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JOHN DEERE

# Golfdom

FEBRUARY 2004 • VOLUME 60 • NO. 2

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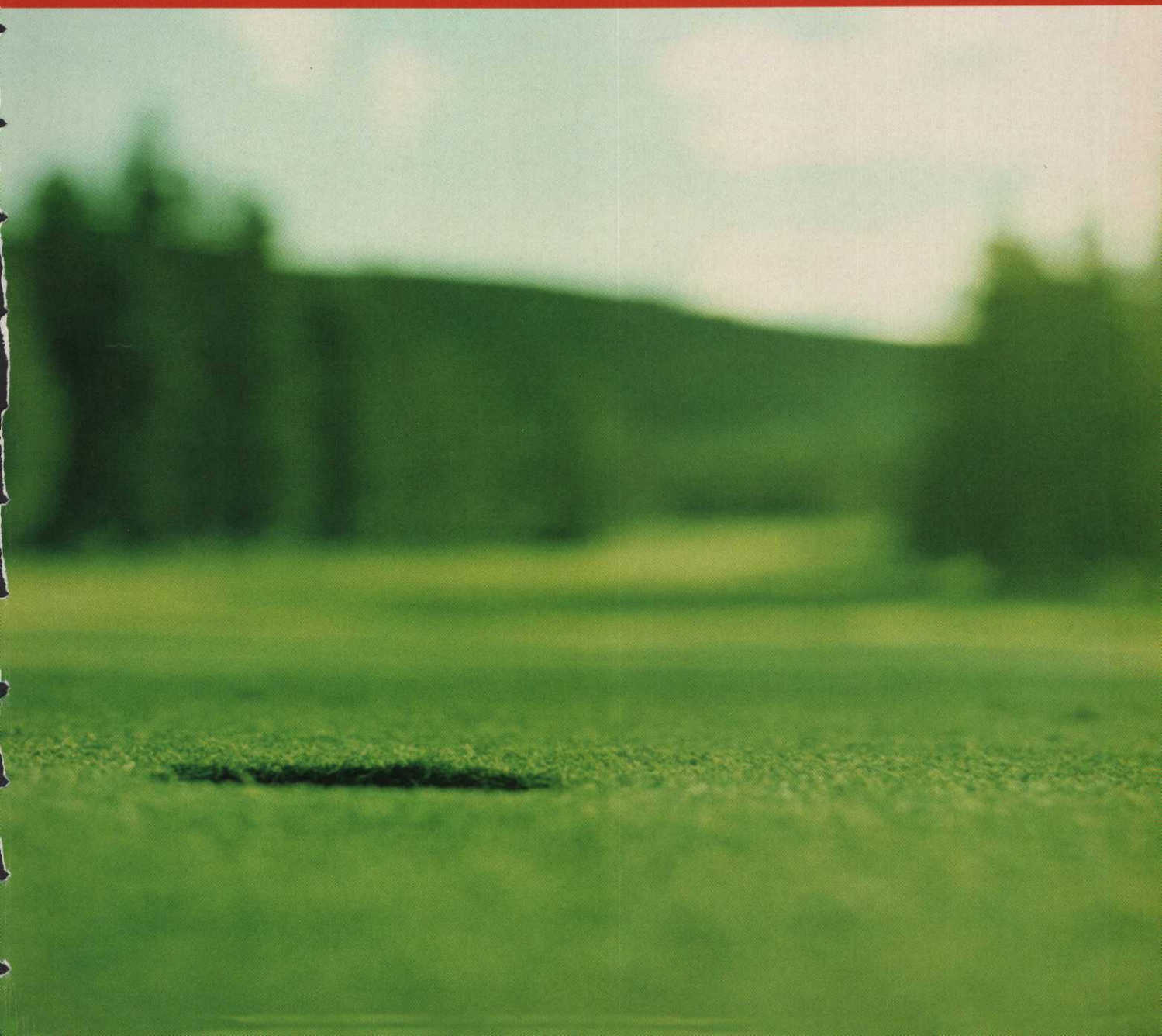


