

You Might Think I'm Crazy,

But I Believe
the Golf Industry
is in for a
Solid 2010

BY CHRISTOPHER S. GRAY SR.,
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2009 will be remembered as a completely crummy year for the golf course industry. The news was ghastly on almost every front — golf courses closing, maintenance budgets shrinking and then the undeniable icon of our sport, Tiger Woods, showing everyone just how human he really is.

But despite the harsh year from which we recently emerged, I'm optimistic about 2010. A year from now, we'll look back and see the beginnings of the golf course industry's recovery — returning the delightful, yet recently unfamiliar feeling of optimism to its workforce of superintendents, general managers and owners.

Woods will be back and in a big way. The three-ring circus surrounding the behavior of the
Continued on page 31

Continued from page 28

world's top professional golfer will eventually end. And while no one knows when Woods will return to competitive golf, I suspect it'll be around the Masters. And he'll re-emerge on the scene with a renewed competitive spirit not seen since early in his career.

The beginning of Woods' reverence began with his astonishing ability to hit miraculous golf shots and win golf tournaments. And that's exactly where it's going to begin again. Tiger will win multiple Major tournaments this year, which will ultimately outshine that unfortunate Thanksgiving night last year.

Some people don't think our economy has hit rock bottom yet, but I do. This is the year of economic resurgence, especially for the golf course industry. I suspect that clear-cut signs won't be visible until the latter part of the year, but they'll be there.

When the economic turmoil began, the people and the companies with the largest cash reserves went into hibernation mode, which, in turn, further slowed the economy. But with the worst seemingly behind us, there's an array of opportunities available in the golf industry of which to take advantage, whether it's in golf course ownership or in launching new products into the marketplace.

It really comes down to one's vision. One man's ceiling is another man's floor.

This is also the year of customer base growth. Three years ago, every consulting firm in the golf industry was touting the retirement of the baby boomers as the saving grace for our industry. For the most part, that prediction fell flat. Economic turbulence effectively scared many potential new customers to stay

home and play bridge with the spouse, rather than hit the links.

But with a clearer economic picture coming into view this year, these same baby boomers have played enough cards and are ready to pick up their clubs more regularly. This potential shot in the arm for our industry from the largest group of people ever entering retirement will start to become a reality this season.

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Coupled with clubs and courses offering remarkable incentive deals and packages to join and play, the baby boomers will begin to have a tremendous impact on our currently sluggish industry. After years of losing members and rounds consistently, we'll end 2010 with a net gain in both categories.

I'm sure some of you think I've lost my mind. And, to be honest, this type of optimistic prognostication has never been my specialty. But there's something about where we're positioned right now as an industry that compels me to believe good things will happen this year.

With so many people and companies affected negatively by the blunt end of this economic downturn, I think we all need to be a little optimistic right now. ■

Christopher S. Gray Sr., a contributing editor to Golfdom, is superintendent and general manager of the Marvel Golf Club in Benton, Ky.



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