

Summit details need to promote golf courses as environmental assets

By Dr. M. HURDZAN

NEBRASKA CITY, Neb. — Christine Todd Whitman, director of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and golf great Arnold Palmer gave keynote addresses to the fourth National Summit on Golf and the Environment here at the National Arbor Day Foundation conference center June 25. Whitman and Palmer also played nine holes at the foundation's new Palmer-designed environmental research golf course, Arbor Links.

Whitman's remarks, while complimentary to the strides made to forge cooperative efforts between golf and environmental interests, also challenged both groups to widen their influence on others.

"Arbor Links is proving the rule that golf courses that are cooperatively and properly designed, built and maintained can be good for the environment," said Whitman. "The mission should be to take positive lessons learned and let others replicate them."

The unique collaboration at Arbor Links brought Palmer Course Design, Landscapes Unlimited and the National Arbor Day Foundation together to build a course that will assess golf's impact on wildlife, water quality, wetlands and trees. The course features a conservation demonstration on each hole to show how golf and habitat are working together.

Whitman called on the industry to share the results of these efforts.

"You are bridging the divide, but you can't rest on your accomplishments," she said. "The greatest environmental challenges are educating the public to the benefits of environmental golf courses and how they can apply them at home by increasing wildlife habitats, using less water, fertilizer and pesticides, and educating young golfers on environmental issues."

Palmer followed Whitman by pointing out the steps that the golf industry has taken to become more environmentally friendly over the years.

"Back when I was six years old and started working on the golf course with my dad, the attitude about the environment was different," he said. "The attitude was 'just get the job done' and no one worried about the consequences of using pesticides like arsenate of lead or mercury."

"Today," Palmer continued,

"we do care and Arbor Links is a living laboratory for continuing research."

During the rest of the summit, speakers and delegates from both golf and environmental groups throughout North America

shared ideas and experiences on ways to better educate the golf industry, as well as non-golfers and government regulators, on the role and responsibility of golf courses to the environment and community.

"Golf courses are one of man's connections to the natural world, and as the world becomes more urbanized, this will be even more important. Golf is about an interaction of social, functional, and athletic activity, involving people, places and environments," said Terry Minger, president of the Center for Resource Management.

Summit participants agreed

there is an enormous need and opportunity to educate golfers, golf course staffs and management, non-golfers and governmental agencies at all levels, on golf and environmental issues. Each group requires a separate approach but is unified by a central thesis that a properly designed, built, and maintained golf course can be an environmental asset.

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