

Accommodating disabled golfers opens door for revenue hike

A majority of the golf courses in the U.S. are required by law to be accessible to disabled golfers. Some courses are hesitant to move forward, citing the financial burden it could cause. But Martin Ebel, general counsel for the Massachusetts Commission against Discrimination, says not only is it the law, but it can open additional windows for revenue.

Ebel explained what's required during his presentation, Accommodating People with Disabilities – Staying out of Court and Making Money in the Process, at the

USGA Green Section Educational Conference during the Golf Industry Show. Ebel explained most golf courses' responsibilities (and recommended that all courses follow them):

- There should be a policy; it should be written and posted.
- There should be a single-rider golf cart available.
- Golf course employees should be aware of what they can and can't ask of the disabled.

There's no reason not to make the course more accessible, Ebel says. With rounds declining, there's a push to grow the game.

One avenue is to reach out to the more than 54 million disabled people in the country. Plus, the Americans with Disabilities Act applies to most golf courses. All public and municipal courses and most private courses are required to follow it. Plus, it's the right thing to do, he says.

Several arguments against becoming ADA compliant can be disproved, Ebel says. For instance, course operators are often concerned that an ADA upgrade is costly, but Ebel says initial money spent will pay off. Golfers rarely play alone, which means

disabled people likely will bring three others golfers and make it a foursome. And, once word gets out, more disabled golfers will come to play.

It can be more costly not to become ADA compliant because the disabled can file lawsuits against courses that aren't accessible.

"Even if you win at trial, you'll pay \$50,000 to \$100,000," Ebel says, adding it also costs time and aggravation.

He cites the case in 2001 in which pro golfer Casey Martin sued the PGA Tour. Martin suffers from a birth defect in his

VARMITGETTER™



Cypress Golf Club, Los Alamitos, CA



Tehama Golf Club, Carmel, CA

Varnitgetter, LLC
130 North Main Street • Payette, Idaho 83661
www.varnitgetter.com • 877-982-7648

Videos available on our website!

www.golfcourseindustry.com/readerservice - #18

Public Course.



Get on course by visiting GCI Online's FREE Message Board. Interact and get answers to your questions from your peers and our editorial staff who frequently stop by to join the discussions.

www.golfcourseindustry.com/messageboard



Martin Ebel discusses the needs of disabled golfers.

right leg known as Klippel Trennauay Weber syndrome, which can make it painful for him to walk, but PGA rules dictated that he was not allowed to use a cart. The ruling changed that.

“Golf cars need to be supplied to those who have trouble walking,” Ebel says. “It’s that simple.”

A single rider cart purchase doesn’t have to put a golf course out of business. Tax credits are available for some courses. If the course’s budget is below \$1 million, the government will likely share the cost of the equipment up to \$10,000 by way of a tax credit.

Another argument against upgrading for the disabled is that equipment like single-rider carts

can damage the course. Courses, including Pinehurst, that have grass as good as or better than many other courses have single rider carts, Ebel says.

The ADA states golf courses must provide reasonable accommodations. That means the accommodations can’t be expensive, they must provide a safe experience, and they must remove any barriers that might arise for golfers. This includes accessible teeing grounds and weather shelters. There needs to

be a 5-foot-wide path every 75 yards and each green must have a point of entry for the single-rider cart.

Besides the course, parking lots, restrooms, the clubhouse, the pro shop counter and every other aspect of the facility falls under the ADA. The only exemption is if the changes create an undue burden on the course. “This means any alteration so expensive, it would be irresponsible to do it,” Ebel says. However, he adds, it’s hard to prove in court

that the alterations would have caused a burden.

Ebel recommends course managers start by auditing the facility to determine the current level of compliance. If there are changes that could be made, and they don’t create too much of a burden, make the changes. Finally, invest in a single-rider cart.

Despite the ADA and the idea of a possible lawsuit, some golf course owners and managers still are not convinced to spend the money to upgrade. They’re held back by the thought that there is no demand for features that accommodate the disabled.

“I think you’ll find if you build it, they will come,” Ebel says.

— HW



SAND STORM

“TURN BACK THE SANDS OF TIME”

Are your bunkers suffering from the adverse effects of time? Are rocks, silts, and clays beginning to build up causing your bunkers to look, function, and play like concrete?

Courses all over the world rely on the Sand Storm by ZScreen LLC. for all their bunker maintenance needs. The Sand Storm cleans and “recycles” your sand right in the bunker, utilizing a 12volt vibratory motor, saving you time and money. Say good-bye to the short term repair method of “removing and replacing” your bunker sand, and say hello to a more cost effective, long term solution.



(623)581-0307 • www.zscreen.com