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Rethink Tomorrow





**Bruce Charlton**, president of the American Society of Golf Course Architects, also is president and chief design officer of Robert Trent Jones II, a golf course architecture firm.

## THREE MESSAGES FOR YOU

In the historic home of golf, in the dramatic landscape of Scotland, the ceremonial gavel sounded to signal the beginning of my presidency of the American Society of Golf Course Architects. As I accepted the responsibility associated with leading this group for the coming year, I vowed to devote as much energy as I could to help the ASGCA familiarize the golf industry and general public with our members' progressive messages—of which many revolve around water use and our views about environmentally responsible and sustainable practices in golf course development and remodeling. These messages can impact the game at every level, from player to pro. Golf course superintendents can keep these messages in mind when considering the goals of their architect associates.

### THE NEW GOLDEN AGE

Many players view the 1920s and much of the '30s as the Golden Age of golf course architecture. Courses by such legends as Alister MacKenzie, Seth Raynor and Donald Ross are among the greatest examples of elemental design and are rightfully glorified. But now we're in a revival period of great course design.

It can be argued that today's practitioners have less optimal pieces of land to work with than their predecessors. Since the early 1990s, our generation's architects have been producing some of the finest golf courses on some of the most challenging sites. By taking advantage of today's technological advances and new theories about design, architects have created an exciting time in golf.

### WATER USAGE

Water is the lifeblood of every golf course. Many misconceptions linger around the ways in which golf courses use this resource. ASGCA members believe in doing more with less, and courses have begun to follow suit. ASGCA architects have been helping many courses reduce their annual

overhead by strategically revamping their habitual water use.

At this year's ASGCA annual meeting, members had the privilege of playing some of the most fabled courses in the history of golf, including The Old Course, Royal Dornoch and Turnberry. And it's never been more apparent just how great a course can play when it simply echoes the watering practices, or lack thereof, of those legendary Scottish layouts. Club management and superintendents should allow their courses

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to play firm and fast. It's a brand of golf that has been the norm for years at great courses worldwide and a concept many ASGCA members support.

ASGCA architects also are designing new courses and remodeling existing ones using improved technology, including drought-resistant grass varieties, and computer-monitored irrigation and

root-moisture monitoring systems. Science has afforded architects the option of using recycled water resources. Effluent water is the only option for irrigation in many parts of the country, and its use is one way golf does its part to contribute to environmental sustainability.

### GOLF IS GREEN

There's a saying that fits the times: "Golf is green, has been green and always will be green." Unfortunately, some people outside the game adhere to dated beliefs that golf courses are bad for the environment, which isn't true.

The fundamental nature of the game relies on thriving ecosystems ripe with beautiful, healthy landscapes and full of natural wildlife. As architects and ASGCA members, we do everything we can to maintain and enhance these intricate relationships. With the financial support of the ASGCA Foundation and the help of his fellow architects, ASGCA member and environmental committee chairman Bill Love recently completed the third edition of *An Environmental Approach to Golf Course Development*.

Love's latest publication highlights positive ways in which golf courses maintain and rehabilitate the environment. The book includes 18 case studies from throughout North America and describes course projects that were situated on a variety of environmentally sensitive sites, including wetlands, wildlife habitats and abandoned areas once used for mining and landfills.

It's ingrained in every ASGCA architect just how important it is to protect, enhance and preserve the environment in which we work and play. ASGCA members are in a unique position to help the golf industry recognize exactly what kind of progress is being made in new development projects and the new techniques that can be applied to future remodeling efforts. I hope you'll join me in getting the word out that today's golf design rivals that of the 1920s and '30s and is an environmentally responsible steward of Mother Nature's gifts. **GCI**



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## EASY TALK, DIFFICULT WALK

**M**y last column (May 2008) addressed the unnerving fact that golf course superintendents generally don't have access to written contracts and suggested how golf course superintendents might help themselves in this regard. As promised, this column will focus on the important role GCSA chapters can play within an evolving national campaign to address this pressing issue. The key observation to note again is that clubs presumably are able to deny superintendents written contracts primarily because their members (almost 100 percent of whom enjoy the privilege of written contracts or grant them universally to management level employees they hire) aren't aware of the situation. Once club memberships are educated about this situation effectively, the picture will begin to change.

Unfortunately, chapters aren't organized peoplewise to undertake this educational assignment effectively because short-term rotating chapter presidents aren't on the scene long enough to command enough attention to make clubs listen. The situation calls for the continuing presence of an articulate, informed professional to fill the role of chapter executive director. Easy talk, but a difficult walk as the following comparison of the way the GCSAA and PGA fund their chapters/sections will show.

