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## THE STATE OF THE GOLF COURSE DESIGN INDUSTRY

**W**hat is the state of the Golf Course Design field? The last few years have been – imagine the voice of, and with apologies to – Rodney Dangerfield, “Tough, I tell ya.”

How tough? We’ll see Haley’s Comet before another building boom... I pick up the phone a dozen times a day just to make sure it’s still working. With my free time, I joined a bridge club. I almost jumped last year. Everyone thinks golf course architects are suicide risks. Even my psychiatrist makes me pay in advance.

ASGCA has switched from Ross Tartan to Burlap! It’s that tough. However, more golf course architects than ever want membership in ASGCA. They’re desperate, I tell ya, desperate. How desperate? One candidate tried to use his wife’s boob job as a “remodel project” on his application to ASGCA. Now that’s a desperate housewife. But he had no shortage of members willing to review his project.

I tell ya, golf course architects get no respect, no respect at all. Architects are fighting for every job out there. Our annual ASGCA meetings look like “Fight Club.” Yet, more people than ever want to get into golf course architecture. We also lose design projects to recently laid-off golf critics, environmentalists and historians. It used to be minimum qualifications for a remodel project included writing at least five specification books to guide construction... now some people sell services based on reading three golf architecture history books. Cheech and Chong seem to be everywhere telling owners, “You don’t need no stinkin’ architect!”

Even those who sought work in booming China face new moratoriums on construction. For architects over there, this is the year of the “draggin’.”

Pricing is tough there and back home. Both Tiger and I get 10 million – him in dollars and me in pennies. I bid one job recently using the Domino’s Pizza strategy – three large courses for \$15, and lost the job to a firm willing to throw in breadsticks!

We can’t afford associates and drafters any more. We sent so many golf drafting jobs to India that they’re opening up a local chapter of ASGCA.

Many golf course architects have a brand new perspective on spending \$4 on a Starbucks: from behind the counter.

Our home life is tough, too. My girlfriend left me for the garbage man. She said she needed more financial stability. My kids don’t want me at career day anymore. My dog growls at me and the cat is more aloof than normal.

It’s hard for contractors, too. Winning bids have profit margins of (-15 percent). Bids are so low the GCBA added a new category to their “certified builder” program – “Certified Insane.” And certified checks are the new gold standard. If ASGCA wears burlap, the contractors are wearing barrels.

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It’s tough on supers, too. Budgets are so low that “pasture golf” is no longer just a cute expression. Environmentalists aren’t complaining about pesticide use any more.

At one course the superintendent’s crew was cut from 20 to 10... and five of those are sheep. At least that super has a job. Another course laid off the superintendent to save money, but kept the golf course dog. I called the shop to ask what the greens, tees and fairways looked like. They answered, “Ruff.”

Well, at least I’m smiling. My little business has always mirrored the economy, and even these slow years, and without going to China, I had one major project a year – not the glory days, but enough to stay in the middle class. I have signed up a big project and have another on the way, suggesting that 2012 will be the best year among the last five.

Maybe 2012 will make me sing the Beatles – “Here Comes The Sun.” It does seem like its years since it’s been here! **GCI**