



# Price WAR

## Symposium on Affordable Golf puts costs in spotlight

BY STEVEN TINGLE

**J**ohnny Depp balances on the yardarm of a towering ship as a pirate with a beard of slithering snakes rushes toward him. Swords drawn, they battle high above an angry ocean, the water swirling in a massive storm. The music rises as the camera pulls back, revealing a whirlpool threatening to swallow the ship. Oh the irony.

The scene is from the third installment of the “Pirates of the Caribbean” film franchise, which, with a budget of \$300 million, is the most expensive film ever made. Every year action films up the ante with more CGI, more explosions, more action, more everything. It’s a clear case of the “more equals better” syndrome.

Like the movie business, golf has been in a “keeping up with the Joneses” war for the past two decades. But instead of bigger action sequences and expensive digital effects, golf has been chasing success with longer layouts and wall to wall manicuring. And just like the movie business, it has watched sales decline.

But at the end of a winding two-lane road at an Elks Lodge in the sleepy town of Southern Pines, N.C., a grassroots movement is taking hold. It is here that local golf course

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## At What Cost?



Returning 30 acres of non-play area to native grasses at Pasatiempo has saved the course \$150,000 annually.



The second annual Symposium on Affordable Golf, hosted by architect Richard Mandell, encouraged attendees to rethink excessive layouts and wall-to-wall manicuring.

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architect Richard Mandell recently hosted his second annual Symposium on Affordable Golf. “It’s really a symposium of excess in golf,” says Mandell. “We need to get back to where we were, smart and sustainable.”

Mandell, whose numerous renovations include the Army Navy Country Club in Fairfax, Va. and The Reserve Golf Club in Pawleys Island, S.C., is concerned by the current trends in golf course design that lead to high maintenance costs. “I think golf needs to be more affordable,” says Mandell. “It’s about cutting expenses and looking at things in a different way. We’re not asking anyone to lower their prices, but lowering costs can lead to that.”

Symposium presenters included Golfdom’s 2012 Herb Graffis Business Person of the Year Paul Chojnacky, superintendent at Pasatiempo Golf Club in Santa Cruz, Calif., who spoke of returning 30 acres of non-play area to native grasses, saving over \$150,000 a year in maintenance and irrigation costs while also restoring the original design.

Master Greenskeeper Gordon Irvine discussed the significant differences between “management” in the U.K. and “maintenance” in the U.S.; and Barney Adams, founder of Adams Golf, spoke of his support of the Tee It Forward program and the radical concept of growing the game by making

it fun. “If the definition of a round of golf is five lost balls, five and half hours and a high score, then hell, you can’t make it cheap enough,” he said.

Other presenters included Rob Waldon, Business Development Manager at Billy Casper Golf; Ran Morrisett, founder of Golf-ClubAtlas.com; Terry Laurent, CGCS, owner of Cross Creek Golf Club in Decatur, Ind.; and others.

Attendee Nick Green of MacDuff Consulting found the symposium enlightening. “I attended last year as well,” Green said. “The consensus seems to be that change in golf is like fighting City Hall, but it has to start somewhere.” Mandell is ready to lead the charge and is already planning next year’s symposium.

Whether it starts at an Elks Club Lodge in Southern Pines or in a studio lot in Hollywood, change is possible and can bring surprising results. Breaking the trend by downsizing the expensive action sequences and digital effects, the fourth and most recent “Pirates of the Caribbean” movie was made for less than half of the third film yet earned over \$80 million more at the box office. Going against the grain is either viewed as brilliance or madness. But as Captain Jack Sparrow pointed out, “It’s remarkable how often those two traits collide.” ■

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