

FIVE THINGS...

It's the start of fall and I've got a lot of things about our industry on my mind.

So with all due respect to Sports Illustrated columnist Peter King, here are "Five Things I Think I Think" about the state of our industry.

1. WE WILL BUILD AGAIN.

I recently attended the GCBAA's summer meeting in Minneapolis and I had the opportunity to talk with a number of the industry's top builders and architects. Nearly everyone believes, when addressing the state of the economy, that the worst is over and that we hit rock bottom about mid-summer. The real challenge now is the long long road to recovery. How long that will take is anyone's guess. However, while new work has not been booked, phones have begun ringing with inquiries. That's a good sign.

Will it ever be like it once was?

No, those days are long over. Outside of the U.S., builders and architects are looking at emerging economies like India, Brazil, China, Indonesia and Korea as locations for future course growth. These promising markets will need know-how, and there's an opportunity for the industry to become an exporter of knowledge. Inside the U.S. and North American market, opportunity for the next two to three years will be in the "re's" – re-engineering, rethinking, recalibration.

2. WATER, WATER EVERYWHERE.

Water management and smart water issues are major issues every superintendent will need to face going forward, whether it's from their members or the general public who don't understand the whole story. I spoke recently with Deborah Hamlin from the Irrigation Association, who says many municipalities and organizations are looking to the golf course industry as examples of how water management is done right. In fact, The

New York Times recently featured an article on this very notion and it's getting a lot of mileage throughout the industry. (To read a copy of the story, type ow.ly/nqN4 into your Web browser.)

3. BOTTOM LINE.

In talking with superintendents, many mentioned taking as high as a 30-percent cut in their maintenance budgets entering this past season. Many are bracing for another 10-percent hit going into next year. I've said this before: The industry will suffer due to its bare-bones operations over the past year. A temporary hardship can not only be overcome, but it can actually strengthen an organization. Over the long term, though, it will only lead to diminished customer satisfaction. The challenge for superintendents come budget time is to create a convincing argument for sustained staffing levels going into 2010.



Mike Zawacki Editor

4. PLAY THE GAME.

Need I say more?

5. BE LOUD, BE PROUD.

Lastly, the golf industry – from owner to superintendent and on through to club member – needs to do a better job with staying on point about the issues that are important to golf. Again, the New York Times water management article is a good example, but golf courses need to do a better job communicating the positive impact they have on their communities. Not only are they wildlife refuges, but they're local-level economic generators. Too often considered just a sport, the industry needs to better hone its skills at communicating not only the benefits of the game, but its multi-billion dollar impact on the overall U.S. economy. You are the experts in your industry; therefore you need to be its ambassadors, as well. GCI

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