

# Mixed Bag

### GCSAA'S LYMAN SAYS NGF NUMBERS TELL A SORDID TALE OF THE GOLF MARKET

By Marty Whitford, Contributing Editor

**W**hich do you want first — the good news or bad? Given the state of the economy, perhaps it's best to tee off with a few positive signs.

The good news is the number of rounds played on U.S. courses increased 0.5 percent from January through September 2009 compared to the same time last year. Rounds played at public-access courses led the way with a 0.8 percent climb.

Another sweet spot: Four times as many golf courses opened in the United States in 2008 than did in 2007. That's pretty much the best of the good stuff that Greg Lyman, environmental programs director for the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America (GCSAA), told members of RISE (Responsible Industry for a Sound Environment) at the organization's recent meeting in Or-



lando. RISE's more than 200 members represent major pesticide, fungicide, herbicide and fertilizer manufacturers, formulators and distributors.

Now for the golf market's nasty slice, according to Lyman, who sourced the National Golf Foundation as the generator of the statistics used in his presentation:

- Rounds played at private golf courses in the United States declined 0.7 percent in the first nine months of 2009.
- Although new course openings quadrupled last year, that statistic is skewed by the meager 8.5 recorded course openings in 2007 — 243.5 less golf courses than opened in 2001.
- Private facilities' membership, on average, fell 13 percent and rounds played at such clubs dropped 17 percent last year.
- An estimated 10 percent to 20 percent of the nation's about 4,400 private golf facilities are "at risk" with this group, averaging a 29 percent drop in members and 22 percent decline in rounds played last year.
- 57 percent of these "at risk" private golf courses operated at a loss in 2008.

"It has been a little rough the past few years, but the golf market appears to have stabilized for the most part — except for, perhaps, a few more corrections looming on the private side," Lyman concluded. "I think we'll see more private clubs converting to public courses, in the short term, to facilitate matters." ■

*Whitford is Editor-in-Chief of Landscape Management, Golfdom's sister publication.*

PHOTO COURTESY: MARTY WHITFORD



December  
THIS MONTH'S HEALTH TIP

More guests visit around the holidays, and they add to the noise, confusion and stress to your dog and take him out of his routine. Dogs can be stepped on, and unsupervised children can injure them. Dogs can escape when visitors come and go, too. Guests are more likely to feed your dog and "just a little bite" can add up to a lot of food. Always advise your guests not to feed your dog. Your dog should also try to sleep in his regular spot. If he's in a spot where he might feel distressed, move him to a quiet place where he will be comfortable.

**Berkley.** His owner is David Callahan, assistant superintendent at Hidden Valley Country Club in Salem, Va. (Photo by: David Callahan)



Improving the Way Professionals Care for Turf