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# Events

## SEMINARS & CONFERENCES

### FEBRUARY

**17 Irrigation Association Seminar: Electrical Troubleshooting Part I: Diagnosing Field Wiring Problems**  
Tarrytown, N.Y.  
[www.irrigation.org](http://www.irrigation.org)

**19-25 TPI Midwinter Conference**  
Santa Barbara, Calif.  
[www.turfgrassssod.org](http://www.turfgrassssod.org)

**23 USGA Regional Conference**  
Monroeville, Pa.  
[www.usga.org](http://www.usga.org)

**24 Irrigation Association Seminar: Electrical Troubleshooting Part I: Diagnosing Field Wiring Problems**  
Hauppauge, N.Y.  
[www.irrigation.org](http://www.irrigation.org)

**24 Irrigation Association Seminar: Electrical Troubleshooting Part I: Diagnosing Field Wiring Problems**  
Hazelwood, Mo.  
[www.irrigation.org](http://www.irrigation.org)

**24 Irrigation Association Seminar: Sprinkler System Scheduling**  
Hauppauge, N.Y.  
[www.irrigation.org](http://www.irrigation.org)

**25 Irrigation Association Seminar: Electric Troubleshooting Part II: Transformers, DC Systems and 2-Wire Systems**  
Hazelwood, Mo.  
[www.irrigation.org](http://www.irrigation.org)

**26 Irrigation Association Seminar: Sprinkler System Scheduling**  
Folsom, Calif.  
[www.irrigation.org](http://www.irrigation.org)

**26 Irrigation Association Seminar: Advanced Head Layout**  
Hauppauge, N.Y.  
[www.irrigation.org](http://www.irrigation.org)

**26 Irrigation Association Seminar: Electric Troubleshooting Part II: Transformers, DC Systems and 2-Wire Systems**  
Hauppauge, N.Y.  
[www.irrigation.org](http://www.irrigation.org)

**27 GCSAA Seminar: Golf Course Drainage: Application and Design**  
 Fargo, N.D.  
[www.gcsaa.org](http://www.gcsaa.org)

**27 Irrigation Association Seminar: Advanced Head Layout**  
Hazelwood, Mo.  
[www.irrigation.org](http://www.irrigation.org)

### MARCH

**1 GCSAA Seminar: Conflict Resolution – Dealing With Member Conflict**  
Hammond, La.  
[www.gcsaa.org](http://www.gcsaa.org)

**1 GCSAA Seminar: Time Management for the Golf Course Superintendent**  
Whitefish, Mont.  
[www.gcsaa.org](http://www.gcsaa.org)

**1 Irrigation Association Seminar: Electrical Troubleshooting Part I: Diagnosing Field Wiring Problems**  
Lincoln, Neb.  
[www.irrigation.org](http://www.irrigation.org)

**1 Irrigation Association Seminar: Field Hydraulics**  
Lincoln, Neb.  
[www.irrigation.org](http://www.irrigation.org)

**3 USGA Regional Conference**  
Whitefish, Mont.  
[www.usga.org](http://www.usga.org)

**4 GCSAA Seminar: Managing Golf Course Trees**  
Auburn, Calif.  
[www.gcsaa.org](http://www.gcsaa.org)

**8 GCSAA Seminar: Managing Golf Course Trees**  
Loudenville, N.Y.  
[www.gcsaa.org](http://www.gcsaa.org)

**8 GCSAA Seminar: I Know You Believe You Understand What You Think I Said**  
Boise, Idaho  
[www.gcsaa.org](http://www.gcsaa.org)

**10 GCSAA Seminar: Golf Course Safety, Security and Risk Management**  
Hudson, Ohio  
[www.gcsaa.org](http://www.gcsaa.org)

Let us know about your events. Send information to Frank Andorka at 7500 Old Oak Blvd., Cleveland, 44130. Fax information to 440-891-2675 or e-mail to [fandorka@advanstar.com](mailto:fandorka@advanstar.com).

