

Issues

The More Things Change...

... will they stay the same? Examining 2001's pressing issues

Last year, the world waited for computers to destroy the world. Fortunately, the concerns heading into 2001 are less frightening, but there are a few issues that bear watching. Here are some of the issues superintendents will be talking about this time next year:

Rounds vs. course construction

In late October, the National Golf Foundation reported that 408 golf courses had opened in 2000. At the end of last year, 936 courses were under construction, with 760 designated to open this year. NGF usually projects that only 60 percent of those courses will open on time. But even then, the number of courses opened this year will easily eclipse last year's record of 496 openings.

NGF found that public facilities (daily fee and municipi-

pal) have dominated openings over the last several years, and it doesn't see that trend changing soon. In 1999, 84 percent of all course openings were public courses. NGF reports that 91 percent of planned courses and 87 percent under construction will also be public.

The number of rounds in 1999 reached 564 million last year, according to NGF. The average number of rounds per golfer increased to 21.3 rounds per year. NGF estimates there are 26.4 million golfers in the United States, with core golfers (those who played eight or more rounds in the year) making up 13.7 million.

Drought conditions pumped up the number of rounds last year, so what will the 2000 numbers show given the odd weather patterns that dominated the season? And can the numbers last given some unsteadiness in the economy? Stay tuned.

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ADA

As Casey Martin's golf car-use case rolls into the Supreme Court (a decision is expected this month), how golf courses deal with the access issues mandated in the Americans with Disabilities Act hangs over superintendents like the sword of Damocles.

There are 54 million people in the United States with disabilities as defined by the ADA, and around 600,000 of them golf. But Michael Quimbey, vice president of environmental affairs for Dallas-based Club Corp., says superintendents shouldn't be worried. Rules defining compliance requirements will be issued by the U.S. Department of Justice sometime in 2002, and Quimbey expects them to require only minor adjustments.

"It's a matter of changing our attitudes to golfers with disabilities," Quimbey says. "We, as an industry, have to remember that these people are golfers first and disabled second. When you realize that, it won't be that hard to accommodate them."

Quimbey and other members of the golf industry have worked on a subcommittee that produced six rules that courses will have to follow to be in compliance with the ADA once the Department of Justice issues the final rules in 2002. Then golf courses will probably have a year to comply, he says.

Management companies

There's rarely a middle ground for most superintendents when it comes to management companies: They either love 'em or they hate 'em. But understanding that management companies are here to stay, what impact are they having on the industry?

The consensus is that well-run management companies add tremendous stability to the business side of golf. For some facilities, aligning with a management company provides them with additional resources that they wouldn't otherwise be able to tap. Superintendents who work for good companies talk of job security and the possibilities for advancement as two significant advantages that management companies offer.

On the other hand, superintendents are upset with what they view as unethical recruitment tactics of management companies such as mass mailings and unannounced course visits. Some superintendents worry that owners are starting to listen to the pitch more closely.



Casey Martin's golf car-use case shouldn't have a severe impact on recreational golf.

PHOTO CREDIT: AP

Though management companies have mushroomed, the weaker ones are slowly being squeezed out of the market. That leaves more courses to be divvied up by three or four large firms, constricting the job market outside of management companies more than ever for superintendents.

FQPA

No single national government regulation raises the ire of superintendents more than the Food Quality Protection Act, enacted in 1996 to protect Americans — particularly children — from pesticide risks associated with food production.

Industry observers, however, believe that what started out as a good idea has been hijacked by the EPA and turned into an all-out war on pesticides, particularly in light of the actions taken against a variety of pesticides this year. It seems almost inevitable that more pesticides will come under fire next year, and it's important for superintendents to let their voices be heard, say industry insiders.

Rumors have Carol Browner retiring as chief administrator of the EPA. If that happens, the industry will have to watch closely to see who takes her place. ■

—Frank H. Andorka Jr.

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