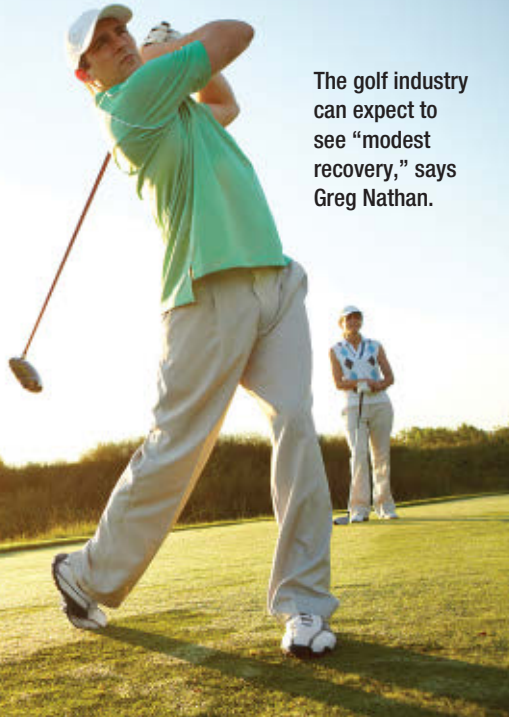


Off The Fringe

On Its Way Back



The golf industry can expect to see “modest recovery,” says Greg Nathan.

mass exoduses of 2008-2009 and 2009-2010, when the game lost 1.5 million and 1 million golfers, respectively.

Equipment manufacturers also are noticing improvement. “2009 fell off the map — for everyone,” said Grant Young, Toro’s Director of Marketing. “Since then, things have rebounded, simply because sooner or later, people have to buy or replace equipment.”

At Jacobsen, meanwhile, “more than 80 percent of our territories are reporting a year-over-year increase in sales,” says Jacobsen Vice President of Sales Ric Stone. “We are cautiously optimistic about the rest of the year.”

Also “cautiously optimistic” is John Deere Marketing Manager Mark Ford. “A lot of courses have been deferring maintenance well, and they now have

Superintendents and manufacturers have held their breath for an economic recovery for five long years. Now, they can begin to exhale, ever so slightly, as the industry starts to show signs of a comeback.

National Golf Foundation (NGF) Senior Vice President Greg Nathan is encouraged by the positivity he’s hearing from leaders in the industry. And, thanks to the mild winter, the past four months have shown double-digit year-over-year rounds gains, he said.

Mild weather definitely has helped, said Keith A. Ihms, CGCS, the director of grounds and maintenance at Country Club of Little Rock. “But I also think people are starting to feel like they can get out there and play,” he asserted.

ECONOMIC SIGNS FINALLY POINT TO A LONG-AWAITED TURNAROUND FOR THE GOLF INDUSTRY. BY BETH GERACI

Ihms, who’s also secretary/treasurer of the GCSAA Board of Directors, said Country Club of Little Rock has kept records on play since he arrived in 2006. This year, he said, “we experienced the biggest January and February of any of those years. There’s been more activity out on the golf course, and encouraging to me, more interest in our junior golf program for the summer.”

Another positive sign, golf attrition finally is tapering off. According to the NGF, the game’s losing players at a much slower rate than in the recent past. In 2011, NGF stats show, golf lost 400,000 players, a 1.5 percent drop from 2010. That’s a mere shadow of the

the reassurance to seriously consider purchasing,” he said.

“It’s a little early to draw any definite conclusions,” Ford continued. “But we’re encouraged. There was a positive feeling at the Golf Industry Show that everyone felt, and we don’t feel that was a mirage.”

NGF research “has shown that golf has emerged from previous recessions pretty quickly,” Nathan said, “and there are good reasons to expect a similar pattern this time.”

Whether golf is making a lasting comeback is “TBD,” Young said. “The key to the future will be getting players into the game and keeping them.”