

One of my favorite Bruce Springsteen songs is an obscure ditty called "Held Up Without a Gun." The song's lyrics are about price gouging. Springsteen sings: "Now it's a sin and it oughta be a crime/You know it happens buddy all the time/Try to make a living, try to have a little fun/Held up without a gun."

Lately, I've been held up without a gun so often that I've come to expect it. I admit there are a few clamps on my wallet, but this isn't about my frugality. Price gouging has more to do with lost principles than lost pennies.

Speaking of pennies, *Golfdom* presents its fifth-annual Guide to Successful Budgeting as its cover story this month. The five-part package covers myriad issues related to budgeting for a golf course's maintenance operation.

Working on the budget guide got me thinking about money, which got me thinking about being on the receiving end of getting nicked and dimed. I'm fed up with being held up without a gun.

Just the other day, I was held up without a gun on the Pennsylvania turnpike. The man wanted three bucks before letting me pass the gate to travel about 50 miles.

A few months ago I stayed at a hotel that charged a daily \$10 "service fee" in exchange for free wireless Internet and complimentary coffee. The wireless Internet didn't work, and the hotel stopped serving the complimentary coffee at 7 a.m., about the time most people wanted it.

I'm sure you have your own held-up-without-a-gun stories. If you've been to a ball game recently, no doubt you emptied your pockets to buy a round of beers.

Back to *Golfdom's* budget guide, which aims to educate readers on how to spend golf course maintenance money more wisely. As responsible business people, any golf course financial decision maker from any of the industry's many segments must ask himself or herself: Am I *taking* money wisely from my customers?

You don't want to be holding them up without a gun, do you?

Getting Held Up Without a Gun

BY LARRY AYLWARD



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I ask this because golf has long been viewed as a rich person's game. While you might say it's a stereotype, you can't argue with the fact that study after study reveals that golfers believe one of the problems with the game is that it costs too much to play — from the green fee with golf car for 18 holes to the hamburger with lettuce and tomato for lunch at the turn.

And then there's the high price of equipment. A \$300 driver and a \$25 box of balls aren't good for the game's economic image.

Of course, there's the cost for a superintendent and his or her staff to maintain a golf course. And it's getting higher as golfers' expectations for superior conditions continue to soar. Unfortunately, most golfers have no idea how much equipment and chemicals cost or how much a course spends on labor to achieve those conditions.

So, yes, golfers have helped drive up the game's cost with their demands. But most of these golfers are the ones who can afford the markup.

The bottom line is the bottom line: The game's cost is a problem that needs to be addressed. Many people don't play the game and will never try it because they know they simply can't afford it.

And that's a shame, especially for an industry that badly needs new players so it can grow among the masses, from the people who make \$200,000 a year to the people who make \$30,000 a year.

It's time everyone in the golf industry take a long look in the mirror and ask themselves: Am I holding up my customers without a gun?

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