**Cost.** There are 41 PGA sections that concentrate golf professionals within a 300 to 600 range of annual dues-paying members per section. Conversely, there are 101 GCSA chapters that concentrate members within a much lower range of dues-paying members (150 to 400), which makes it difficult for most chapters to self-fund an executive director.

More interestingly, the national PGA dues format rebates \$500 of each member's \$600 annual dues fee back to the sections. This provides the average mid-sized section with an approximate \$225,000 stipend each year, which is enough money to allow PGA sections to hire executive directors comfortably within a salary range of from roughly \$60,000 for the smaller sections to more than \$125,000 for the larger sections. GCSAA members pay an annual dues fee of \$320 the association

### GOLF ASSOCIATION SEEKS EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

An established, member-based regional golf service association is looking to hire a retired corporate executive, military officer or the equivalent as its first executive director to serve as c.o.o., to direct a one-person administrative staff and become the spokesperson for the organization. Candidates must play golf with a USGA-approved handicap and be familiar with a private golf club environment. The successful candidate will be responsible for managing/promoting the association; converting to chapterwide electronic communications, including Web site management; scheduling and managing events; and optimizing revenue flow. Respectable starting salary with the opportunity to increase as the chapter grows. Send resume with cover letter electronically to (insert chapter e-mail address).

keeps without rebating to chapters.

The GCSAA should consider adopting the PGA dues model, but this would take some time to implement if the GCSAA is willing to go down this road. While waiting for the GCSAA to adopt the PGA dues format, or in case the GCSAA never does adopt the PGA dues format, chapters would always be able to generate adequate funds to self-fund the hiring of an executive director themselves provided they (after appropriately increasing their annual dues fee):

(i) partner, if necessary, with one or more neighboring chapters and/or independent regional associations to hire a common executive director; and

(ii) look to hire qualified retired corporate or military men and women with solid retirement portfolios who would be willing to work for less initially. For some chapters, the time to consider hiring an executive director is now; for others, later.

**Workload.** A fundamental decision chapters must address when considering hiring an executive director is whether to replace or retain a presently employed executive secretary. Circumstances suggest that the larger member-based chapters with heavy workloads, especially those that publish a magazine, retain executive secretaries to insure covering the work base. Conversely, smaller chapters with lighter workloads need not retain an executive secretary when hiring an executive director. This key decision will have to be measured carefully on a chapter-by-chapter basis.

Three meaningful benefits immediately accrue when hiring an executive director to complement, not replace, an executive secretary:

(i) it would cost less to hire an executive director because

of the shared workload;

(ii) the number of candidates qualified for the job would increase; and

(iii) candidates would look more favorably at a job they are considering. Chapters might use the model media on this page when soliciting candidates.

My next column (July 2008) will discuss this subject in more detail and present a definitive job description that will profile the wide range of valuable services a qualified chapter executive director can deliver. **GCI**



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**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](mailto:jackbrennan@tampabay.rr.com).

## DWELL ON YOUR BUSINESS

What's with the brouhaha between the New York Times article "More Americans are giving up golf," (Feb. 21) and the editorial response from Mike Hughes, c.e.o. of the National Golf Course Owners Association, in the April issue of *Golf Business* challenging the Times' negative opinion about the golf industry's health?

I received an e-mail copy of the Times article the same day it ran. It was sent to me by a course owner, who was one of the sources in the article. He was shocked and dismayed by its negativity. Call me a sensationalist, but after I read it, I agreed with the author's underlying basis for the negative headline.

The author uses many statistics attributed to the National Golf Foundation. I'm not saying the statistics are wrong, though they might be dated or inaccurate. Nonetheless, the author's forecast was negative. He came to the conclusion that the problem isn't a game of golf; it's the game of golf itself: "Over the past decade, the leisure activity most associated with corporate success in America has been in a kind of recession." Hmmm. I thought the leisure activity most associated with corporate success in America was cigar smoking and martini drinking. But I digress.

The author even sourced Jim Kass, research director for the NGF, who used the term "doom and gloom" when asked what was keeping people from taking up the game, and golfers from playing more. Oops. Seems that quote steepened the author's apparent negative slope.

We have two different perspectives about the health of the industry – doom-and-gloom on the one hand and rose-colored glasses on the other. Considering those two views – both correct in my opinion – here's a marketing suggestion: Don't dwell on the state of the industry. Rather, dwell on the state of your golf business. You can help make the industry better by making your golf business healthier. And two easy-to-implement marketing elements to help monitor your business are play trends and player surveys.

Here's a marketing suggestion: Don't dwell on the state of the industry. You can help make the industry better by making your golf business healthier.

As owners, managers and operators, it's meaningful to understand the trends in the industry, but don't you care more about what's happening at your course, in your market? How many rounds are being played at your course versus your competitors, and why? Whether rounds have increased or decreased, you need to know why a market trend is occurring at your course.