# Golfdom

## BUSINESS STAFF

**Pat Jones** PUBLISHER 440-891-3126 [pjones@advanstar.com](mailto:pjones@advanstar.com)  
**Tony D'Avino** GROUP PUBLISHER 440-891-2640 [tdavino@advanstar.com](mailto:tdavino@advanstar.com)  
**Mindy Moczulski** ADMIN. COORDINATOR 440-891-2734 [mmoczulski@advanstar.com](mailto:mmoczulski@advanstar.com)  
**Jill Hood** PRODUCTION MANAGER 218-723-9129 [jhood@advanstar.com](mailto:jhood@advanstar.com)  
**Rhonda Sande** PRODUCTION DIRECTOR 218-723-9536 [rsande@advanstar.com](mailto:rsande@advanstar.com)  
**Tracy White** CIRCULATION MANAGER 218-723-9540 [tracy.white@advanstar.com](mailto:tracy.white@advanstar.com)

## ADVERTISING STAFF

### CLEVELAND HEADQUARTERS

7500 OLD OAK BLVD.  
CLEVELAND, OH 44130-3609  
**Kevin Stoltman** ASSOCIATE PUBLISHER [kstoltman@advanstar.com](mailto:kstoltman@advanstar.com)  
440-891-2772 FAX: 440-891-2675  
**Pat Roberts** NATIONAL ACCOUNT MANAGER [proberts@advanstar.com](mailto:proberts@advanstar.com)  
440-891-2609 FAX: 440-891-2675  
**Michael Harris** REGIONAL MANAGER [mharris@advanstar.com](mailto:mharris@advanstar.com)  
440-891-3118 FAX: 440-826-2865  
**Tom Cermak** ACCOUNT EXECUTIVE AND CLASSIFIEDS [tcermak@advanstar.com](mailto:tcermak@advanstar.com)  
440-891-3170 FAX: 440-826-2865

## MARKETING SERVICES

**Marcie Nagy** REPRINTS (500 MINIMUM) 440-891-2744 [mnagy@advanstar.com](mailto:mnagy@advanstar.com)  
**Dave Kenney** CIRC. LIST RENTAL 440-891-3113 [dkenney@advanstar.com](mailto:dkenney@advanstar.com)  
**Subscriber, Customer Service** 218-723-9477; 888-527-7008  
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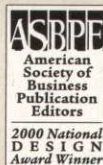
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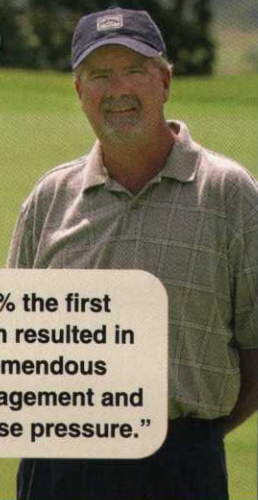
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## EDITORIAL STAFF

