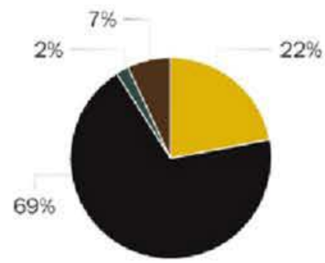
By The Numbers cont.

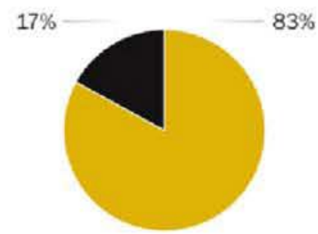
Do you subscribe to the "no contact/no relief" or "light contact with light relief" grinding philosophy?

- No contact/no relief
- Light contact with light relief
- Don't know
- Other



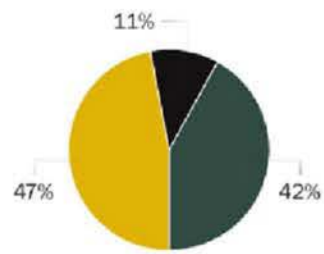
Do you grind new bedknives?

- Yes
- No



Do reels stay on/cut longer when maintained to the manufacturer specifications?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know



move during grinding.

"A brand-new $60,000 grinder will give you a bad grind if your $5 bearing is shot, so make sure everything is working properly," says Baard. "While you have the machine off the floor, it's also a good time to check other things like hardware, seals, etc."

NOT TRUING THE BEDKNIFE

It's another simple step that technicians often skip. After you've married the bedknife to the backing, the top and front faces of the bedknife need to be ground to make sure they are straight and true.

EXCEEDING REEL DIAMETER LIMITS

OEM reels are designed to work within certain parameters. Going beyond the manufacturer's reel diameter tolerance limit alters the original geometry of the reel and bedknife setup, says Westbrook. "For example,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Consider all of the variables

There are a large number of parameters and variables to evaluate to find the best course of action on any given day, says Foley United's Jim Letourneau. Making the decision to completely refurbish reels in the winter is an easy decision. What needs to be done to correct a poor quality of cut situation for a short period of time requires more complete evaluation.

"In most cases the manufacturers have tested and developed cutting units that will stay sharp, use the least amount of horsepower, and stay on cut the longest amount of time if they are returned to the manufacturer's specifications," Letourneau says. "However, there are many methods that work and produce a high quality of cut and the best program may use a combination of all practices."

- Understand the entire process and what labor and equipment are needed to execute the plan.
- Establish a realistic reel maintenance program that meets both the expectations and budgets is essential to quality turf management.
- Have the right tools in place to perform the tasks is essential to the program and lack of them may limit the options that are available.
- Start with a quality assessment and an establishment of goals, then looking at the methods needed to achieve those goals, and then ensuring the budgets are capable of supporting the program should be done carefully.

Letourneau recommends a program established by the team, not an individual, unless that individual is truly capable of understanding every facet of the reel maintenance program as it relates to the overall course maintenance program.

on a 5-inch reel, you don't want to get below a 4.5-inch diameter. When you see the reels worn past that diameter, the reel is simply unable to provide a good quality-of-cut."

PREP WORK

One of the biggest mistakes is not fully understanding that the reel and bedknife are not properly prepared for the task they are being asked to do, says Jim Letourneau, Foley United's president and COO.

"Using dull reels and expecting a perfect cut will not result in the reels meeting the expectations of the user," he says. "Doing a partial overhaul and sharpening job and expecting the reels to stay on cut for the entire season will also lead to disappointment."

When it comes to reel grinding, Tracy Lanier, John Deere Golf product manager, says everyone has their own method that works best for them. But that doesn't mean a program should be inflexible. "The most common problems that we see are on courses that use a grind-only program," says Lanier. "These courses tend to grind too much, which can lead to increased cost due to reduced life of reels or bedknives. It can also lead to cut issues during times of stress."

Lanier recommends a more balanced approach, using backlapping and reel grinding to maintain a good quality cut. Using this approach ensures the bedknife and reel stay sharper for longer. GCI

Henry DeLozier is a principal in the Global Golf Advisors consultancy. DeLozier joined Global Golf Advisors in 2008 after nine years as the vice president of golf for Pulte Homes. He is a past president of the National Golf Course Owners Association's board of directors and serves on the PGA of America's Employers Advisory Council.

