

Technology threatening course obsolescence, architects warn

CHICAGO — Golf course architects believe there should be "a line drawn in the sand" — at least for tournament golf — or technology could render many courses obsolete.

"The challenge will grow even more difficult with each passing year," said the board of governors of the American Society of Golf Course Architects, in a position paper issued recently. "It is not just an issue for new courses, but for every club that finds its best golf holes rendered defenseless by technology."

The board added: "It is difficult and some-

designer intended.

In 1994, the ASGCA issued a "white paper" on the problem, its original warning, pointing out that advancements in golf course maintenance, club design and ball technology have altered the way the game is played and how courses are designed.

Since then, equipment advances have enabled golfers — including hacks — to hit longer shots, with no end in sight.

TOURNAMENT BALL

Some of the group's most prominent designers, such as Jack Nicklaus and Pete Dye, have long called for a "tournament ball" that would control distance. And a number of ASGCA past presidents, including Bobby and Rees Jones, Ed Seay, Art Hills and Geoffery Cornish, support the call to review technology's impact on the game.

"Technological parameters would enable some of the great traditional courses to continue to host major tournaments," said current ASGCA president Damian Pascuzzo. "They would enable us to design new courses that won't be obsolete in a few years."

Longer drives by high-handicap players also are forcing designers to widen fairway corridors to accommodate more pronounced slice and hook shots. "Safety is a real concern," said Pascuzzo.

DISCOURAGING NEW GOLFERS

Pascuzzo added that if technology dictates longer and wider golf courses, it will further escalate land acquisition and maintenance costs, ultimately driving up green fees and membership dues.

"We're already designing 7,000-yard courses," he said. "What's next — 8,000 or 9,000 yards? Or does technology force designers to 'trick up' a course to defend par? Frankly, we think that solution is not good for golf. But if technology continues to give

Continued on page 23



ASGCA executive committee, standing left to right, Jay Morrish (vice president), Clyde Johnson (treasurer), and Bill Love (secretary). Seated, left to right, Brian Ault (immediate past president), Damian Pascuzzo (president).

times impossible because of land restrictions for architects to design courses that will challenge top players using high-tech golf clubs and balls."

As modern golf becomes more of a power game, designers are finding it difficult to create holes that require good players to hit long irons onto the green. In this summer's U.S. Open, for instance, players were driving with two irons on a 490-yard hole — not the driver and long iron the

Diamond Players breaks from Golf Trust

By JAY FINEGAN

ORLANDO, Fla. — Diamond Players Club, a golf management company, has terminated leases at two Orlando-area courses owned by Golf Trust of America, a South Carolina real estate trust now liquidating its golf property portfolio.

Gregg Gagliardi, chief executive officer of DPC, said his firm is no longer connected with Sweetwater Country Club or the former Diamond Players Club Wekiva, both in Longwood, Fla. DPC Wekiva has reverted to its former name — Wekiva Golf Club.

DPC had run the clubs for two and a half years, but according to Gagliardi, "they didn't fit our strategy going forward. We decided to cut bait and focus on Diamond Players Club Clermont, which we own. Golf Trust is a class organization, and they were good to work with. The parting was very amicable."

PERFECTING SYSTEMS

Golf Trust, of Charleston, has taken the two clubs back and will run them until they are sold under their liquidation strategy, Gagliardi said.

"We just needed to retrench," he added. "We have a great course here at Clermont. We're trying to build a brand, and one of the things we learned is that you need to get all your systems perfectly in place and entrenched and

operating for a couple of years before you take on anything else. We learned that the hard way. This course is our prototype. We will get it to where we want it, and go from there."

HIGHEST IN FLORIDA

The Clermont club is DPC's only golf facility. Gagliardi called it "the best layout in the state, next to Black Diamond Ranch & Country Club." The Terry LaGree design, opened in 1999,



A view of the DPC Clermont

has an elevation change of 280 feet — the highest in Florida, he said.

"We have a par-3 of 250 yards from the back tees, and it drops 90 feet from tee to green," Gagliardi said. "It is very much not a Florida golf course. It's more like an Irish course, with the gorse."

The semi-private layout — a par-71, 6,911-yard track — offers affordable golf, ranging from \$30 in the summer to \$90 in the winter.

