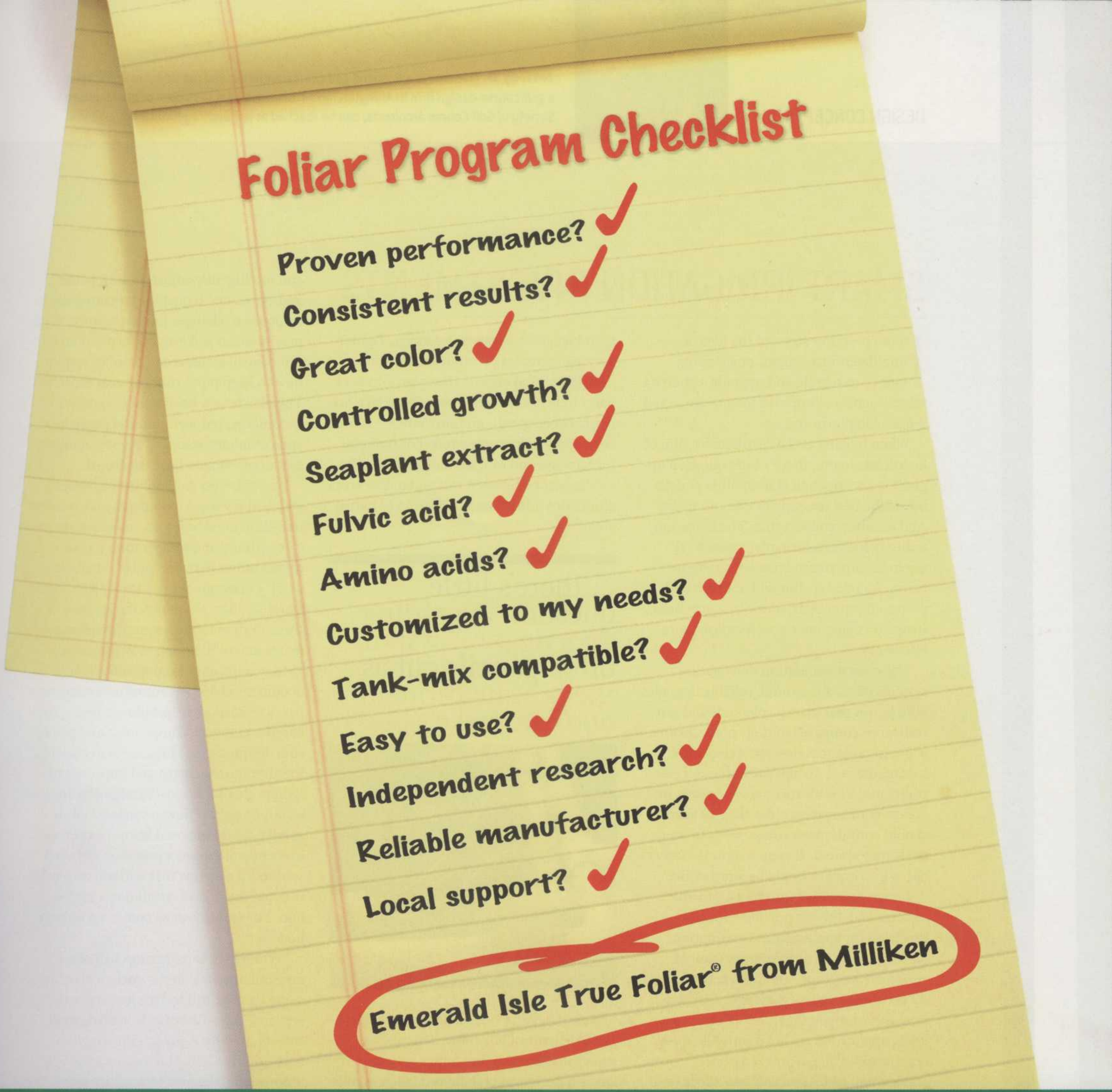

Foliar Program Checklist
Proven performance?
Consistent results?
Great color?
Controlled growth?
Seaplant extract?
Fulvic acid?
Amino acids?
Customized to my needs?
Tank-mix compatible?
Easy to use?
Independent research?
Reliable manufacturer?
Local support?
Emerald Isle True Foliar® from Milliken

Jeffrey D. Brauer is a licensed golf course architect and president of GolfScapes, a golf course design firm in Arlington, Texas. Brauer, a past president of the American Society of Golf Course Architects, can be reached at jeff@jeffreydbrauer.com.

