the numbers that shape the golf course management business but also illustrates the tumultuous times that many of the companies have been going through.

In addition to the section in this issue, a complete list of the companies, their full course portfolios and contact information is now available on the Web at www.golfcoursenews.com.

PLENTY OF CHANGES

While management companies still have almost 1,600 courses in their collective clutches, one look at this year's list and you'll see that many large companies have left the building.

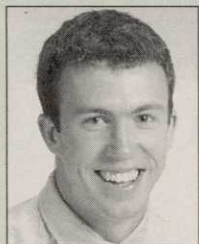
Some of the biggest firm's from last year's list went out of business, including Family Golf Centers and Golden Bear Club Services. Golf Trust of America is also absent from the list as they sort through their liquidation process.

A number of other firms revamped

their portfolios and plenty of courses changed hands. And despite the economics of the marketplace, firms such as Gotham Golf Partners, GolfMatrix, and Heritage Golf Group have all expanded.

AMERICAN GOLF STILL LEADING

There are also dozens of new additions: Medallion Golf Group, Redstone Golf Management, and Z Golf, just to name a few. Still another company has changed its name: Shaker Golf Corp. has now become Vintage Golf Properties.



Andrew Overbeck,
managing editor

This year's top companies, however, have not changed much, with American Golf Corp. still holding a substantial lead with 294 courses. ClubCorp and Troon Golf round out the top three with 118 and 54 courses, respectively.

FEEDBACK

As always, we here at *GCN* look forward to getting feedback from the industry on the new format of the Management Company List.

And although we strive to update this list every year with the most current information, please let us know if any of the information on the list is not correct.

Golf and the Census

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State holds 15 million people today. Its population is projected to hit 20 million in 2020 and 30 to 40 million by 2050.

Florida adds 750 new people every single day. At current rates, Florida needs 111,000 more gallons of fresh water today than it needed yesterday, and the same tomorrow. And so on. This in a state where water shortages, salt water encroachment and diminishing aquifers are already serious problems.

Florida could build huge desalinization plants and start tapping the Atlantic and the Gulf of Mexico, but that would be very expensive water indeed.

Not many Floridians are crazy about what's happening to their state. Some 72 percent of them say that growth, sprawl and overpopulation are Florida's worst problems.

HIGH GROWTH IN THE ROCKIES

Even in Colorado, residents are alarmed by rapid growth. The state's population is expected to increase by 67 percent over 25 years, from 4.3 million to 6.4 million.

That's trivial compared to California. Nonetheless, 72 percent of Coloradans, in a recent poll, said they believe that "the current pace of population growth threatens the quality of life."

Fully 70 percent said state and federal leaders "have a responsibility to reduce development and halt population growth so that a high quality of life, a healthy environment and a sound economy can be maintained."

If there's a bright side to a population that's burgeoning out of control, it might be that golf courses will be more highly valued for preserving at least some open space. ■

MAILBAG

REFUTING THE 'THREE-YEAR RULE'

Dear editor:

I read your article about the "three-year rule" (May issue), and had to let you know about golf courses on the North Shore of Chicago. My course, Sunset Ridge Country Club, was built in 1923, and I'm only the fourth superintendent. Domenic Grotti was here from 1933 to 1978, and I've been here 36 years, including 22 as superintendent.

I could come up with another 20

guys who have been at their clubs for 15 years or more. Ed Fischer has been at Old Elm Club for 30 years. Julius Albaugh has been at Westmoreland Country Club for more than 30 years. And Mike Bauier has been at Inverness Golf Club for some 30 years.

I know of five more superintendents in this area who've been in their current jobs at least 20 years.

Dennis Miller, *Sunset Ridge CC, Northfield, Ill.*

Augusta National

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greens are at their best in early spring before the onslaught of summer heat and humidity.

Subsurface heating coils help bring early-season growth to some of the greens ahead of Mother Nature's schedule. It has been said that cooling tubes beneath some of the greens help prolong the quality of the bentgrass when the heat and humidity arrive.