Adelson named GM at Mirabel Club

SCOTTSDALE, Ariz. — Steve Adelson has been named general manager of the Mirabel Club, a private golf club under development here by Discovery Land Co. and Terrabrook. Before joining Mirabel, Adelson was a founder of the acclaimed Raven Golf Clubs in Phoe-

nix and Tucson. After Raven Golf was acquired by Intrawest in 1998, Adelson became vice president of development and management. Mirabel, set to open late this year, is a gated community and private equity club featuring a Tom Fazio design.

GE Capital buying Heller

By JAY FINEGAN

CHICAGO — Heller Financial, a \$20-billion commercial lender that recently launched a golf financing division, is being acquired by GE Capital, the \$370-billion financial arm of General Electric Co.

Chicago-based Heller established the golf lending group in hopes of filling the void created when Bank of America abandoned the golf-financing field last fall.

Rick Nekoroski, a vice president and investment officer in the Heller golf unit, said it's way too early to gauge the transaction's impact on the golf-lending operation.

"In 60 to 90 days we'll know a lot more about how the acquisition will affect us," said Nekoroski, who handles the eastern half of the country from Boston. "I'm continuing to put out proposals on new deals, and we're closing deals involving course acquisitions. So we're still in business, still doing golf deals."

Christy Lockridge, product manager of Heller's golf group, said "it's business as usual for the whole department."

LOWER COST OF FUNDS

GE Capital is paying a premium for Heller — \$53.75 a share — 50 percent more than Heller's closing price July 27 on the New York Stock Exchange. Japan's Fuji Bank, which owns 52 percent of Heller and controls 77 percent of the voting power, agreed to the deal.

According to Nekoroski, the acquisition may work to the advantage of borrowers. GE Capital, he said "is not just buying the Heller portfolio. They are buying the people and the intellectual property. So all assumptions are that all business units will continue to operate, which could be great for golf, because we'd have access to a lower cost of funds and a bigger machine."

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Crist on liability

Continued from page 5

apparatus, the facility's due care responsibility becomes greater.

The judge in the *Maussner* case put it this way: "All golf courses have a duty to post a sign that details what, if any, safety procedures are being utilized by the golf course to protect its patrons from lightning....If, however, a golf course chooses to utilize a particular safety feature, it owes a duty of reasonable care to its patrons to use it correctly."

Similar complexities are involved in the decision to make defibrillators available to assist in cardiac incidents on the golf course. On the one hand, it certainly seems like the enlightened and progressive thing to do. On the other hand, such well-intended, humanitarian efforts, if implemented incorrectly or inadequately, could increase liability exposure rather

than reduce it.

COMMON SENSE

Perhaps the best mix in fulfilling the duty of due care is a combination of concern, common sense and a good liability insurance program. Paramount should be concern for the customer's welfare and desire on the owner/operator's part to anticipate foreseeable risks and take reasonable preventive measures.

Avoiding liability claims is impossible, but a concern for safety, a good liability insurance program and the implementation of risk management policies will go a long way toward keeping things under control.■

Gary M. Crist practices sports and entertainment law in Jupiter, Fla. Prior to establishing his own practice in 1994, he was general counsel to the PGA of America and associate general counsel to the PGA Tour.

Bryn Mawr

Continued from page 7

Noted projects that contributed to the certification include: allowing non-play areas to grow naturally; adding several bluebird and wood duck houses; incorporating native prairie plants into the landscape; and decreasing pesticide usage.

"We have an integrated pest management scheme here now where we monitor turf conditions heavily," Bossert said. "We don't spray anything on a preventive basis."

A new irrigation system was installed in 1998 to water the layout more efficiently and a \$25,000 equipment wash pad was put in place the following year.

The superintendent credits his former assistant, Dan Augdahl and his assistant for the past two years, Bryan Widmer. "They really deserve a lot of the credit," he said. "They did all of the documentation work."

This fall, the facility will complete the final

Architects

Continued from page 3

golfers more distance, it will be impossible for us to design courses that will be a challenge for more than a decade."

Research shows that many players drop out because they become discouraged, and Pascuzzo believes that the percentage would rise if courses had to be longer and more difficult to challenge the better players.

"It's becoming increasingly difficult to design a course that all levels of players find interesting," he said.■

stage of a four-year renovation plan. "The project is mostly new tees and bunkers," said Bossert. Architect Richard Jacobson, based in Libertyville, Ill., provided the design work for the renovation project.■



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