



DEMAND FOR AFFORDABLE GOLF GOING UNMET

To the Editor,

I am writing in response to your editorial on affordable public golf (GCN September 2002), and I wholeheartedly agree that we need more of it. As a golf course architect, I enjoy designing public courses as much as private courses. These courses reach many more golfers and, when correctly designed and maintained, can offer just as rewarding an experience as an expensive private club.

Having designed many public, municipal and First Tee golf courses, I know first-hand how quickly the courses fill with players and how many more people are able to participate in the sport when public golf is acces-

sible and affordable. This speaks to the need and demand we find in today's affordable golf sector.

My most recent new course, Providence Golf Course, is one of the most affordable public golf courses in central Virginia. Built on a frugal budget of \$2.4 million, we were able to create a beautiful and challenging golf course that looks like it has been there for decades. We left many specimen trees on the site to create a park-like atmosphere. We also worked around wetlands and environmentally sensitive areas to incorporate natural hazards, which aided in cost-efficiency as well as added design interest. We only moved 90,000 cubic yards of dirt to build 18 holes.

The land used for Providence Golf Course, (part of which once housed a poorly designed and maintained course) had remained empty for a number of years until funding from a new owner, Buddy Sowers, came in and made the project possible. The greens fees range from \$22.50 to \$45.00 (including cart), affordable by any standards, and there are rarely any tee times unclaimed.

If more developers would research the demand and profitability of afford-

able golf courses, this often-undervalued niche in the marketplace could flourish.

Sincerely,
Lester George,
George Golf Design
Richmond, Va.

MAINTENANCE CONTRACT NOT A RESULT OF 'UNDER BIDDING'

To the Editor,

I would like to respond to the statement made in the article entitled, "IGM faces lawsuit in New Jersey" (GCN September 2002). In October of 2001, Environmental Golf (now ValleyCrest Golf Course Maintenance) was selected as the maintenance outsource provider at Glenwood Country Club in Old Bridge, N.J., in spite of the fact that our fee was higher than the previous maintenance contract with IGM. The award of the maintenance contract was not a result of "under bidding."

Sincerely,
Terry McGuire,
ValleyCrest Golf Course Maintenance
Calabasas, Calif.

Single-year plan

Continued from previous page

disruption.

- Lost momentum. When politics, costs and hassle stop a project, it causes long-term problems and results in new, out-of-place architectural features.

FINANCIAL ADVANTAGES

There are also numerous financial advantages of renovating all at once, most notable of which is better construction value. One new USGA greens complex costs \$70,000, while several may cost \$45,000 each. The contractor's mobilization and supervision expenses, for example, are about the same whether building one green or 18, so large projects get economy of scale.

Courses will also get more value out of architectural fees. Architects can review many holes as easily as one during design or construction evaluation, and usually have similar economies of scale. You are more likely to attract a top architect with

a bigger project, which should also get better results.

There is also less lost revenue. Clubs doing a few holes annually often find that auxiliary revenue declines significantly, while employee costs remain the same, because golfers stop using the club – and sometimes give up their memberships. Clubs doing renovations all at once have been creative at arranging alternate play venues and making the "lost year" of play a unique experience for members.

When you combine these economies of scale with the current low interest rates, the annual interest cost of a large project may not be significantly higher than paying for individual projects.

Courses must ensure these benefits, however, by actually finishing quickly. This requires extensive preplanning. At our recent renovation at Indian Creek in Carrollton, Texas, the owner wanted the course out of play only six months. To accomplish this, our design plan:

- Avoided environmental permitting restrictions by providing compensatory flood storage, avoiding wetlands and minimizing tree clearing.

- Used much of the existing routing and features to minimize time and cost of construction.

- Limited bidding to Golf Course Builders Association of America certified contractors, who were qualified for a fast-track project. We placed strict schedule requirements – and penalties – in the specs.

- Timed work to hit optimum grassing dates in summer.

Given today's low interest rates, the availability of high-quality contractors who can accelerate construction and the importance players place on having their course available, it is usually best to complete a renovation in one year. ■

Jeffrey D. Brauer is president of Jeffrey D. Brauer GolfScapes and is a past president of the American Society of Golf Course Architects.

Multi-year plan

Continued from previous page

the town finally pulled the trigger on bonding \$2 million for a complete overhaul of Randall Oaks – but even now, we plan to execute our updated master plan over the course of two years. Why? The town can't afford to lose all of its golf course revenues, so we're shutting down one nine at a time.

It is important to remember that municipal course revenues often fund other town recreation initiatives. If that money disappears completely, other municipal programs can suffer or disappear, too.

And municipal courses aren't the only facilities affected by this dynamic. Daily-fee courses live and die by the revenue generated from

greens fees. It takes a pretty stable financial situation (with little or no debt service) to justify closing the course and sacrificing a season's income.

The private equation is just as cash-dependent. Several years back, we renovated Meadowbrook Golf Club, a private layout in Racine, Wis. Initially the club was anxious about closing its entire golf course down, so we first renovated a single hole – to show what we could do. The members liked what we did, so they authorized my firm to close the course for a year and completely renovate it. We finished on time and under budget, and the members love their new course.

However, that single golf season missed (due to course construction) severely strapped the club

financially – mainly because other club revenues fell off so drastically. No golf meant far fewer bar tabs and far fewer meals in the dining room.

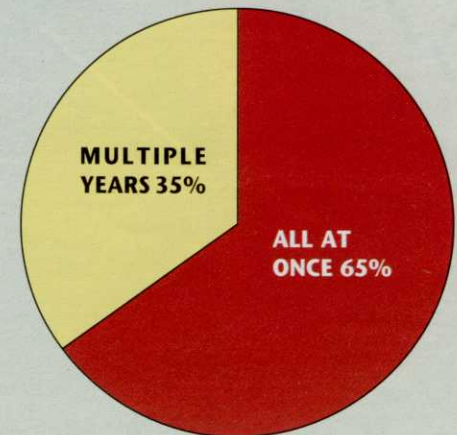
Also there is considerably more risk these days in shutting a course down completely because competition among private, daily-fee and municipal facilities is so strong. In the 10 months it may take an architect to remake a club or course, they risk losing golfers forever. There have never been so many choices for golfers; they may just transfer their loyalties to the (new) club or course down the road. ■

Bob Lohmann is the principal of Marengo, Ill.-based Lohmann Golf Designs. He is past president of the American Society of Golf Course Architects.

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Is it better to spread renovation work out over multiple years or to get it done all at once?



Stringing out the process really has a long-term effect on customers and their support of your facility. If your facility is down or under construction for too long, they move their habit elsewhere and you may never get them back. Make it short, sweet and complete and you have the best chance of keeping your loyal customer base.
— Rick Harrington, PGA golf professional, Mohawk Park Golf Club

Many clubs believe that piecemealing renovations over time is an economical solution. However, reapplying for permits, attracting the same contractor and sourcing the same materials and supplies makes a five-year plan a very costly affair.
— Jerry Weyer, Jerry Weyer Golf Course Designs

We spread our project out over two years so that our members and outside guests would have at least nine holes to play on over the summer. The owners also needed to have part of the course open so they could continue to generate revenue.
— Michael Kuhn, golf course superintendent, River Bend Golf & CC

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