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*Continued from page 30*

concerned that increased fuel prices will slow the business. But it remains to be seen whether gas prices will affect rounds of golf played.

Last year Charlie Fultz, the superintendent of Shenvallee Golf Resort in New Market, Va., fretted about losing traveling golfers from Northern states because of high gas prices. When prices climbed higher than Fultz ever imagined in the spring, he and others at Shenvallee were sure the course's business would take a hit. But they were wrong, much to their surprise.

"We lost a little bit, but I can't even put a percentage on it because it wasn't that much," Fultz says. "We kept waiting for people to call and say they weren't going to make the drive because it was going to cost them \$150 to get here. But they still came."

Stine says cases could be made that fewer people are playing golf because they need that money to buy fuel for their vehicles. But Stine believes those are rare instances.

"The guy playing golf three days a week is a serious golfer," Stine says. "The price of gasoline just doesn't enter into whether he's going to play golf on a Saturday or not."

Industry personnel agree that it's vital to do everything possible to grow the game, whether it's developing more players or improving operations and customer service.

## Hurricanes, Heat Make for Tough Year; Glut of Courses Worrisome

By Thomas Skernivitz, Managing Editor

Although a fair number of North American golf courses closed in 2005, the industry expanded by about 80. And with similar net growth expected in the near future, Gregg Brenningmeyer is a bit concerned.

"I remain troubled by the number of new golf courses that are coming in," says Brenningmeyer, the director of sales and marketing for John Deere Golf & Turf One Source. "To

me, that is troubling because I don't see the commensurate number of new golfers coming into the game, so the competitive environment is going to get even stronger in the near-term future."

More competition tends to mean tighter budgets. And tighter budgets often take their toll more quickly on equipment manufacturers than other sectors of the golf industry.

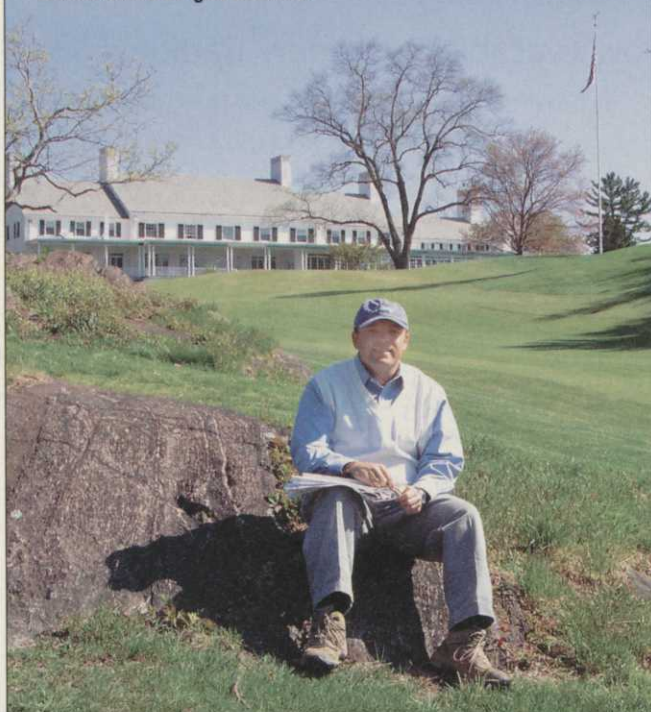
"When budgets are under stress, that creates a need for (superintendents) to make what they've got last longer and stretch out their dollars even further," Brenningmeyer says. "Immediately, people will delay a package purchase or they'll extend their lease by a year instead of what they originally planned. It forces the manufacturers to re-evaluate their value propositions."

No major shifts in global market share were experienced among the major equipment manufacturers in 2005, Brenningmeyer says.

As for the golf industry in general, he calls 2005 "more troublesome" than the recent trend, primarily because of weather issues. The hurricanes that hit the Gulf Coast region and the summer heat that hindered the east-

### FOCUS ON: IRON

Architect Tripp Davis says he would like to see fewer man-made waterfalls and more Mother Nature-made natural areas on golf courses.



Hughes says owners across the board want more player development programs. "They certainly want that to stay on the top of the agenda of the golf associations."

Hughes also says owners desire better financial information to operate their businesses. NGCOA recently teamed with Golf Datatech to help develop that information through the Financial Benchmarks Program. Hughes says the program provides accurate and consistent industry measurements to help owners and operators evaluate the performances of their facilities. They can also use the information to compare their results to their competitors' results.

Fultz says improved customer service should be at the top of everyone's lists. "We have to treat golfers the best we can treat them," he adds.