SMART IRRIGATION INVESTMENTS

In the past, I've stressed the idea of intelligent investment, or spending money to rebuild and upgrade a course's infrastructure to improve maintenance and reduce long-term costs.

When looking at the cost/benefit ratio of an infrastructure, there's little question upgrading an irrigation system often pencils out as the best investment one can make. And numbers support that. The irrigation industry spent its formative years working to let superintendents irrigate more turf more reliably. But with current and proposed water restrictions in many areas, irrigation companies now focus on more effeciency.

The newest generation of irrigation systems offers substantial, reliable upgrades with better gear drives, solenoids and grit resistance compared to their predecessors. More importantly, new sprinklers offer substantial cost savings for water and electricity use. The advances are so broad, any course with a system older than 10 years should consider new components or an entirely new system. If your system is 20 years old, a new system would be worthwhile.

Improvements of sprinklers, control systems and designs provide laser-like precision for applications. Distribution uniformity of the newest generation of sprinklers has improved to 88 percent from 67 percent just a few years ago. Distribution uniformity is a measure of uniform water application within a sprinkler's coverage area – 100 percent is a perfectly even application. At 67 percent, one needs to run the system one and a half times longer than required to assure adequate coverage everywhere (1/0.6666 = 1.50). At 88 percent, additional running time is reduced to about 14 percent. Thus, simply replacing worn-out sprinklers might offer water and electrical savings of 23 percent.

Some courses have experienced an additional 23-percent water savings by installing a new system designed for precision application. Irrigation designers know more sprinklers means less water usage. Tighter spacing increases distribution uniformity and fights wind effects. Using back-to-back part circle heads – once thought to be a luxury between greens and surrounds – is used commonly to increase control differential for fairways and roughs. Using part circles on the border between turf and native areas eliminates unnecessary irrigation of native areas.

... there's little question upgrading an irrigation system often pencils out as the best investment one can make.

New irrigation system designs also focus more on control flexibility. This allows superintendents to fine tune a system to irrigate different microclimates (such as hills and valleys or shade and sun) much better than designs a decade ago, which focused on minimizing pipe and wire. Better control reduces water use and annoying wet or dry spots, which enhances turf health and play quality.

Irrigation control no longer requires guesswork, and systems never have to run while it's raining. Newer central controllers are smarter and use real-time evaluation and data from past experience to constantly and intelligently adjust, cancel, pause and/or resume irrigation programming in response to changes in temperature, wind, precipitation and evapotranspiration. Central control systems can monitor system flow to keep pipes running near capacity. This shortens watering time, saves water and energy, reduces pipe and pump wear, and completes watering sooner, allowing earlier mowing to beat the crowd.

New wireless soil monitoring systems – which allow superintendents to determine irrigation need based on actual soil moisture, salinity and temperature measurements rather than computer calculations of ET – show great promise for additional water savings. Naturally, the location of these devices in representative microclimates makes them the most effective.

In one instance, a superintendent documented 46-percent water savings on a per-acre basis after installing a new system based on modern components and precision design. Some clubs use water savings to water more acreage and improve turf. Others choose the cost savings of using less water. Some use new systems simply to survive newly imposed water restrictions. I recently proposed a precision watering system for a course that will add nine holes to avoid the cost of rebuilding a supply line. Precision systems cost more up front, however.

"While long-term savings will offset up-front expense, in the current economy, many courses still opt for less-expensive systems," says Terry Little, an irrigation consultant with Aqua Engineering in Fort Collins, Colo. "Like many irrigation innovations, the new technology seems more common in the West, where water needs are often most critical. But it works everywhere."