RETHINK CAPITAL PLANNING

Not the sexiest of subjects, but easily the most important to be involved in.

Emerging from a recessionary cycle that required most clubs to defer capital replacements and acquisition, club leaders are scrambling to prepare for much-needed capital investments.

"Many clubs fell behind the planning curve and are now playing catchup to put their plan in place," says Paul Mueller, who runs Milwaukee-based Club Capital Planners. "Everyone knows that capital planning is important. But it becomes a tiresome exercise for many because they're too busy or don't understand the steps in an effective planning process."

Here are five steps that will result in an effective capital plan:

INVENTORY EVERY ASSET. Prepare a preliminary list of everything with a useful life of more than one year and costs more than $1,000. This time- and base-price reference point is a starting point in answering, "What should be considered a capital asset?" This first-step requires a thorough listing of furnishings, fixtures and equipment (FF&E) in each department. From water fountains to greensmowers, list everything.

EVALUATE CURRENT CONDITION. Does the asset show greater-than-normal wear and tear? Has it been in use for too long? Will it operate properly with routine maintenance? Your evaluation serves as the baseline for the capital plan. Consider the buildings, parking lots, pathways, and facility signage.

CROSS-REFERENCE USEFUL LIFE. The club accountant or an accounting expert can provide a standard useful life table showing an objective reference point for how long most golf course and club equipment should be depreciated. In its simplest form, a depreciation term indicates how long the equipment or asset should last and continue to be effective. Most courses stretch the useful life to its limit. Bear in mind that aged and outdated FF&E brings with it uncertain performance and risk for the operator and users.

ESTIMATE REPLACEMENT COSTS. What will it cost to replace the asset? Consult vendors, suppliers and peers to understand the market on goods or services required to replace the asset in question. According to Mueller, most clubs can obtain updated costs from vendor websites or from distributors, supplier or manufacturers' representatives.

PLAN FOR THE FUTURE. Following a time when so many capital purchases were delayed because of the recession, most clubs are surprised and sometimes overwhelmed by the amount and cost of replacements. Replacements must be prioritized as few clubs can afford to replace everything in one year. In fact, most clubs plan for replacement every year. The amount in any given year varies. For example, replacing an entire irrigation system will cost millions while the resurfacing of the tennis courts will be a fraction of the cost. Scheduling replacement and expense is one of the most critical steps in the capital planning process, requiring patience, discipline and understanding of value.

While there is no rule-of-thumb answer to prioritizing replacements, planning criteria include:

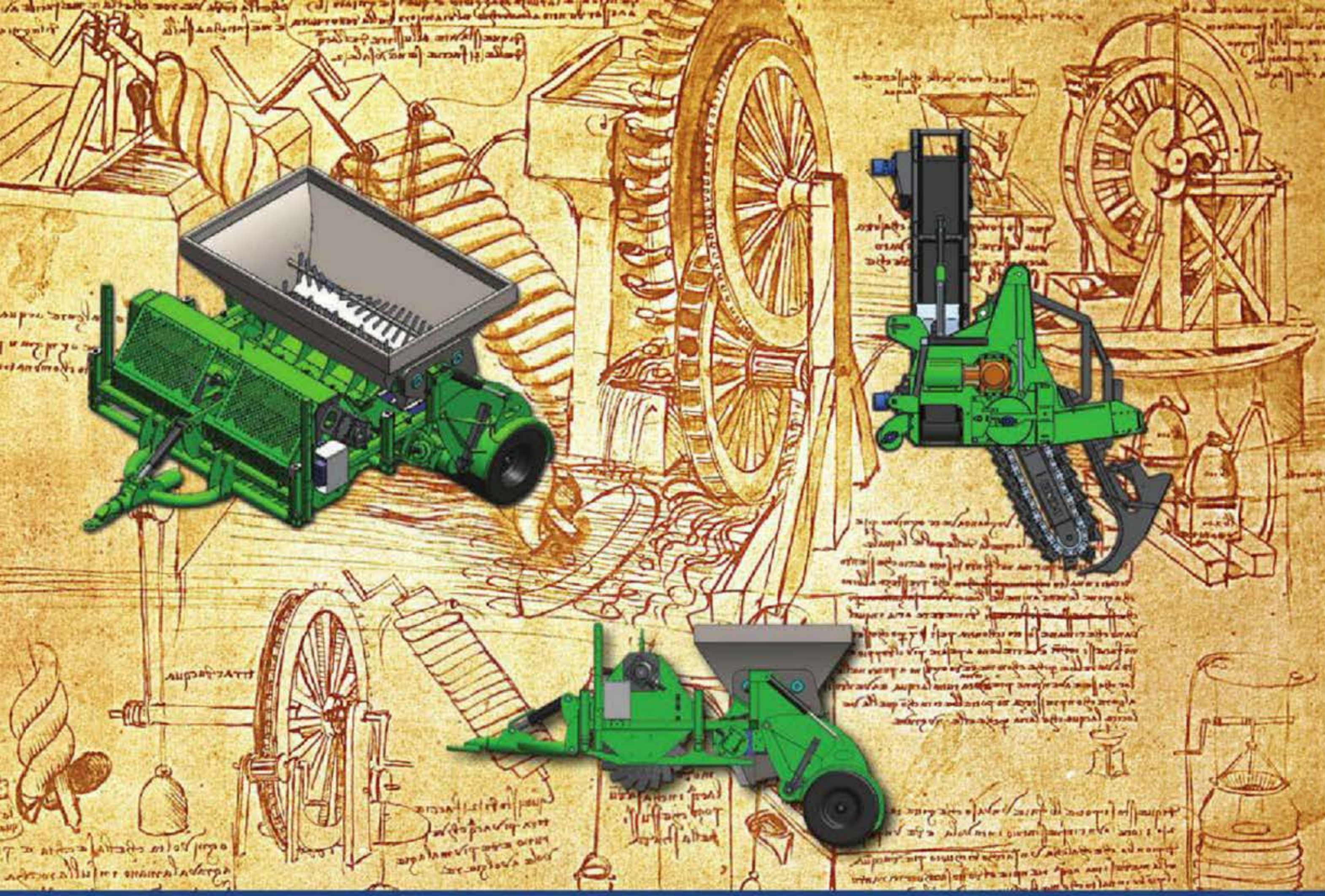
SAFETY AND SECURITY. Aging FF&E that threatens the health and safety of members and staff must be replaced.

