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OFFERING REAL ADVANTAGES

Jeff Brauer and I have been friends for a long time. He grew up in Toledo, and I grew old in Toledo. So, it's not unusual for us to talk nothing but golf while we try to break 100 on some of the world's most difficult courses. Aside from the wonderful camaraderie we share, my discussions with Jeff also have a great side effect: They help make me a better golf course architect.

The American Society of Golf Course Architects affords its members similar benefits – only on a much grander scale. Through the ASGCA, members such as Jack Nicklaus, Pete Dye and Tom Fazio are able to use each other as natural resources to foster professionalism, support design excellence and, ultimately, help grow the great game of golf.

Gaining individual knowledge from collective experiences affords ASGCA members the insight necessary to plan and assist in successful course development and renovation projects. Working with an ASGCA member eliminates much of the guesswork in choosing a qualified architect. That's why many potential owners, superintendents, managers and developers use ASGCA as their source for seasoned architects for their next course projects. As the ASGCA president, I'm proud to say as many as 88 percent of PGA, LPGA and Senior PGA Tour events are played on ASGCA-designed courses in a given year. That statistic speaks volumes.

ASGCA architects have a thorough knowledge of the game, valuable expertise with financing and permitting, and a sound understanding of how to cultivate the landscape properly to preserve the beauty of the natural environment within a course design. They have a familiarity with heavy construction, agronomy, hydraulic engineering, soil science, geology and civil engineering. With such a diverse skill set, ASGCA professionals are able to preside over an entire project, maximizing a course's full potential.

It's also safe to assume ASGCA architects have been around the block because membership in the organization demands it. Our requirements ensure ASGCA membership candidates have spent a minimum of eight years practicing golf course architecture and developed at least five 18-hole courses (or the equivalent) from beginning to end. However, the vast majority of members have experience that far exceeds these initial minimums.

Membership candidates have their work meticulously scrutinized by other ASGCA architects in what often amounts to a two-year process. First, candidates attain sponsorship from three current members familiar with their work. Then, four of the candidate's representative courses are evaluated by other ASGCA members via a course walkthrough or a round of play. These reviewers also discuss the course design with professionals who know it well (the owner, superintendent or local pro) to attest to the ASGCA candidate's involvement in the project and his influence on the course's inherent strengths and weaknesses.

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Following a candidate's course evaluations, a panel interview is conducted where select ASGCA members question an applicant about his experience, design philosophies and goals. During the interview, candidates must demonstrate a firm grasp

of design techniques and best practices. It's not an inquisition, just an opportunity for veteran ASGCA members to truly understand a candidate's unique insights on the many aspects of course design and development.

Once admitted, new ASGCA members abide by a code of ethics and continue professional development by attending various educational seminars presented throughout the year that keep our members abreast of the always evolving art of modern golf design and construction. At the annual meeting, industry insiders introduce ASGCA architects to new innovations and design trends. Perhaps just as importantly, we engage in informal social gatherings where members readily feed off each other's shared experiences – both good and bad.

The ASGCA's educational events often have a direct impact on clients. I look no farther than my friend Jeff, who relayed a specific example of how new erosion-control strategies presented at a recent ASGCA meeting helped save his client money, avoid fines and better preserve the construction site and surrounding lands of their course.

With the creative and highly-specialized nature of the profession, it's almost impossible (and likely not prudent) for a governing or licensing body to exist for golf course architects. However, through the detailed application process and varied professional development activities, the ASGCA does its best to provide a reliable starting point for those seeking an accomplished architect to aid in their upcoming projects. If your vision includes the design of a new course or the renovation of an existing one, ASGCA architects offer value, expertise, and best of all, peace of mind.

Working with an ASGCA architect is a comfortable and often enjoyable process – like breaking 100 with an old friend. **GCI**