Current cost concerns aside, the least-expensive way to do something is to do it right in the first place. That idea holds true now more than ever regarding irrigation. Building as sophisticated an irrigation system as you can afford pays big dividends down the line through reduced water and power usage and better turf. **GCI**

Jim McLoughlin is the founder of TMG Golf (www.TMGgolfcounsel.com), a golf course development and consulting firm, and is a former executive director of the GCSAA. He can be reached at golfguide@roadrunner.com or 760-804-7339. His previous columns can be found on www.golfcourseindustry.com.

BEWARE OF (SOME) G.M.S

It's often said that while the American form of government isn't perfect, it's clearly the best form of government available to man. Similarly, it can be said that while the general manager format of club governance isn't perfect, it's the best available to the private golf sector. (See my March 2007 GCI column.)

Some might think there can be no more deadly power struggles than what we see within the halls of government where the welfare of constituencies, or voters, often are subverted to the will of the politically ambitious. Regrettably, this level of political infighting isn't limited to government. We see similar devastating infighting every year within the halls of America's private club community between general managers and golf course superintendents.

In my March 2007 column, I mention there are about 4,600 private golf clubs throughout the country, about 950 of these are governed by the committee format, another 850 are managed by contract firms, and the balance of about 2,800 clubs (61 percent of the total) are operated through the general manager concept. The approximate 2,800 general managers in American golf can be broken down into the following three categories:

The good guys (about 60 percent of general managers). If general managerships are the best form of governance in golf (and they are), the reason for this is solely because of the experience, leadership qualities and maturity of the people who occupy these positions. Their personal makeup includes a fundamental understanding that private clubs are in the service business, staff careers should be nurtured, effective intramural communications are essential to success, and a club's welfare is the paramount objective at all times. This is the best working environment throughout all golf for golf course superintendents.

The power brokers (about 25percent of general managers). This category of general manager generally is employed at a club *before* a superintendent candidate is hired. These general managers have established their power base within the club and don't want an incoming well-qualified golf course superintendent becoming too popular, thereby, potentially undermining this authority. Consequently, they do what they must to ensure star-material superintendent candidates don't get hired and lesser, more

These general managers dismiss superintendents at the first practical opportunity. If a superintendent resists, the big guns are brought to bear.

pliable candidates do. Once hired within such an environment, superintendents should be mindful that the better they do their jobs, the more tenuous their job security might become. Accordingly, superintendents always should have their personal Web sites ready to move on.

The bad dudes (about 15 percent of general managers). These are the most lethal type of general managers who, generally, will be hired *after* the golf course superintendent at a club. They join a club administration without an established power base and don't want to take the time (or might not have the ability) to earn one. Consequently, once on board, they look to identify staff professionals who might be a threat to them in terms of acquiring status or power. What juicier target than a well-qualified, well-paid popular golf course superintendent?

These general managers dismiss superintendents at the first practical opportunity. If a superintendent resists, the big guns are brought to bear. Superintendents are told that, unless they leave quickly and quietly, their salaries and benefits will be terminated immediately, health coverage will be shut down, their families will be put out on the street if the club provides housing directly or indirectly, and positive references will be permanently denied. Left with no choice, proud superintendents cave and go quietly, often with little hope of resurrecting careers. This scenario is repeated a few hundred times a year throughout the country.

If the memberships at these clubs knew how their respected golf course superintendents were being treated, there would be outrage. But they don't know because the GCSAA and its 103 chapters have done little throughout the years to educate people in this regard. They haven't addressed the lack of written contracts issue, which, once resolved, would restrain overzealous general managers. While the present GCSAA board scrutinizes these issues more closely, the 103 GCSA chapters might consider taking this issue directly to their local clubs via their Web sites and newsletters to ask their constituent clubs why only 20 percent of golf course superintendents are granted written contracts when as many as 80 percent of golf professionals, club managers and virtually 100 percent of club employed members are. This question properly presented should open the door for better dialogue with clubs about this issue.