> "Your evaluation of the current condition of each asset serves as the baseline for the capital plan. Consider the buildings, parking lots, pathways, signage and all aspects of the facility."

Ensuring that the facility is secure and maintains low risk levels is also vitally important. Jeff Magoon, CMAA's risk management executive, says most insurers will provide guidance concerning asset replacement risks.

MISSION CRITICAL. What is the club's mission? If best-in-class conditions are a non-negotiable requirement to uphold the mission, course needs must be prioritized. The same holds for any asset that supports and sustains the mission and member expectations.

REVENUE ELASTICITY. In clubs where there is constant pressure to keep revenues flowing, assets that generate revenue are the next priority. Kitchen equipment and capabilities that sustain food and beverage revenue are important. Golf cars that yield high-margin revenues need attention and replacement. It is important for each manager to fully understand what assets produce the greatest revenue potential. **GCI**



SO SAYS NOSTRA-BOB-MUS

IN 2010 GCI'S BOB LOHMANN MADE 10 PREDICTIONS ABOUT THE INDUSTRY IN 2020. FOUR YEARS OLDER AND WISER, HE TAKES STOCK OF HIS CLAIRVOYANT ABILITIES.

Way back in 2010, I was asked to play Nostradamus at the annual Wisconsin Golf Turf Symposium. I guess they thought I was old enough – at that point, we'd been in business for 26 years – to come up with plausible golf industry predictions.

Just the other day, with four years more experience, I happened upon those predictions. I want to share them with you – along with some current comments about how I did – or, in some cases, did not – hit the mark.

Maybe, when I come down from the euphoria of nailing so many of these, I'll forego another round of predictions and take this uncanny ability straight to the stock market.

PREDICTION 1

CHINA WILL ECLIPSE THE RECORD U.S. COURSE OPENINGS FROM THE 1990S, BUT WILL REPEAT THE MISTAKES OF THE U.S. BY BUILDING TOO MANY DIFFICULT, UP-SCALE FACILITIES AND NEGLECTING THE NEED FOR BEGINNER GOLF.

China hasn't been opening golf courses at a rate of 300 or 400 a year, which was the high water mark here in the States back in the go-go '90s. It's been more like 75-100 per year since 2010, though it's difficult to get reliable numbers in a country where the government has imposed a course-building moratorium – and developers go ahead and build them anyway, under the radar. Anyway, I was all wet on the numbers. But I'll stand by the "repeating mistakes" part: Nearly all these new Chinese courses are private, very expensive to join, and many are relying on real-estate components to make them economically viable. And we all know where THAT leads.

