

# Off The Fringe

## A License to Drive ... and Pitch and Putt

IT'S HIGH TIME THAT GOLFERS

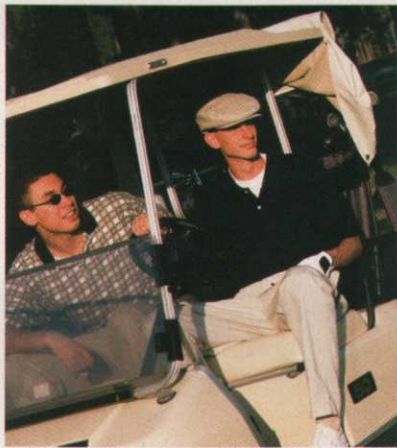
### LEARN THE RULES

By Anthony Pioppi

**I**t was an epiphany of sorts. Not really hit by a bolt of lightning, but shocked just slightly, like the time in sixth grade when I accidentally touched the inside of an empty foot-light socket in my junior high school auditorium.

Tzzzzzz... What the...!?

This time the little jolt came while standing on the 17<sup>th</sup> tee of the local muni. About 30 feet below lies the 10<sup>th</sup> green and on this fine afternoon, four players were putting out on that very green, their golf carts parked no farther than a couple paces from the putting surface. While this in itself was out of line, the fact they had to negoti-



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ate the vehicles around a veritable obstacle course of yellow rope, stakes and trees to get where they were was no accident. Or was it?

Up until then, I had always assumed 90 percent of the people on golf courses who are doing what they shouldn't just don't give a rats back


porch about the course. My conclusion was reached after a couple of decades playing the game, two years on a golf course grounds crew and more than a few occasions taking the role of ranger on the aforementioned layout.

For some reason, a modicum of patience had worked its way into my demeanor and rather than fire off my usual harsh words of disgust at the four offenders, I took a rather tactful approach.

"Gentlemen," I said in a voice loud enough for them to hear without a hint of anger, "those carts don't belong there. Could you move them back behind those ropes, please?"

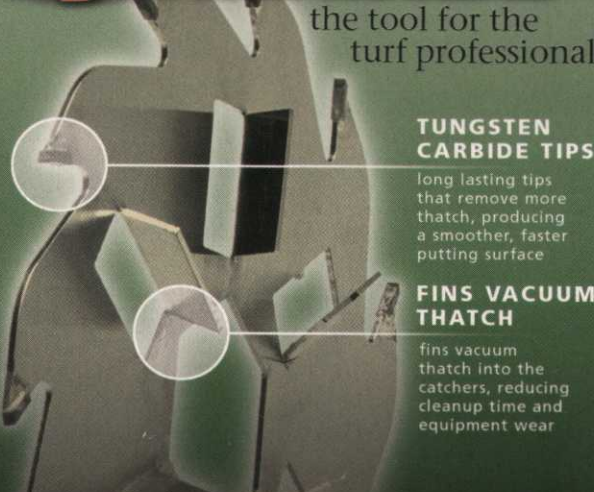
Well, tie me to an anthill and smear me with Ho Hos, the reaction from the four was nothing short of astonishing. Two immediately sprinted to their carts and moved them back to a reasonable parking distance, and they all practically

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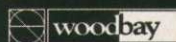


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fell over each other spouting words of genuine, yes, *genuine* apology.

Over the years, more than one of my playing companions have disagreed with my low opinion of golf course miscreants. Those friends have argued eloquently, and not so eloquently, that the players who do not take care of the golf course are, in most cases, guilty of ignorance rather than of malice.

"How can you say that?" I would ask them under cross-examination giving an example. "What about the old-timers around here who were playing the game years before Noah needed to build himself a boat? They never fix a pitch mark."

"They don't know they are doing anything wrong," my friends would tell me. "No one's ever shown them the error in the their ways."

I have a proposal to correct this, which follows along many of the lines of other golfing countries such as Swe-

den. Under this plan, players are not allowed onto courses until they have passed golf's version of a safe driving test. There will be no grandfather clause. If you don't have a license to drive, pitch and putt, you will not play golf. It's as simple as that.

Once golfers learn the etiquette of the game — including such talents as fixing ball marks; when and when not to replace divots; good cart driving techniques; and why it's not an insult to let a faster group play through — they can tee it up anywhere.

I suggest the regional PGA section and the regional superintendent sections coordinate the classes that will be taught by golf pros and superintendents for a fee, of course. Along the way, prospective golfers will gain an appreciation for not just the game and its rules, but also for the people who take care of the courses on which they play. They'll come to understand *why*

it is important to fix a pitch mark or fill and level divots.

The dual teaching program will also foster increased communication and goodwill between pros and superintendents — both of whom will also learn to appreciate a little more what each other does.

Once certified golfers are let loose on the links, rangers will have it easier as well since all players will be well-versed in what and what not to do. Rangers will be able to skip the polite and gentle reminders to move golf carts or speed up play. Instead, BAM! To the moon Alice or Andy or whoever else breaks the law. Three strike law? Nah.

If the educational process works, I can even envision a world where rangers will not be needed one day. Now wouldn't that be something?

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*Pioppi is a free-lance writer from Middletown, Conn.*

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