Closing reminder: It should be clear that candidates for superintendents' jobs should check out the caliber of general manager they would work with if hired and act accordingly. GCI

Jack Brennan founded Paladin Golf Marketing in Plant City, Fla., to assist golf course owners and managers with successful marketing. He can be reached at jackbrennan@tampabay.rr.com.

INTERPRET MARKET RESEARCH

My past several marketing columns emphasized the value of market research – in-office and in-person research in the marketplace – for quality golf course marketing planning. Neither is complete without the other, but in-person research tells you what's actually occurring in your market. There's no substitute for "on the ground" research.

All the formulas for golf market research – participation rates, state annual rounds, adjustments for age and income, etc. – will give you a snapshot of what, most likely, is occurring in the market. And, it's quality information, which is a product of many years of golf industry research by the National Golf Foundation, the Sporting Goods Manufacturers Association, Pellucid Corp. and others.

However, when it comes to planning real-life golf course marketing, golf course managers should want this theoretical or in-house research along with in-person market research before they start projecting priority business segments and allocating budget money to them. Although course managers prioritize incorrectly occasionally, you want your best shot at being right with marketing plan priorities the first time through.

If you've followed my column the past few months, you're capable of identifying and collecting valuable market research for your course to help you create a meaningful marketing plan that'll generate incremental rounds and revenue. After a few calls from readers apparently trying to follow my market research columns, eventually, you come across a unique market where you have to ask, "So, what if …"

What if you're in a market where the available in-office market research and the in-person market research are so divergent that golf demand for the marketplace doesn't make sense?

For example, seven or eight years ago I was trying to help an industry friend better understand his market, Jacksonville, Fla. The first thing I did was conduct a golf rounds demand analysis. I wanted to look closely at where his greatest opportunities for public play would come from, so I researched a five-, 10- and 20-mile radius from his course. In a five-mile radius, consumer golf demand ranged from 16,500 rounds to 21,900 rounds per 18-hole equivalent. In a 10-mile radius, consumer golf demand ranged from 72,800 rounds to 91,000 rounds per 18-hole equivalent. "That can't be! It's highly unlikely," I thought. In a 20-mile radius, consumer golf demand ranged from 87,300 rounds to 110,400 rounds per 18-hole equivalent. "I don't think so! Jacksonville?" I thought.

… there are many types of market research, and not all of them will be accurately revealing about a golf market.

I called the company I bought the demographics package from and asked if there could have been a mistake in the population numbers it gave me. It double-checked, and its population statistics were correct. Confused, I called another consultant – one with more years of consumer market research experience at the time. Stuart Lindsay of Edgehill Consulting looked at my consumer demand analysis then looked at the raw population figures. He followed my calculations and demand adjustments and stated quite comfortably: "The five-mile radius is probably representative, but the 10-mile and 20-mile radii are population anomalies. When you visit, check your golfer participation rate. It's probably very low in that particular area of Jacksonville."

Lindsay was correct. My point is there are many types of market research, and not all of them will be accurately revealing about a golf market.

Lindsay shared another market with research aberrations unique to it – Las Vegas.

"They've got 39 million visitors from all over the country, and 9 percent (the national golf participation rate) of those probably play golf. But the Las Vegas Visitors and Convention Bureau states 2 percent of those 39 million play almost 800,000 rounds while they're there. What that number really says is that only about 25 percent of the golfers visiting actually play golf, or the demographics of the typical Las Vegas visitor don't match those of the typical golfers. It's what we call a cultural anomaly. In a nontourist area, we then look at income, age and ethnicity for a possible explanation. If that doesn't work, we usually repeat the following advice:

1. There's no substitute for actual "on the ground" market reconnaissance.
2. Place more belief in the rounds information personally obtained from courses in the area.
3. Use those round averages to extrapolate actual golf demand in the area.

So, in the aforementioned Jacksonville example, one should follow this advice to figure out why all those missing golfers are doing something instead of golfing. The same advice can be used in the Las Vegas market as well.

