

Off The Fringe

Business briefs

Powell Honored by PGA

William J. (Bill) Powell of East Canton, Ohio, who overcame racial barriers to become the only African-American to design, build, own and operate a golf course (Clearview Golf Club) while pioneering diversity in the game, is the recipient of the 2009 PGA Distinguished Service Award.

Powell, 92 and a PGA Life Member, will be honored in conjunction with the 91st PGA Championship at Hazeltine National Golf Club in Chaska, Minn. The PGA Distinguished Service Award is the association's highest annual honor.

Whitepaper Details Growing Problem

Damage caused by vandals to golf courses and their golf car fleets is an \$8 million to \$10 million problem that course owners, operators, club professionals and superintendents are struggling to solve, according to a whitepaper published by Club Car.

The whitepaper ("Golf Car Vandalism: No Joyride") was developed following research to identify owners' and operators' chief operational concerns. Among the survey findings were statistics that underlined the critical nature of the vandalism problem:

- 72 percent of courses reported vandalism or golfers playing extra holes without paying a green fee.
- 27 percent said they had retrieved a vandalized golf car from a lake or creek.
- 48 percent reported unauthorized use of golf cars.
- 42 percent reported golf cars being driven in restricted areas.
- 21 percent reported theft of golf cars.

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Rounds on the Rise?

THERE ARE SIGNS OF ECONOMIC RECOVERY, WHICH BODES WELL FOR THE GOLF INDUSTRY

By Larry Aylward, Editor in Chief

Don't look now, but people are talking about economic recovery. Yes, there are signs — from banking to housing to manufacturing to the stock market — we're coming out of this nasty recession. While it's good to know we may have hit bottom (or are in the process of it), most everyone agrees recovery will not happen overnight.

That prompted us to take a quick survey of about 80 U.S. golf course superintendents to find out how their golf courses are doing with rounds now that it's spring and the golf season is in full swing nationally.

The golf industry has been a victim of this recession just like any other field, although it hasn't fallen off the cliff like some other industries. Superintendents have had to cut costs because the revenue isn't coming in like it has in the past. That

said, our recent survey found some good news (but it's not all good).

We recently asked superintendents: It's spring and golfers are returning to courses. How has activity been on your courses so far this year? Here's how they responded:

Excellent , players are coming out of the woodwork	15%
Good , rounds are up	26%
Fair	29%
Not good , rounds are down	26%
Awful , nobody's playing	3%

If you're doing the math, 70 percent of superintendents surveyed say rounds are fair to excellent.

Golf Datatech recently reported rounds were up 3.4 percent in March compared to March 2008. The increase is based on reportings from 4,090 courses and the report is in conjunction with the National Golf Foundation, the National Golf Course Owners Association and the Professional Golf Association.

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Mike Read, director of marketing for Club Car's golf category, called the statistics "shocking" and noted that "these are all issues that directly affect operating expenses."

According to the whitepaper, which was developed based on interviews with owners, operators, superintendents and golf professionals, nearly every golf facility encounters some form of vandalism at one time or another. But it is vandalism to golf cars that causes the most serious and costly damage at a golf course.

Deere's Chase Takes New Role

John Deere Golf's Nicole Chase, former business manager, has accepted the newly created role of golf sales and marketing director for Europe, Africa and the Middle East. Chase will relocate to Germany in order to more effectively focus on worldwide growth opportunities for John Deere Golf.

Chase is responsible for bolstering sales and marketing support in existing markets while exploring new opportunities for equipment, irrigation and agronomic product lines. "The game of golf continues to advance globally and we must evolve with it," Chase said.

With an Eye on Weevils

DuPont has just launched a Web site, www.weeviltrak.com, where 11 university researchers and cooperators are sharing regular updates for superintendents on the annual bluegrass weevil activity in their respective areas. Golf course superintendents can click on their location, or enter their zip code to read the observations of their local researcher.

The updates are based on degree-day monitoring, the state of forsythia bloomage and on the findings of the researchers, i.e., if there are larvae and what stage they are in. The researchers will analyze turf samples from more than 30 monitoring sites throughout Connecticut, Delaware, Massachusetts, Maryland, Maine, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia, Vermont and West Virginia. ■

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So far this year — and keep in mind that the economic news was basically miserable for the first three months of the year — rounds are up 2.4 percent nationally.

Rounds were down 1.8 percent in 2008 compared to 2007.

Of course, even before the Great Recession hit, people in the golf industry were talking about the importance of growing the game with more women, children, minorities and men as players to increase rounds and revenue. The game is getting new players, all right, but it's losing more players.

According to a recent NGF study, 4 million golfers either approached the game for the first time (1.7 million) or returned after a hiatus (2.3 million) in 2008. But 4.9 million "lost golfers," who played in 2007 but not in 2008, offset the gain. The NGF reports the number of golfers fell 3 percent in

2008 from 2007, to 28.6 million from 29.5 million. (A golfer is defined as a person age 6 or older who plays at least one round of golf in a year.)

"There is a natural turnover of participants not only in golf but in virtually every sport," Joe Beditz, NGF president and CEO, said in the report. "We are definitely attracting new and former golfers from a large pool of latent demand. The challenge for the industry is to slow the loss of existing golfers while increasing the retention rate of those who come in each year."

Decreases were seen in both core (eight or more rounds a year) and occasional golfer (one to seven rounds a year) categories.

If you look at the news above with a glass-is-half-full eye, you'll say things are looking up. But if you look at the news with a glass-is-half-empty approach, you probably want more signs that business is getting better. ■

“Quotable

“We all realize we need to suffer a little in order to keep our jobs.”

— *John Gurke, certified superintendent of Aurora (Ill.) Country Club, commenting on how he and his staff will receive no pay raises in 2009. Gurke also accepted no bonus for 2008 and will do the same for 2009.*

“Under my administration, the days of science taking a back seat to ideology are over. Science is more essential for our prosperity, our security, our health, our environment, and our quality of life than it ever has been.”

— *President Obama, speaking in April to the National Academy of Sciences about the importance of science, research and development to the nation's well-being and future. Will Obama take this stance toward pesticides?*

Off The Fr



DEEP THOUGHTS

WITH Rick Slattery

Superintendent shares views on golf and the economy



Editor's note: Rick Slattery, longtime superintendent of Locust Hill Country Club in Fairport, N.Y., is an astute person who not only keeps up with the latest in golf course maintenance agronomics, but is well-versed in what's going on in his world, from politics to the economy to world events. *Golfdom* asked Slattery, who is on the magazine's editorial advisory board, to share some of his thoughts with readers. Slattery's column will run randomly in *Golfdom*.

Barack Obama was elected president of the United States by signaling a message of change. Will the green industry be willing to change?

I, for one, reject the notion that Democrats will regulate and tax golf courses out of business. In fact, most pundits agree that some regulation is good as long as it doesn't smother — just look at the reasons behind the stock market crash last fall. Although over-regulation and taxation are real threats, if anything puts us out of business, it will be our economy.

Historically, the golf industry has prospered during strong economies and struggled during weak economies. Golf survived the Great Depression, and it will survive this too. But with emerging economies around the world, there is a growing global demand for fertilizer and water for food-producing agriculture. The pressure for us to reduce water and agronomic input will come not only from environmental fronts and political regulation, but economically as well in escalating costs and decreasing availability of water and raw materials. Are we fighting to preserve the size of our piece of the pie, when the pie as a whole is shrinking? ■

Golfdom would like to hear your deep thoughts on Slattery's view. Just send an e-mail to info@golfdom.com.

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