



Ron Dodson and **Bill Love** are the founders of Love & Dodson, LLC a firm that specializes in sustainable planning, design, construction and management of golf courses, recreational facilities and sanctuaries. www.loveanddodson.com

THE STATE OF SUSTAINABILITY AND GOLF

First things first: If you are reading this, the Mayans were wrong. Whew...we made it to the beginning of yet another year.

Now that we know that we have survived to face the upcoming months and years ahead, this is a great time to stop and look at how the world around us is really doing. And while we're at it, let's review what we personally and professionally have contributed.

So as not to totally come across in a negative way, let say there are individuals in the golf industry who have taken to heart their responsibilities to become better stewards of the environment. Their actions have changed the faces of many golf courses, as well as the way golf course maintenance facilities are being designed and managed. Those facilities serve as catalysts for improved water quality and increased wildlife habitat.

During the last few decades, golf organizations such as the USGA have invested millions of dollars toward research efforts, aimed not only at uncovering the facts connected with what golf may or may not be doing to or for the environment, but suggesting management changes, as well. These efforts serve as the foundation for the development of new products that deliver increased environmental and economic efficiency. To all of that I give a hardy "Bravo!"

Now here comes the other shoe. Sustainability is not a destination, a sign, an award, or, for that matter, environmental management by another name. Sustainability is an attitude and a combination of methods collectively aimed at fostering economic viability, environmental health and improved social wellbeing. To put it bluntly, from nearly every aspect, the economy is down, the health of the environment is down, and the social wellbeing of a growing number of human's

on Earth is down and continuing in a downward trend.

Over the past few years I have talked with the management at a number of facilities that I believe represent the leading edge of environmental stewardship efforts connected with golf course management. I asked each if they believed, or better yet,

To put it bluntly, from nearly every aspect, the economy is down, the **health of the environment** is down and the social wellbeing of a growing number of humans on Earth is down and continuing in a downward trend.

if they could prove that biological diversity had gone up, down or stayed the same. Likewise, I wanted to know if they could demonstrate that water quality had improved, or that they reduced their water use rates and so forth. Without exception the answers were all affirmative. Then I asked each if they believed the same could be said for the communities in which their facilities were located. And without exception the answer was "No!"

If the golf course industry is truly going to become engaged with the topic of sustainability, the industry must think beyond golf. Yes, golf must walk the walk at each golf course facility, but the industry – and to an extent individual courses – must carefully consider and take actions that are focused on topics of real importance that are well beyond golf.

For example, consider that 1.1 billion people lack adequate drinking water access; and 2.6 billion people lack basic water sanitation. Add to those the fact that the average American uses 30 times more water than a person who lacks adequate access to water. In other words, we simply take this vital resource for granted.

Think about the fact that every ecosystem on Earth is in decline. Nearly all of the major fish stocks in the world's oceans are over fished and in decline and the oceans' dead zones are growing, not shrinking.

I have been trying to capture the attention of the golf industry concerning these and other topics for more

than 25 years. My hope is that in the next few years the industry wakes up and makes the decision to truly become engaged in sustainability.

There seems to be a growing effort to use the terms "sustainability" and "sustainable golf." However, many of these efforts are, in my opinion, a mile wide and an inch deep.

They are simply the same-old-same-old... but with a new name. That simply will not get the job done. And further more, it will lull most people into a false sense of security that will not only be dangerous for the future of the golf industry, but it will add nothing to the efforts needed to help move society toward a more sustainable future.

It's sort of like rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic and making certain the ship is at least heading in the right direction as it slowly slips beneath the icy waves.

So to those individuals in our industry who have given it their all over the past 25 years, I offer you a sincere "Thank you."

But to the vast majority of those in the golf industry who have done nothing, I say, "Wake the Hell up." **GCI**