To achieve Stimpmeter speeds of 12 or even 13 requires bentgrass and special mowers with extremely thin bed knives. Even so, the height of cut for Masters week (approximately 1/8 inch) cannot be maintained throughout the golf season. The grass will die.

Achieving these speeds requires intense attention to the greens with many actions beyond only mowing. With fewer than 10,000 rounds of golf a year and restricted play leading up to Masters week, traffic over the course is at best modest. Limited annual play eliminates the cancerous effects of traffic-induced compaction that stresses many courses.

MAINTENANCE IN THE REAL WORLD

Courses that must withstand 40,000, 60,000 or even 100,000 rounds of play per year cannot compete. Tropical locations where bentgrass is unknown must deal with Bermudagrass cultivars or perhaps paspalum on the greens. Trying to achieve Augusta greens' speeds on Bermuda or paspalum cannot be done, even with the new Tifeagle hybrid Bermuda variety. Bermudagrass cannot be cut as closely as creeping bent.

Trying to shave down Bermudagrass

greens seeking ever-faster Stimpmeter readings leads to deterioration in the reliability of the turf and the quality of the putting. In any event, remember that Augusta's greens speeds are faster during Masters week than at any other time of the year. They are not maintained at that height throughout the year. They cannot be.

The immaculate perfection of fairways, and now even a little semi-rough "second cut" along with tees and greens, is as much due to superb management of fertilizers and micronutrients as it is of mowing. Not every other course everywhere



View of green at Augusta National

can afford the price of intense micronutrient supplements and nitrogen-phosphorus-potassium fertilizer programs. Mowing each year with brand new equipment that is carefully adjusted, perhaps with factory mechanic assistance, helps. Most golf courses cannot afford to replace all their primary and expensive mowing equipment every year.

AZALEAS BY FEDEX

The spectacular floral show around

some of the more popularly televised holes reflects a favorable matching of climate, season and horticulture. Not all those flowers are there every year. If nature is off schedule, hot houses or cooled greenhouses help regulate the timing of Azalea flowering. Overnight delivery and placement of some flowering shrubs can occur at Augusta. But can the average course afford it?

No cart paths mar the view. With relatively few rounds of golf being played and caddies on hand, there is no need for paths.

The smooth appearance of the tidy pine needles under the native pines and around the recently planted trees is not a gift of nature. Not all those pine needles began their existence on an Augusta pine tree. Considerable effort is required to make that pine needle soil cover look so nice.

AESTHETICS VERSUS CASH FLOW

Augusta National is a wonderful course. It is unfortunate, however, that too many other people long for similar playing conditions. Since most public courses and country clubs must earn a profit or at least break even, it is suggested that while one can appreciate the aesthetics of Augusta, it is essential to tailor one's own ideals and objectives to financial reality. Increased maintenance costs must pass through to the end user.

There are all too many indications around now that escalating green fees,

guest fees and joining fees are discouraging new players and limiting the play of average golfers in many markets. Decreasing the amount of play by excessive cost is only desirable at a few select and noted courses.

There are many rational and efficient actions an experienced superintendent can do – given a reasonable budget, or modest budget increase – to improve the appearance and quality of the course. Some owners and operators only want average or marginal maintenance results, and in some markets those are acceptable.

SETTING REASONABLE STANDARDS

Not every course must strive to produce an Augusta "10." Most golfers would be very pleased with conditions equating to seven or eight on the Augusta scale. For high traffic courses, five or six, together with smooth, putttable greens, would produce the most favorable revenue stream. Improvements in green speeds and in the appearance of the turf in general can add an extra bit that does distinguish the course from others that don't offer these conditions.

These efforts can translate into increased revenue for the course. Members surely appreciate improved levels of turfgrass quality. Scores can improve with better turf. It is up to each individual course to set a reasonable or attainable standard. What is good for Augusta is not necessarily good or practical for every one else. ■

Ron Fream, of Fream & Dale Golfplan, has been involved with planning, design, construction and maintenance of golf courses in about 60 countries.