If the game grows and rounds increase 5 percent next year, you just might see Mike Hughes flinging his 5-iron in the air in an act of jubilation. But, as Stine stresses, golf is not Google stock, and it's important to remain realistic as far as the game's growth is concerned.

"Would we rather have rounds played up 10 percent? Yes, but rounds don't go up 10 percent in a good year," Stine says. "The golf business doesn't see huge increases like that, nor does it see huge decreases like that. It's just the nature of the industry." ■



ern half of the country combined to cause "significant stress," he says.

High fuel prices also cut into consumers' leisure spending. "Which again perpetuates itself with fewer rounds being played and even lower revenues in terms of greens fees," Breningmeyer says. "With the convergence of all these elements, it was almost like the perfect storm for a lot of golf courses."

As for the effect of increased gas costs on equipment manufacturers, Breningmeyer says it's been minimal. No plans were altered at John Deere; none were scrapped. "Even with our hybrid technology that we introduced last year, the gas savings were a result of technology," he says. "The driving goal of that product was to reduce noise and to reduce hydraulic leaks."

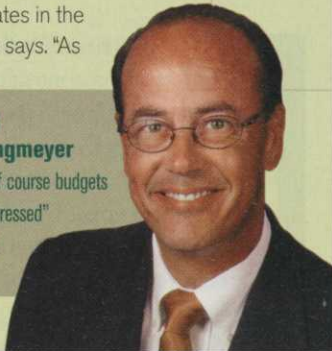
The feedback concerning John Deere's hybrid technology has been "incredibly encouraging," Breningmeyer says.

"Like any new technology, you've got the early adopters. Then you have to get over what we call the "valley of death," to where it becomes a mainstream-type product," he says. "We've had great success in our planning. And globally the response is very encouraging."

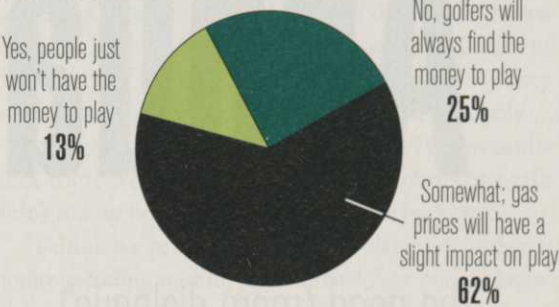
Breningmeyer adds that from a historical perspective, one bad year doesn't mean the future is bleak.

"We've weathered all types of climates in the past, but this is a resilient business," he says. "As the industry encourages new golfers, superintendents continue to effectively manage tight budgets and suppliers introduce new, viable business solutions, there's certainly promise for the future."

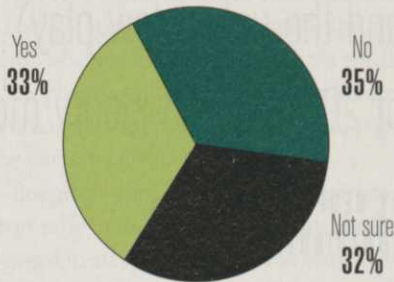
**Gregg Breningmeyer**  
says golf course budgets were "stressed" in 2005.



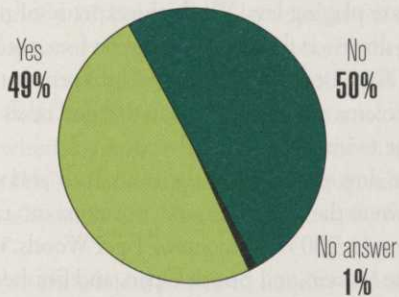
### Are you worried that high gas prices will lead to a decrease in golf course rounds and revenue in 2006?



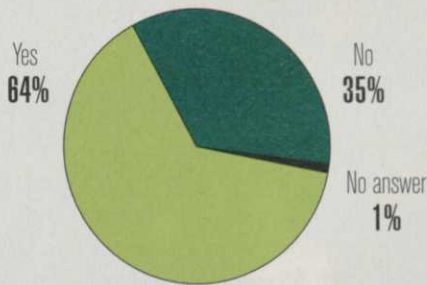
### Are you confident the economy will improve in 2006?



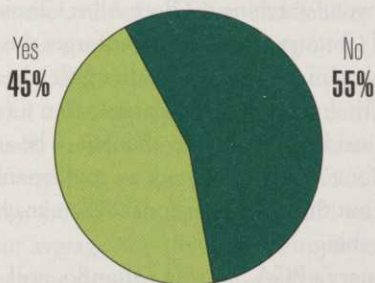
### Did your course's revenue increase this year?



