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NO. 100

Back in May 2004, I sat down to write my first Golf Course News column. That I wrote even one is a miracle, considering the editor they had just fired recommended me. I figured I was probably out the door before I was even in. That I have written a hundred of these columns is even more miraculous. It's been fun, even with the monthly panic of "What do I write this month?" being a constant companion. I wonder how newspaper columnists wordsmith on a regular basis.

I started at a time when I had already realized the value of expressing design ideas in writing. I figured if I couldn't explain my design philosophy clearly in writing, then I probably didn't have a strong one. I had been writing some thoughts in short bites to clarify my ideas anyway, and in many ways, this column simply forced me to keep it going constantly.

My father's advice (he was a business executive) also helped me as an "amateur" golf course architecture writer. In high school, my father, sensing computers were the future, insisted I take the girl-dominated keyboarding class. He stressed the importance of expressing my thoughts in writing, and to do it succinctly. He felt any ideas not expressed in two or three sentences were probably "as well formed as a post-oatmeal bowel movement." At his urging, I wrote a business plan for my then new business venture, and even before reading it, he made me trim it from a dozen pages to three, while leaving in all the important content.

Those editing skills come in handy, as that is how these columns are written. At various times, my maximum word limit has been 450, 600, 800 and 1,000 words. My first draft usually takes a day to write, and I spend at least one more day whittling it

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down to size, usually by cutting my bad puns, old stories and other fluff, to my regret and the probable delight/relief to readers. Sometimes I "cheat" by spreading content into multiple columns, like my series on the superintendent's role in construction.

My instructions through three editors have been to write about 2/3 "meat and potatoes" columns and 1/3 on design issues. The first President Bush didn't "get the vision thing" and when it comes to golf course design, most readers don't either. They prefer reading about more practical issues of immediate need. In total, I've written:

- 34 design issue related columns
- 11 on master plans
- 10 on irrigation or environmental issues
- 10 on construction/reconstruction
- 7 on bunkers
- 3 each on greens, drainage, trees and maintenance
- 2 each on cart paths and tees
- 1 each on safety and ADA

The other 11 touched on golf-related memories, tributes to recently deceased industry members, or similar topics. I focused on humor twice, once using the style of Rodney Dangerfield to explain the moribund state of the industry (*To save money, one course replaced the superintendent with the golf course dog...when I called to ask about their golf course conditions, the answer was "ruff."*) In another case, I assumed the persona of "Dat Effen, Golf Course Architect," to explain how angry golfers are when the design doesn't suit their game. (It seems like Dat Effen, Golf Course Architect,

designed EVERY course I play.)

While writing is fun, and there is always some self-satisfaction at heeding my late-father's advice in writing clearly to share 36 years of accumulated golf-design knowledge with readers, it is always a highlight when readers take the time to provide feedback on the columns. I get at least one email most months complimenting me. A few ask for free advice, which I give if I can from long distance.

I had only two lowlights over these 100 columns – one company accused me of unfairly "pitching" a competing supplier. As it happens, their national sales manager shares my last name (not related) and I do remain neutral.

The lowest point was an email from a superintendent saying, "Thanks a lot. My GM slammed your column on my desk, and fired me, saying I should have known how to solve this problem." That was my column on adjusting approach-area sprinklers to different reverse points to reduce wet spots. I was passing on free, easy to implement advice that USGA construction guru Jim Moore had been researching. Obviously, it was new info to many, not something "every superintendent should already know."

I appreciate GCI's editors for nominally paying me for these few days of writing fun each month, and appreciate all who read me regularly (You three know who you are). While I do slightly panic every month, in looking back at what I have written, I see there is so much more I want to cover. Here's to another 100, providing you'll still have me. **GCI**