

About 10 years ago, I was driving to Florida with a couple of guys, and we were heading into Atlanta at rush hour. Rather than face the mother of all traffic jams, we decided to pull off and find a place to play a quick nine. The map showed a muni right off the highway. We found it, paid our \$15 and commenced hacking.

Three holes into the round, I sensed something was different about this course. Then it hit me: *We* were different. All of the other players were African-American. We were the only white people on the course.

This Twilight Zone role-reversal moment forced me to consider what it must be like to be one of the relatively few blacks who venture onto America's largely white courses. For a few brief minutes, I felt, as Robert Heinlein put it, like a stranger in a strange land.

The experience also made me think about our side of the game. A quick glance around the GCSAA show is all you need to confirm that blacks are a relative rarity in the profession. The actual numbers are even more startling: Of more than 15,000 class A, B or C members of the national, only 29 classify themselves as African-American.

In this month's cover story, *Golfdom's* Frank Andorka provides a groundbreaking look at the issue of race in the golf course industry. It's a thought-provoking piece that suggests we're trying harder to be more inclusive, but that we're still not making much progress toward having an industry that "looks like America."

But before you read the article, I want to pose a question: Is this push for diversity merely a new wave of political correctness or is it a business issue that warrants serious attention? Here are five reasons I believe it's the latter:

• **Law** — Suppose you're working for a company that has a contract with Atlanta to manage and maintain that golf course I wandered on to a decade ago. Atlanta has particularly strict rules about equal opportunity hiring for its contractors. If you can't find qualified minority candidates, you lose the

A Stranger in a Strange Land

BY PAT JONES



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contract — and maybe your job.

• **Labor** — Have you noticed that white suburban kids aren't too interested in seasonal jobs that pay \$7 or \$8 an hour? Having trouble filling out your summer staff? An outreach program targeting African-American or Hispanic youth could be a perfect way to accomplish your goals and round out the cultural composition of your staff.

• **Revenue** — Golf is a pastime that is passed like a torch from person to person. Every time you bring a non-white into a golf career, you help to bring them, their families and their friends into the game. The game is flat — we need more players and their wallets.

• **Regulation** — Whenever issues like local pesticide bans, wetlands usage or private club status are discussed, the fact that golf is a white man's game is always an underlying factor. When we create opportunities for non-whites, we help to counter the connection between race and other issues.

• **Reputation** — Do you really feel good about being part of a business whose only defense against cries of racism is the fact that Tiger Woods can work miracles with a stick and a ball?

In my humble opinion, this is all about enlightened self-interest — the concept that doing good for others can also be good for you. There is no reason that this industry shouldn't provide attractive career opportunities for African-Americans and other people of color. On the other hand, I've just listed five good reasons it's extremely attractive for us. Let's reach out, let's make this a priority, and let's fix this once and for all.

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