

Shades Of Green

■ OPINION

What do you do when the headline in the newspaper says, “Golf’s Toxic Fairways” or “Turfgrass is a Waste of Water” or “Overseeding Golf Courses is a Luxury We Can’t Afford” or “Treated Water Should be Put on Restrictions”?

These are all real headlines I’ve seen. I’m not making them up to scare readers. Heck, I couldn’t have made these up. The important question is how do you react to them when you see them.

Do you go “ho-hum” and turn to the funnies? Does your stomach knot up as you feel the cross hairs of the negative media bearing down on you and your livelihood? Do you complain about the misinformation and slanted reporting to your peers over beers after work?

We live in stressful times, with attacks from environmentalists on our industry coming at us full-throttle. I have one sure-fire therapy to relieve you of this stress — write a letter to the editor and carbon copy the reporter who wrote the offensive article. A newspaper generally puts an e-mail address of the reporter at the end of the article and lists its letters to the editor address in the editorial section.

There are two cardinal rules for these letter responses. The first rule is to be brief and to the point. The paper may or may not have a word-count limit published. The second rule is to be professional. You may want to vent and call the paper absolutely stupid, but it likely won’t print it. Then the real tragedy is that you won’t be able to get the facts presented to refute the misinformation in the original article.

Part of the therapeutic value of writing that letter to the editor is that you are not preaching to the choir. You are educating the media and the general public. You get to tell your side of the story and bring pertinent facts to light. The silent majority tends to be moderate in its actions, but it is the vocal minority that gets the action done in rule-making sessions.

Your letter may not get printed, but it may get filed under the topic in question, so the next time the media go off on a witch hunt, it

Be Part of the Vocal Majority

BY JOEL JACKSON



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will be inclined to do more research based on your input. As much as it loves to use negative, attention-grabbing headlines, the media also has a vested interest in getting it right. When letters with documented facts keep coming in to challenge stories, the media’s credibility and jobs are at stake.

Do not remain a member of the silent majority and let another piece of misinformation go unchallenged. Silence allows the public perception of golf courses as toxic wastelands to fester. If you write a letter, the media will be given an opportunity to learn both sides of the issue and be better equipped to make decisions about coverage — and perhaps inform readers in the process.

Will your one letter change the opinion of the activists? No. Will your factual letter provide some balance to the issue? Absolutely. You can remain a member of the silent majority and be considered sheep to be led, or you can speak up calmly with facts on your side and give the rest of the flock a choice.

In recent dealings with the media and government officials, I have learned that they are generally grossly misinformed about turfgrass and golf. We have made headway with some reporters and regulators. For every one who now sees the big picture, there are 10 who only know the anti-environment pabulum they have been fed by years of unchallenged articles.

The pen can be as mighty as the sword, but you have to be willing to unsheathe it once in awhile and strike a blow for your own stress relief. It’s up to you to give the silent majority a goose every now and then.

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