



## GLAD TIDINGS... AND GOOD NEWS

In a recent presentation to attain funding for their proposed golf renovation project, one authority announced her intent to vote “no” because she had read “golf was dying”. I couldn’t blame her if her only exposure to golf was reading the papers. We’ve had three years of reported gloom and doom, with news of another high-end course facing foreclosure just that morning.

However, while many “trophy courses” publicly struggle, there are numerous success stories that have gone unreported from mid-level courses and clubs. These type courses constitute the bulk of golf – if not golf reporting – in the United States. In just my little cross section of the golf world, success stories seem to outweigh tales of woe. Some examples: Three of my courses designed in the early 2000s (in Minnesota, Kansas and Texas, a nice cross section of the country) are now under management by Kemper Sports and each increased play by a few thousand rounds last year.

I also have designed and redesigned many courses that EAGLE Golf now manages. In 2004, we renovated the Indian Creek Golf Courses for the City of Carrollton, Texas, and they took over management. They had a dramatic turnaround the first year, at first attributed to golfers “trying out” the new look. While some courses recede to previous play levels, Indian Creek has continued to improve in financial performance, according to Richard Ellis, VP of Business Development at EAGLE. They have nearly restored rounds played from 50,000 when they took over to more than 90,000 rounds now – comparable to peak play of the late 1990s. He notes revenues are now \$2 million per year above the pre-reconstruction levels.

Ellis detailed other success stories that never make the typical media focus, on both the public and private courses they manage. From media reports, would you expect private clubs in the Phoenix area to have a waiting list? EAGLE manages Arrowhead Country Club in Glendale, and it does. All told, EAGLE’s three private courses in Phoenix area have increased revenues 21 percent this year.

Ellis says the successful courses are simply providing the “forgotten element of more value. “Families “do the math” and if a public course

like Indian Creek feels like a \$100 course and charges \$50, they will beat down the door (It does and they do).

If a club offers variety of family-friendly recreation like dining, kids’ sports and a health club, with a dues structure that is comparable to playing high-end public golf, many will join the club. More importantly, EAGLE strives to make their clubs “the place to be” with a traditional (yet modernized) sense of “I belong here” by stressing the social interactions and ability to make new friends.

It doesn’t take professional management companies to succeed, just professional grade management to get improved results. The City of Mesquite, Texas, has tremendously improved their performance by taking out native areas (originally let grow long to save money), improving the greens, bringing in a friendlier pro shop

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staff and in turn have brought back long-time and new customers, many of whom believed there was no reason to go back.

These examples are a roadmap to success right now and in the future. To many golf managers, it seems the quality and value bar is still rising, while revenues are not. No doubt, it’s hard to find the right combination of design, service and conditions that creates that value for today’s golfer. I suspect it’s harder for those who complain of the “new normal,” than those who realize it’s just “normal.”

Value, whoda thunk it? Begun by frugal Scots in about 1457 AD, golf wouldn’t have survived periodic tough times for centuries if it didn’t have value in its DNA. As Ellis says, “In hindsight, “it’s really a basic plan with tremendous results.

Here’s to a great holiday season and a more prosperous and golf filled 2012. **GCI**