PREDICTION 2

COURSE CLOSURES (750 TO 1,000 BY 2020) WILL CONTINUE TO OUTPACE OPENINGS. NEW OPENINGS WILL INCLUDE ALTERNATIVE AND MIXED-USE FACILITIES.

In 2013, the U.S. golf market experienced its eighth straight year where course closures outpaced course openings. There were 14 openings in 2013 and 154.5 closures (all but five of them public courses). The net loss of approximately 140 18-hole equivalents has held steady the last three years. While the annual net losses were smaller from 2006-2010, do the math. Methinks I nailed this one. This correction could well persist through 2020, and the idea that we'll see more than 100 new openings per year? Those days seem gone forever.

PREDICTION 3

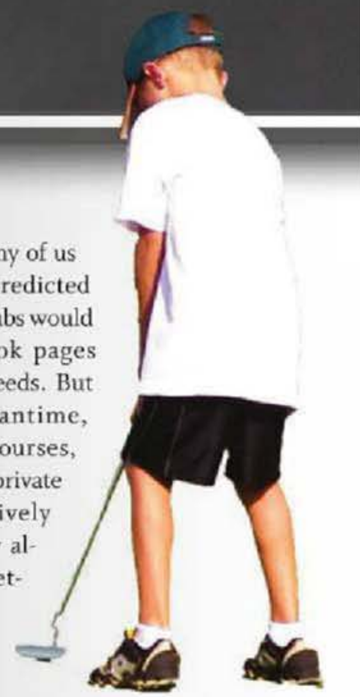
COURSES WILL LOOK TO ALTERNATIVE SOURCES FOR PLAYER DEVELOPMENT, MEANS OF REVENUE, AND USE OF THEIR PROPERTY.

I hinted at this in prediction No. 2 and here again. The bottom line is, we see evidence of this more and more, both first-hand and anecdotally. I think we all had a sense that programs like the First Tee would result in "alternative" practice facilities and short courses. If you've read my columns here at GCI.com, you know that we are supportive of First Tee, but also Links Across America, which we consider an even better model (we've personally been involved in designing/creating/opening three such alternative facilities). So this prediction was something of a no-brainer. What we didn't see coming (but which I predicted just the same) was the advent of disc golf and even footgolf at existing "traditional" golf facilities. We have two client courses that will be incorporating the latter into their routings starting this spring. These alternative uses are being incorporated into golf courses, in the same way fishing derbies, winter sports and hiking trails are being incorporated. The pace of this has surprised me, but it was only a matter of time. Especially at public courses, what's the difference between setting up a disc course within the traditional golf course, and having a wedding in the clubhouse? Revenue is revenue.

PREDICTION 4

CLUBS, ESPECIALLY PRIVATE, WILL HAVE TO FIND WAYS TO MARKET TO THE NEXT GENERATION.

I think the advent of social media strategies is enough proof that this has taken hold, in a huge way. Four years ago, I don't know that many of us would have predicted that private clubs would have Facebook pages and Twitter feeds. But they do. Meantime, look for all courses, but especially private clubs, to actively and creatively alter courses setups to allow for 3- and 6-hole loops, for folks short of time and attention span.



PREDICTION 5

EXISTING COURSES WILL CAPITALIZE ON ALTERNATIVE MEANS FOR FUNDING RENOVATION EFFORTS.

Again, I'll take credit for being spot on with this one – but with so many publically owned facilities struggling today, as we've noted above, it's really a matter of renovating or closing their doors. What I couldn't foresee, but perhaps should have, is the way some municipalities have leveraged stormwater and water-quality management projects to pay for these renovations. We at LGD and Golf Creations have been involved in dozens of projects where our renovation work aided a city's water-retention and/or water-filtration efforts. But we didn't see this coming in 2010: New state statutes recently obliged the city of Appleton, Wisconsin to improve water quality and stormwater retention, vis a vis the nearby Lower Fox River. The city wisely used Reid Municipal GC to make this happen – and the city paid for what turned out to be a substantial course renovation, because you can't add all those ponds and wetlands without radically changing a course routing. This is a model that should be followed elsewhere, including private clubs.