The bottom line is that you should conduct all the market research available to you. Always remember the most important element of market research is the correct interpretation of the data and information for the benefit of your facility. Keep asking: "So, what if …" The answers will follow. **GCI**

This is a glimpse of how golfers' behavior impacts the business of facility maintenance and management. It shows the link between the professional community and golfers. Throughout the year, we'll publish trends, likes/dislikes, suggestions and other information about your customers.

Barriers to play

A high percentage of golfers are intimidated or embarrassed at golf courses, according to a recent survey conducted by the National Golf Foundation. The finding shows efforts to create new players – or more frequent, committed golfers – are more difficult. However, most of the issues surrounding these bad feelings are addressable at the facility.

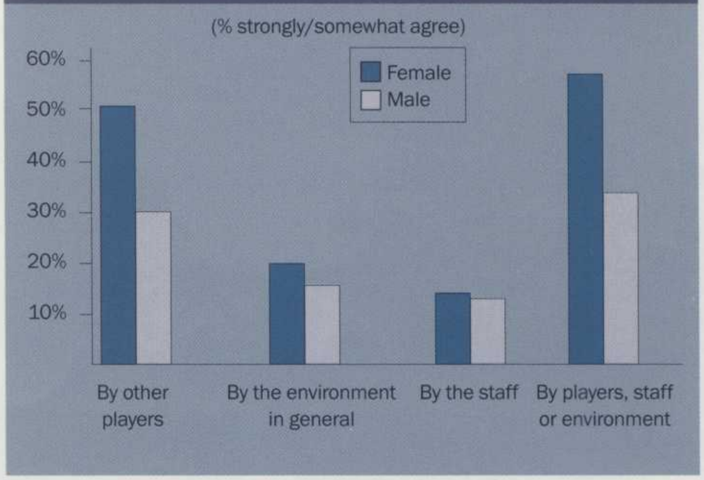
More than half of female golfers feel intimidated by other players, the staff or the environment in general. And 60 percent of women feel embarrassed by their lack of skill or knowledge. Men are far less likely to feel intimidated or embarrassed compared to women. Still, one-third are.

Infrequent golfers are much more likely to have these feelings compared to more frequent players. Addressing the issues: Skill, the No. 1 issue, can be addressed in group lessons; staff can be more welcoming; structured programs for beginners can include rules and etiquette lessons; and so on.

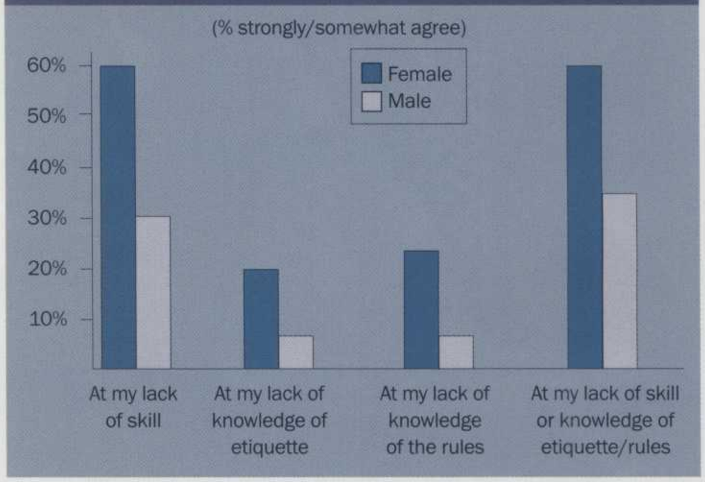
When asked what would make them play more often, golfers overwhelmingly answered the age-old time-and-money issue, which, for the most part, aren't addressable at the facility. Issues that are addressable, and are important to many golfers, include having a social network of people to play with, such as leagues, playing nine holes and walking instead of riding.

Source: National Golf Foundation

I sometimes feel intimidated at golf courses ...



When playing golf, I sometimes feel embarrassed ...



