

Like a progressive politician lobbying for a righteous cause, Florida architect William W. “Bill” Amick is trying to persuade the golf course industry that it needs smaller venues to promote its trade. But Amick, based in Daytona Beach and a veteran designer of more than 40 years, is wondering if anyone can — or even wants — to hear him.

Amick’s reasons for building many more private and public short golf courses are more than sensible. For starters, Amick knows there are a lot of bad golfers who like the game — but don’t want to be brought to their knees by a 7,186-yard, par-72, 18-hole course.

Amick cites other reasons for more small courses, such as lower green fees and less time to play. Not surprisingly, the opposite factors — \$75 green fees and four-hour rounds — are two king-size reasons why people *don’t* play golf.

In addition, smaller courses are also better adapted for children and beginners, Amick notes. And if you want to practice your short game, as so many decent golfers do, there’s no better place to do so than a pitch-and-putt course.

But if these reasons make so much sense, why aren’t small golf courses popping up like pizza parlors in the suburbs? Simply, it’s because they aren’t sexy, Amick explains.

For instance, even some bad golfers, who are better suited for small courses, would rather shoot 110s on big courses than swallow their pride and play a par-3 track.

“We don’t see small courses on TV or in magazines,” Amick points out. “There are no small courses on any best-course lists. They don’t get the publicity, recognition and exposure that regulation and championship courses do.”

So nobody wants anything to do with small courses, including lenders and developers. And they have their own reasons. What developer wants to build an affluent new neighborhood around a par-3 course?

But that’s still not a good reason for more small courses not being built. The bottom line is there are 40 million people, according to the National Golf Foundation, who would like to

Hacks Long for Short Courses

BY LARRY AYLWARD



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try playing golf or play more often. Yes, you can assume that a lot of these golfers stink.

Unfortunately, a lot of these crummy golfers think they’re too good for small courses. While they need a collective reality check, their egos aren’t helping the cause for small courses.

As Amick stresses, there are plenty of golfers who realize they aren’t very good and would rather play on smaller courses. I know at least one bad golfer who would welcome an exciting and challenging small course to improve his game.

“A lot of people will never be able to hit a long ball or have a single-digit handicap,” Amick stresses.

Another thing: The industry is trying to promote its game as a family affair, like going to the movies. That’s wonderful, but let’s face it: Dad, Mom and 7-year-old Junior aren’t going to go to the new and demanding Tom Fazio course up the street to play 18 holes for four hours in the hot sun and be entertained. They realize (hopefully) that this course is not the place for them to spend quality family time. They realize (hopefully) that they need a small course that’s fun and fast to play.

Amick says developers should start building a big course and a small course on the same allotment to satisfy an array of players.

“But [developers] aren’t buying that yet,” Amick adds. “That takes more land.”

It’s time the developers, lenders, designers, marketers and golfers lock themselves in a room and discuss this topic in detail. Once everything is on the table, I’m sure they’ll understand that small courses are sensible for myriad reasons.

Yes, if you build small courses, people will come. But they’re getting tired of waiting.

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