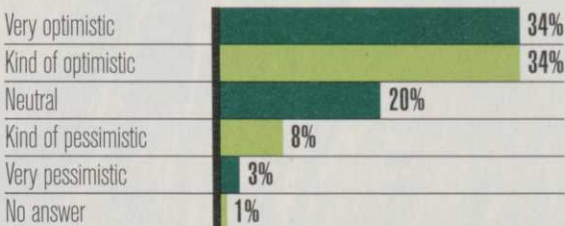
### Did the economy affect your course's revenue in 2005?



### Did your course's rounds increase this year?



### How optimistic are you about the economic health of your facility?



Editor's note: Findings are based on responses from 380 superintendents and other golf industry personnel who participated in *Golfdom's* October online survey.



# Annual Review

The good (more dialogue),  
the bad (increased costs),  
and the ugly (slow play)  
of 2005 – and plenty more

BY GEOFF SHACKELFORD,  
CONTRIBUTING EDITOR



**M**aybe it was Abe Lincoln. Or John Wooden. Someone said we should never confuse change with progress. But another year in the golf industry seemed to prove that those with the most influence view change as progress.

Unfortunately, that change tends to include rising costs, slower play and little concern for the plight of golf course owners.

There was, however, more dialogue in 2005. Issues were debated with a goal toward securing the game's long-term health.

Rounds look like they'll finish about flat, but avid golfers are playing less. While the expense of playing is coming down via flat or lowered green fees, course owners and even established country clubs report that slow play problems and the perception that golf takes too long continue to impact rounds played.

Since slow play starts at the PGA Tour and works its way down to the daily-fee round, operators can take heart in the cranky 2005 comments of Tiger Woods, who captured the Masters and British Open, and finished second and fourth in the U.S. Open and PGA Championships, respectively.

"Our Tour is so slow," he said after another deliberate round. "Welcome to the PGA Tour, five plus."

And anyone watching the Booze Allen Classic at Congressional Country Club will never forget the antics of Rory Sabbatini, who played half a hole ahead of his famously sluggish playing partner Ben Crane. The unsavory incident was initially thought to be an embarrassment for a sport priding itself on gentlemanly sportsmanship, but the ensuing national debate may prove to be a good thing.

At January's PGA Show in Orlando, golf industry





Tiger Woods  
says the Tour  
is too slow.  
No kidding!

titans convened for a lightly attended seminar to discuss the state of the game.

"You might want to do this a little later in the day next time, hopefully get a few more people here, but thanks to all of you who did come out," said Fred Ridley, outgoing president of the United States Golf Association (USGA).

Besides several shows of mutual admiration among the panelists along with light applause for their efforts on behalf of women and minorities, the annoying topic of technology and its impact on golf courses came up. Audience members chimed in.

"The lustiest cheer came when a Michigan woman, the owner of a 27-hole course, lamented how the new balls and space-age equipment were rendering her 1960s-built course obsolete," reported Cybergolf's Jeff Shelley.

"You need more acreage, and maintenance costs are higher (when managing more turf) for both accurate golfers and high handicappers," the woman said. "One guy with a hot club and a hot ball will slow play for everyone else."

She also mentioned increased liability problems for course owners and directed her remarks to the USGA's Ridley. The course owner explained that when her course was built, homes lining the fairways were plotted when 250 yards was the longest drive. With 350 yards the longest drive now, the course faces safety and liability concerns.

Ridley said the issue has been going on for 100 years, and that the USGA has done more in the past seven years to deal with it than the previous century combined.

"We really haven't seen the types of increases in the past couple of years that we saw back in the 1990s," he said.

Actually, the 1999 Tour average was 271 yards and the 2005 Tour average was 288.9 yards, up almost 2 yards from last year despite 18 rain-delayed events in an

unusually wet year across the country. A Tour record 26 players finished with drives averaging more than 300 yards.

A Golf Datatech consumer survey found that 37 percent of those questioned believed distance is threatening the integrity of the professional game, up 6 percent from the year before. A surprising 45 percent say they would support limits on equipment for the pros only.

But the USGA's Ridley told the PGA Show audience there were signs that all of the technology talk didn't matter because golf is on the comeback trail.

"I think we've seen corporate involvement and corporate spending starting to come back," he said. "I know in our environment that has certainly been evident at our championships. Certainly, for the U.S. Open, we are going to have a terrific year at Pinehurst."

The U.S. Open was wonderfully successful thanks in large part to the fine efforts of the Pinehurst team to pull the course together despite dreadful spring growing conditions. Michael Campbell won on a thrilling final day that saw players combat the famed Donald Ross course in an unusual way: drive as far as you can, regardless of where the fairway or hole location is.