I'd play more often if...	Male	Female	Occasional (1-7 rounds)	Core (8+ rounds)	
I could play better	41%	55%	50%	40%	addressable
I had more people to play with	38%	47%	44%	37%	addressable
I could play (and pay or) less than 18 holes	22%	30%	27%	20%	addressable
I could walk instead of ride	13%	10%	13%	11%	addressable
I had more time	64%	61%	70%	58%	
Playing fees were less expensive	63%	43%	63%	54%	

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LUNATIC on the LINKS

By Pat Jones

Charlie Birney swings into his new role as the NGCOA president

Let's get one thing straight right now. Charlie Birney, the grand high poobah ... er, I mean president ... of the National Golf Course Owners Association, is a lunatic.

No, he's not a raving, knife-wielding serial killer or anything like that. He's just a mildly wacky guy who sends self-drawn cartoons and odd pictures along with every e-mail. He's incapable of staying on point in a phone conversation. You ask him a simple question about the golf courses he owns, and you end up talking about 17th century archeology and exotic bird species.

But that's the beauty of Birney. He's a lunatic who's passionate about the golf business. And the industry will be better off for it.

Birney was born with a terra-cotta spoon in his mouth. Specifically, he's a descendant of the founders of The Brick Companies, originally the Washington Brick & Terra Cotta Co., one of the region's great accidental fortunes. Way back when, one of his ancestors was smart enough to realize that building Washington, D.C., would require a great many bricks, and established a company to provide them. The business was successful, but the land on which the company operated also happened to be the area of northern Virginia that's now called Crystal City. The family eventually sold that land to companies such as Charles E. Smith and Marriott. Today, Crystal City is packed with hotels, office buildings and government agencies. Suffice it to say that The Brick Companies made a small profit along the way.

The company hasn't produced a brick since 1939. Instead, it focuses on managing and developing commercial properties and real estate, including three courses in a division called Atlantic Golf. When he's not busy with NGCOA stuff, fundraising for the company's charitable foundation or doing wacky stuff with his wife and twins, Birney serves as the managing director for the company. He started his two-year term at the helm of the owners association in February, so it's a good time to ask him about his plans for the organization and his views about the state of the industry.

Why did you volunteer for NGCOA in the first place?

I went to an NGCOA conference years ago, and it wasn't good. I was underwhelmed, and I said so. But I was impressed with the staff. Before I got involved, I'd spent a great deal of time and money opposing the growth of municipal golf in our area. I was a private sector guy competing against a government agency. I started to go to hearings where the county was trying to get even more active in golf development. I said, 'Look, this is a travesty. You have no business building courses.' Eventually, we sued them and forced them to change their charter. Unfortunately, this allowed them to do whatever they wanted to do. It's pretty darn hard to oppose government development.

I became involved with a lot more political stuff because of that and lobbied for tourism as a member of the Maryland Tourism Development Board. A friend, John Shields, was leaving the board of the NGCOA and helped get me involved. At the time, Bill Stine was dumb enough to nominate me for the board. I'm still passing the hat for my own impeachment fund.

Is there any legitimate role for government to develop new golf courses?

There might be places – and I'm not aware of any – where governments should be creating new golf courses. But, as a rule, the government shouldn't be building any new courses. There are plenty of idiots like me who are willing to do it. I'd like to see existing muni facilities privatized, but the problem is counties such as Montgomery County in Maryland have a stranglehold on golf. Typically, these courses aren't really run by the county but by a 'revenue authority' or similar mechanism so the jurisdiction can act outside its standard responsibilities and take on projects that compete with the private sector. They should have better things to do. So, I don't think the government should be building golf courses ... or the PGA Tour for that matter.

Tell us about your courses.

They're three very different facilities – different styles, price points and locations. South River outside Annapolis is transitioning to private and hopefully will be profitable. There is a lot more rise and fall to the course than you would expect from land in this area.

Queenstown Harbor is a special course right on the Chester River and the Chesapeake Bay. I can't think of a course in the area with better views of the bay from so many holes. It's wrapped in great history as well. And Queenstown is