**Larry Aylward** EDITOR 440-891-2770 [larryward@advanstar.com](mailto:larryward@advanstar.com)  
**Frank H. Andorka Jr.** MANAGING EDITOR 440-891-2708 [fandorka@advanstar.com](mailto:fandorka@advanstar.com)  
**Geoff Shackelford** CONTRIBUTING EDITOR 310-451-5877 [geoffshackelford@aol.com](mailto:geoffshackelford@aol.com)  
**Joel Jackson** CONTRIBUTING EDITOR 407-248-1971 [flgm@aol.com](mailto:flgm@aol.com)  
**Mark Luce** CONTRIBUTING EDITOR 785-841-6044 [mlyce@earthlink.net](mailto:mlyce@earthlink.net)  
**Dave Wilber** CONTRIBUTING EDITOR 916-630-7600 [dave@soil.com](mailto:dave@soil.com)  
**Dr. Karl Danneberger** CHIEF SCIENCE EDITOR [danneberger.1@osu.edu](mailto:danneberger.1@osu.edu)  
**Lisa Lehman** CORP. CREATIVE DIRECTOR 440-891-2785 [llehman@advanstar.com](mailto:llehman@advanstar.com)  
**Kim Traum** SR. GRAPHIC DESIGNER 440-891-3175 [ktraum@advanstar.com](mailto:ktraum@advanstar.com)  
**Mike Klemme** CHIEF PHOTO EDITOR 580-234-8284 [mike@golffoto.com](mailto:mike@golffoto.com)  
**Sue Porter** EXECUTIVE EDITOR 440-891-2729 [sporter@advanstar.com](mailto:sporter@advanstar.com)  
**Vernon Henry** CORP. EDITORIAL DIRECTOR 440-826-2829 [vhenry@advanstar.com](mailto:vhenry@advanstar.com)  
**Lynne Brakeman** WEB EDITOR 440-891-2869 [lbrakeman@advanstar.com](mailto:lbrakeman@advanstar.com)

## CLEVELAND HEADQUARTERS

7500 OLD OAK BLVD.  
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## OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF



American Society of Irrigation Consultants 111 E. WACKER,  
18TH FLOOR, CHICAGO 60601; 312-372-7090; WWW.ASIC.ORG

## GOLFDOM ADVISORY STAFF

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## ASSOCIATIONS



American Society of Golf Course Architects 111 E. WACKER,  
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Golf Course Superintendents Association of America  
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**O**ne of the consequences of being old as dirt (as my 8-year-old likes to remind me) is that I increasingly long for the “good old days.” For me, the good old days were before he discovered both the Nintendo Gameboy and Dad’s inability to keep up with him in a foot race.

From the industry perspective, I’m beginning to think of the good old days as the era when there weren’t 450 résumés submitted for every superintendent’s job that opens up. I hear way too many horror stories about facilities that hold employment “beauty contests” seemingly designed to entice as many applicants as possible.

These also seem to be the same facilities that never even bother to so much as acknowledge receipt of the application or send “regrets” letters to unsuccessful candidates. Frankly, that’s just plain rude behavior from those supposedly gentlemanly club presidents and owners who engage in such practices.

But that’s the reality of the job market these days for the vast majority of superintendents who are forced to seek work. It ain’t pretty out there. For those who leave jobs involuntarily, the old rule of “one month of unemployment for each \$10,000 you need in salary” seems to more than hold true right now. I know too many good folks who’ve faced this nasty situation. It’s a desperate and depressing position to be in.

There are several causes for the current imbalance in the job market. First, there’s the downturn in new construction. Instead of 400 desirable new jobs at new facilities each year, there are only about 150. Second, thanks to the sour economy and general skittishness, superintendents seem to be staying put longer. In our 2001 *Golfdom Report* study, the average tenure in our respondents’ current position was 7.1 years. By 2003, the average jumped to 8.7 years. Job hopping is clearly on the decline.

But the biggest cause of the current dilemma is, ironically, the industry’s success at promoting and marketing the profession. We’ve actually helped to create this monster through decades of public relations, outreach to schools and broader awareness among young golfers about

## These Aren’t the Good Old Days

BY PAT JONES



THE CUP HAS  
RUNNETH OVER.  
IT’S TIME WE START  
MANAGING  
EXPECTATIONS  
AND STEMMING  
THE FLOW

the role of the superintendent. Over the past two decades, young people who would have otherwise ended up in agriculture, horticulture or another discipline have flowed into golf/turf programs.