PREDICTION

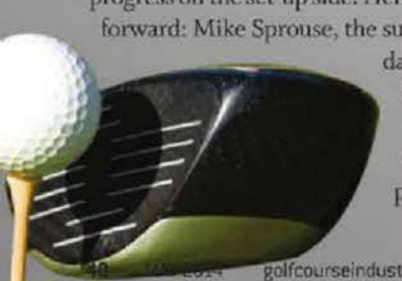
COURSES WILL DO "MORE WITH LESS," EMPLOYING UNIQUE, AFFORDABLE RENOVATION STRATEGIES TO MAKE IMPROVEMENTS AND UPGRADE INFRASTRUCTURE.

Hardly rocket science, this prediction. The way golf courses spent money in the years prior to the economic downturn of 2008 simply wasn't sustainable. To me, however, the solutions golf has deployed in response to tighter budgets is the lemonade we've created – having been handed such a big basket of lemons. The gas and regrass option, for example, has proved a fine alternative to costly, full-on greens renovation/reconstruction. Ditto for push-up greens construction. Four years ago, I would never have dreamed our renovation jobs would feature so much in-house labor, meaning course maintenance crews. The biggest and most significant cost-saving advance might just be the Asset Management Plan, or AMP, whereby we at LGD deconstruct a master renovation plan, break it into affordable chunks, and help clubs work those projects into annual budgets.

PREDICTION

COURSE MANAGERS WILL CHALLENGE TRADITION IN THE WAY THEY SETUP AND MARKET THEIR PRODUCT.

I'm not a marketer, but I think golf still has a ways to go in the non-traditional marketing department. So the jury's still out on that front, and we're making slow progress on the set-up side. Here's one step forward: Mike Sprouse, the super at Randall Oaks GC in Dundee Township, Ill., has experimented with allowing golfers to tee it up wherever they choose. No markers. This essentially allows people to "Tee It Forward", the program promoted by the ASGCA. But Mike's experiments are unique in that they also provide him real useful information on usage and wear, i.e. where his teeing grounds should be bigger, smaller or eliminated altogether. We know Mike because we designed a Links Across America short course there at Randall Oaks, back in 2010 actually, and have been helping him upgrade the 18-hole course since the 1980s. I will probably talk to Mike further for an upcoming article, because I love what he's doing. In the meantime, I'm still waiting for the tech revolution to allow for flexible course rating and handicapping, meaning from all yardages, using GPS.



PREDICTION

MANAGEMENT COMPANIES WILL CONTINUE GROWING THEIR PORTFOLIOS IN THE PRIVATE AND PUBLIC SECTORS.

If courses are going out of business in such numbers, a certain percentage of those courses can surely be plucked by management companies for pennies on the dollar. So, it's no surprise that management portfolios are growing. The NGF confirms that here. Of course, I think the economic downturn probably separates the truly competent management companies from their less competent competitors. I'd like to see some figures from the NGF that show the number of course closures where the facilities had been under third-party management the previous 36 months.

PREDICTION

COURSES WILL INVEST IN UPGRADES WITH LONG-TERM SUSTAINABILITY AND IMPACTS ON MAINTENANCE.

I think golf did an all-around admirable job of developing more efficient irrigation control, water conservation, water sourcing and heat/drought-tolerant turf species before the downtown. So it's no surprise that these efforts have taken on more urgency in the four years since this prediction. Of course, it's one thing to have these advances available – the powers that be at golf facilities still have to pay for them, and that's a tall order these days. Look at Better Billy Bunkers. These are proven cost-savers in the long run, especially in terms of man-hours. But they require a significant investment. And lookee here: GCI poobah Pat Jones weighs in with a whole new generation of technical diagnostics, most of which should lead to economic or resource efficiencies. Unfortunately, it's not clear to me whether enough golf courses are making the necessary technological investments today.

PREDICTION

GOLF COURSE ARCHITECTS WILL BE RELIED ON MORE TO BE TEAM FACILITATORS RATHER THAN MERE DESIGNERS.

There is no better example of this prediction coming true than the AMP process. I never thought we'd be so intimately involved with a client's long-term budgeting, which is a facilitating role if there ever was one. But when you're economizing, it's a no-brainer. And architects are uniquely placed to serve in this role, because our relationships with clients are normally long-term. It's already happening and I'm convinced that what we architects refer to as "the creative process," once limited to drawing pretty pictures, will increasingly focus as much on implementation and delivery as it does on the design itself. **GCI**

Bob Lohmann is founder, president, and principal architect of Lohmann Golf Designs and a frequent GCI contributor. Check out his blog at lohmanncompanies.blogspot.com.