One section of my company's course marketing plan is called a calendarized revenue plan. Calendarized means incorporating your rounds and revenue projections into each month of the year, even weekly, if you can. The marketing secret to these projections is that they're not right or wrong. You don't live and die by these numbers. You learn from them. Doing so, you'll begin to understand your market

better. Whenever you miss your calendarized revenue plan, ask why you missed the projection and investigate the reasons. Learn why, and you'll be able to project that month's rounds more accurately next year.

For those operators who monitor player surveys, how consistently do you monitor them? Too often can be bothersome to golfers and not often enough is almost meaningless. Current, meaningful insight about players – their habits and likes and dislikes about your course and golf market – can be gathered effectively once a quarter. The manager should schedule a survey week in each quarter of the year. The survey should be handed out for seven consecutive days, preferably 10, to be representative of all play segments patronizing the course. The most difficult part of organizing a player survey for owners and managers is knowing which questions to ask and how many questions to include. (An example survey can be found online. See box below.)

The manager should determine an effective, appropriate incentive (e.g., a free beverage) to give the customer for filling out the survey and returning it. The returns on this type of a survey are low – 5 to 10 percent – so it's important for the entire staff to encourage customers to fill them out.

As surveys are handed out, the atmosphere should be friendly. You're asking customers to do you a favor, so you need to make sure they realize the information is important and meaningful to your operation and service to them.

The favorable results should be posted the week after the survey. Research information should be used as a barometer to gauge real and/or perceived problems that might need to be addressed within the marketplace. The first few surveys will provide bare market insight. However, with the compilation of repeated surveys, you'll begin to see meaningful results about who's playing the course and why. This information will go a long way to help you better market your course. **GCI**

### PALADIN'S PLAYER Survey

> View the example player survey on GCI's Web site. It will be posted with this column. Click on "current issue" at the bottom of the home page.



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## Know your customers' buying habits

**D**o you have fresh insights into your customers' characteristics, attitudes, perceptions and spending behavior? If you don't, you should. Being more in tune with customers helps operators manage their business better and chart a course for growth.

When it comes to golfers' purchasing habits, their purchase incidence increases with age and income. Golfers age 60 and older have a higher purchase incidence for shoes, for example, compared to those age 18 to 39 (38 percent to 20 percent, respectively). Higher income players are more likely to purchase shirts – 52 percent of \$100,000-plus purchase versus 32 percent of less than \$50,000.

Additionally, there's a distinct channel profile among buyers. Channel profile means the profile of golfers by different channels of distribution for a given product, such as golf gloves. The on-course shopper plays more frequently, has a higher income and is more likely to be a private club member compared to the sporting goods shopper. However, the sporting goods shopper shoots lower scores and is more tuned into golf Web sites compared to on-course and off-course shoppers.

Take the Wal-Mart shopper for golf balls. The profile of the golfer who buys golf balls exclusively at mass merchants is quite different from other buyers. The Wal-Mart shopper is a less avid golfer in terms of rounds, number of balls purchased and golf media consumption. The mass merchant shopper also has a lower income and is less likely to be a private club member.

The statistics on this page are based on more than 2,000 U.S. golfers who completed an online survey in May 2007 from the National Golf Foundation. The sample was drawn from global market research firm Synovate's nationally representative panel of 2.6 million Americans.

Source: National Golf Foundation



## CLUB BUYER PROFILE

GOLFING CHARACTERISTICS	Club buyers	Index to all golfers (100=average)
Average rounds 2006	30	142
Average score	94	95
% hooked on golf	84	127
% watch golf on TV at least monthly	78	122
% read golf magazines at least monthly	62	157
% visit golf websites at least monthly	42	166
% went on golf trip last 12 months	67	149
<b>DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS</b>		
% male	81	106
Average age	49	103
Average household income	\$102,790	111

Buyers are defined as having spent \$200+ on new clubs in the past 12 months.

## PREMIUM SHIRT PROFILE

GOLFING CHARACTERISTICS	Premium shirt buyers	Index to all golfers (100=average)
Average rounds	38	192
% private	47	302
% maintain handicap	65	209
% take golf lessons	29	286
% read golf magazines at least monthly	73	186
% watch golf on TV at least monthly	88	139
<b>DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS</b>		
% male	77	100
Average age	59	123
Average household income	\$152,300	164
% college grad	79	143
% retired	36	175

Buyers are defined as typically spending \$40 or more per shirt.

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Steve Cook says it's surprising how much time is spent on things other than turfgrass management during tournament preparing. Photo: Jim West

# MOTOWN MAJOR MAN

**STEVE COOK** prepares for the PGA Championship, discusses his career, and offers advice for younger superintendents and assistants