Universities, community colleges and vocational schools aren’t dumb. They’re in the business of generating tuition revenue and, noticing this upswing of interest, started or expanded turf-degree programs. No one seems to really track this, but I’m guessing that the number of institutions offering two- or four-year degrees has at least doubled in the past 15 years. There are now nearly 100 programs listed on the GCSAA Web site — and you know there are many more out there.

And the number of students enrolled in those programs has increased as well. Every professor I’ve talked with says his or her turf program has grown steadily. Bigger schools are graduating 20 to 30 kids per year, and smaller ones are cranking out at least five or six. So let’s conservatively assume that each of those 100 schools is graduating 10 students per year. That projects to at least 1,000 new entrants into the market annually with high hopes for big jobs and six-figure salaries within a few quick years. Yikes!

The cup has runneth over. It’s time we start managing expectations and stemming the flow. Word needs to go out to students — particularly those at some of the smaller programs where some of the inflated ideas about salaries and jobs seem to start — that the good old days in the golf course job market are over, and it might be time to rethink their career plans. Better they hear it now than face the bleak prospects of an oversupplied market four years down the road.

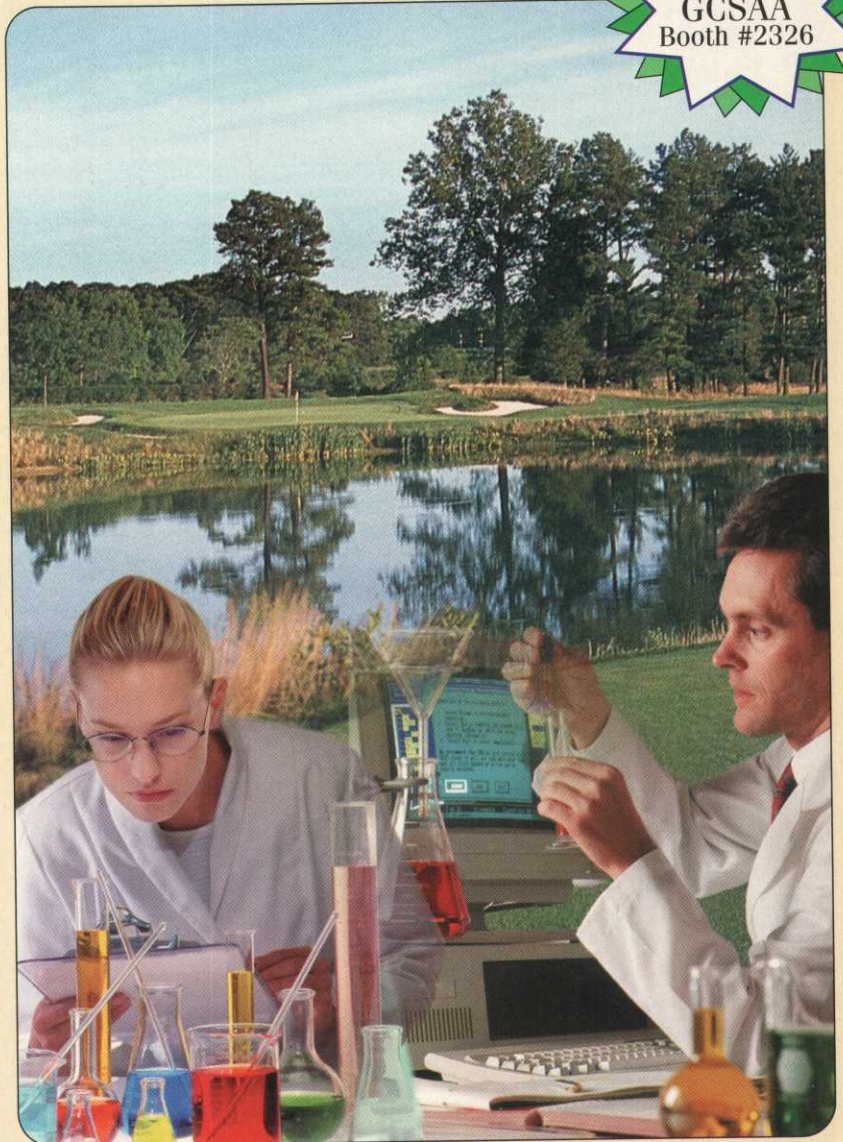
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*Jones, the publisher of Golfdom, can be reached at 440-891-3126 or [pjones@advanstar.com](mailto:pjones@advanstar.com)*

