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DESIGN IN 2009 AND BEYOND

While the current economic difficulties combined with the resulting slowdown in golf course and residential development is troubling to all those in the business, it's a good time to reflect on the state of the game, past trends, as well as successes and failures. As the economy rebounds, it will be important to formulate a strategy that will ensure the successful future growth in the game of golf and in the development of golf courses, golf course communities and golf resort developments.

Here are a few trends, suggestions and ways to capitalize on demographics that I see as important to keep in mind.

Here come the baby boomers. As the population of baby boomers continues to head towards retirement age, there's no doubt that the demand for new golf courses, golf lifestyle communities and unique golf destinations will continue to grow, especially in markets that are undersupplied. As the financial markets and lending institutions rebound and confidence is restored, the resurgence in development of golf/lifestyle communities and resorts is inevitable. As these types of developments begin to flourish again, developers must carefully consider what's important to their customers, in addition to applying what they've learned from past successes and failures.

Faster play, shorter courses = more players. Our fast-paced, demanding lifestyles have forced most of us to place a much greater emphasis on effective time management. The aspect of balancing time for business, recreation and family must become a primary consideration for all golf facilities, if golf is going to continue growing successfully into the future. The luxury of spending the entire day at the golf course on the weekend, during business outings or on family holidays is becoming a thing of the past as the demand for balancing time increases. Existing and future golf courses will no doubt have to consider reducing the length of the time it takes to play a round of golf.

What does this mean for the design of future golf courses? I believe we'll begin to see shorter, more compact, efficient and playable golf courses – golf courses that can be played in three to four hours, rather than five hours or more.

The impact of technology. Advances in the technology of golf clubs and balls has no doubt encouraged all golf course designers to design longer, more challeng-

ing layouts to defend par against the highly skilled players. As a result, golf courses have continued to increase in length and in the amount of acreage they consume. Not only has this trend added to the length of time it takes to play 18 holes on modern day golf courses, but it also has placed more demands on our natural resources and has added to the cost of building and maintaining them. Ultimately, it's the golfers who pay for these increases in time and money.

Time to pull together as an industry. Perhaps at no other time in the game of golf's long history has there been a greater need for all of golf's stakeholders to come together to formulate a strategy for the future growth of golf. Golf course owners, developers, managers, superintendents, architects, ball and club manufacturers and the governing bodies of golf must work together to formulate a united strategy for attracting new golfers to the game, for retaining existing golfers

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and for making the game of golf more sustainable.

Golf courses no longer can afford to consume increasingly expansive tracts of land, use more water, maintain more turf or take longer to play. Perhaps the time is right to consider reducing the overall length of golf courses, the distance that golf balls travel, the amount of turf that's maintained, the amount of water that's consumed and the length of time it takes to play.

Ultimately, it's the quality of the game and the quality of the experience on the golf course that's most important. Golf courses do not have to be excessively long to be challenging, interesting or inspiring to play.

For golf to flourish as the world recovers from the recession, it must become more sustainable economically, environmentally and socially. **GCI**