

We'd like to hear from you.

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## Waiting for things to even out

I read with interest your May 2010 cover story "In Munis We Trust" (page 20). As co-owner of a family-owned, 18-hole public golf course in Western Massachusetts, established by my parents in 1963, I feel more than qualified to weigh in on this subject. We have six municipal golf courses within a 20-mile radius of our area, each in direct competition with us. My dad built our golf course for the average golfer, with a business philosophy of offering a quality product at a fair price. Our customer base is the average player, providing what Dennis Lyon calls "accessible, affordable, quality golf."

Recently, we have seen some of our local municipals receive benefits that go beyond tax breaks. In 2007 we saw the Ledges Golf Course in South Hadley receive a nearly \$250,000 "Urban Parks" grant from the state to build its new clubhouse. Several years ago, Franconia Golf Course in Springfield received a \$1 million state grant and a matching bond from the city to install an irrigation system. These are just some of the most egregious examples of

what we have to compete against. It sure would be nice to have access to some of these free gifts out here in the private sector.

Mr. Lyon sure was right when he said there are no level playing fields when it comes to competition between golf courses. However,

out here in Western Massachusetts we're still waiting for things to even out.

Mark T. Perez  
East Mountain Country Club  
Westfield, Mass.

## Your point

In your article "In Munis We Trust" (May 2010, page 20) you missed a couple of points.

- Muni prices are not break-even prices in most cases; the tax payers foot the bills and have no idea how much they are.
- Muni courses pay no real estate taxes. True.
- Muni courses pay no payroll taxes. True, who does?
- Muni courses pay no insurance. True, who does?
- Muni courses don't pay labor. True, who does?
- Muni courses take away tax base and add to the taxes of private business. True.
- Muni courses can buy equipment at government contract prices. True.

The point here is that muni courses charge way below what the product is worth and they are driving private business out of business. There may not be a level playing field, however that does not mean that government inefficiency, cronyism, corruption, etc., should be running us out of business.

Brian Christman  
Christman's Windham House  
Windham, N.Y.



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## An easy target

I have a comment about Charlie Birney's Pro/Con article ("A Cautionary Tale," May 2010, page 28). I've been around golf long before the boom that brought so many business owners looking for a quick buck. The result: owners who knew little about golf wanted the municipalities – who were there for many years and who provide recreation for the less fortunate who want to play – to go away. It was all about not wanting competition. The question became: "Why is government in golf?" And the answer: "Because the private sector will only do it if it makes money."

Parks & Recreation departments are not revenue producers – they are tax supported. The essence of this is to provide recreation for the masses. Ice arenas, tennis courts and playgrounds are not being built by the private sector for similar reasons. Are some municipal courses losing money? Yes. Many are not making it because too many courses were built around them. In the Minneapolis/St. Paul area there were more than 110 courses added to

the metropolitan area since 1970 (2003 Clasp Report by the NGF). Think about capacity and dividing the pie. Who is the easy target to go away? No one addresses who built all this oversupply.

Next, we have the courses built for land sale with walk-away realtors. They could care less about the cost of golf or how to run a facility. But the older courses are left with increased green fees that hurt everyone. It helped destroy the game we all loved. Now we reap what was sown by strictly profit motivations. There is a place for government run course where private enterprise cannot afford to provide for the amenity, especially in urban centers.

**John Valliere**  
General manager  
Braemar Golf Course  
Edina, Minn.

## Hearing the message

Just read Pat Jones' April 2010 column ("Huh?" pg 58) – good stuff. I too suffer from hearing loss, and the older I get the worse it

is for me to "get a grip on my problem." I've been a "rocker" for as long as I can remember. As a Golf Course Superintendent I stress the importance of hearing protection. I've been a "super" for more than 20 years. I'm 44-years-old and I can hear an owl from a half mile away but I cannot hear my assistant talking to me from the end of the lunch room table.

I too witnessed Pete Townshend and The Who – damn those lymie bastards... (Pat's line). I tell all my young guys once your hearing is gone, it's gone. Now when I use a chainsaw or even weedwack I have hearing protection on. The young guys are following my lead.

"We" cannot stress the importance enough. As always I'll continue to read my Golf Course Industry magazine from back to front.

**Tom Niebling**  
Columbia Golf & Country Club  
Germantown, N.Y.

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