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**W**hen he was a kid growing up in the 1960s, Mike Hughes remembers his dad going off with his buddies to play golf nearly every Saturday and Sunday. Hughes' mom never barked at her husband for taking so much time to work on his golf game. Neither did Hughes or his siblings.

"It was beyond our imagining for any of us to criticize him," Hughes says. "That's what those guys did in those days, and it was good for the golf business."

But that was then. And Hughes, the well-liked executive director of the National Golf Course Owners Association, chuckles when he thinks of what is now. He admits his spouse would never let him get away with playing *that* much golf. "That wouldn't work in my family ... to put it mildly," Hughes said.

These days, most parents don't let their personal activities steer their lives, Hughes said. They let their children's activities steer them. And that means driving their kids here and there and everywhere on Saturdays and Sundays — not spending five hours smacking the dimpled ball on the golf course and another hour rehashing the round in the clubhouse over a cold beverage.

Hughes' point is the golf industry needs to recognize this fact and do something about it — now. Time is a gargantuan issue in the industry because contemporary dads, unlike Hughes' father, no longer have nothing but time to play golf. In fact, many have to beg, borrow and steal for time to get in nine holes.

During his address to owners at the National Golf Course Owners Association's annual conference last month, Hughes belabored the point that they must cater to the time-starved golfers' needs. Hughes let owners have a glimpse into his own life to help make his point.

"My life has no half-day increments," Hughes said, noting that most activities he partakes in are less than two hours. "That's the way I live my life, and that's the way many in my generation live their lives. If it's a business meeting, it's in that time frame. If it's a church meeting, it's in that time frame. If it's a family activity, it's in that time frame."

We've heard over and over that a big reason

## Those Were the Days, My Friend

BY LARRY AYLWARD



**BUT THEY'RE LONG GONE, AND TODAY'S OWNERS NEED TO FIND NEW WAYS TO ATTRACT TIME-STARVED PLAYERS, SAYS NGCOA'S MIKE HUGHES**

more people don't play golf is because they don't have five hours to spare. Courses seem bent on speeding up rounds, which is fine. But Hughes' point about time increments can't be ignored.

A reason — and probably the main reason — that golf leagues are so popular is that players can play nine holes in two hours or less, Hughes said. "It's quick, and it fits in the time increment that many people are living in."

Yes, there's still the group of players who play 18 holes once or twice a week, and owners must keep catering to their needs. "But there's a sizeable portion of the population where we need to think about different kinds of programming," Hughes said. "Let's package the product in a way that's easy for people to buy it in terms of pricing and available time."

Maybe that means offering programs where players can play three holes for \$5 or five holes for \$10 during the week. It would take some strategic planning, but it could work.

Then golf courses could satisfy the people who don't have a lot of extra time on their hands, like myself. I can't tell you how many times I've wanted to go to the course up the street from my house and play golf — for an hour. That might mean playing only five holes, but it would suffice. And as a father of two young children, it would fit in my time schedule pleasantly.

As Hughes said, there are two groups of golf consumers — the diehard players and the fringe players. The challenge for owners is to take care of them both without interfering with either of them. Owners must continue to take care of the regulars, but they can't ignore the people who would like to play on their own terms.

"We have to reach out," Hughes said. "We have to recognize that the golf consumer has changed."

*Aylward can be reached at 440-891-2770 or [laylward@advanstar.com](mailto:laylward@advanstar.com).*