The "flogging" approach became apparent at Doral Golf Resort early in the year where Woods and Phil Mickelson engaged in an epic dual, but was actually started by Vijay Singh, who grew tired of trying to keep his drives in between the Tour's increasingly narrowed fairways.

Here's what Tiger said about flogging after the round to NBC: "Because of the hole locations, even if you put the ball in the fairway, it's still unbelievably difficult to get close to. So even if I drive it in the rough, it's no big deal. I have a 60-degree sand wedge in my hand and figure I can hack it up there and make birdie."

Pinehurst offered a chance to see how much the game has changed in the six years since it last hosted the U.S. Open. In 1999 the field hit 38.8 percent of the fairways, 40.6 percent of greens in regulation and averaged 268.0. In 2005 the field hit 30 percent of fairways, 43.3 percent of greens and averaged 300.3 yards off the tee.

The U.S. Open marked the swan song for the USGA's infamous course setup man, Tom Meeks, and ushered in the era of Mike Davis. The Open also provided the USGA a chance to explain how the organization is on the cutting edge of research. In an NBC pre-packaged segment, senior tech guru Dick Rugge likened the golf ball to a train that has stopped at many stations, and said, "We think we've stopped it in the right station right now."

Executive Director David Fay told audiences that the USGA was 2.5 years into a research project and that things haven't changed, though it was interesting to note that the USGA reminded viewers that it has drawn the line on

*Continued on page 36*



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distance before it embarked on the research project.

In April the USGA asked manufacturers to submit "rolled back" balls for testing as part of the research program. As of September, none had complied. Because the problem remains a simple one: Manufacturers have been able to design a ball that passes the USGA overall distance standard under the stipulated launch conditions but exceeds the distance standard under different launch conditions. In other words, some people are driving 80 mph and the radar gun still says 55 mph.

Golf's 2005 majors proved unusually memorable, with a wild Masters shootout between Woods and Chris DiMarco, eventually won by Woods with a birdie on the first sudden-death playoff hole.

The Masters also saw the classy, understated farewell of Jack Nicklaus, who was visibly emotional coming up Augusta's ninth hole during Saturday morning's rain-delayed play.

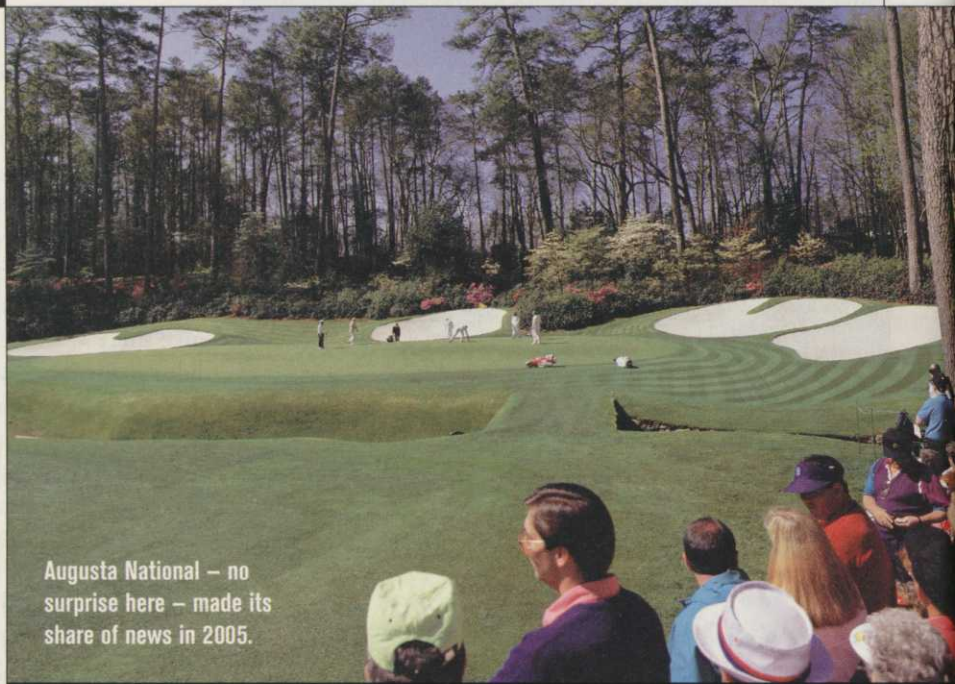
Afterward, Nicklaus said: "Unless I can gain 10 mph more clubhead speed, then I'm not coming back. How is that? I don't think that's going to happen."

The other real star of Masters week was the SubAir subsurface aeration system that kept Augusta's surfaces firm despite torrential rains. The Golf Channel, doing its typically fine job during Major coverage, went behind the scenes and allowed SubAir to show off its remarkable product, which was invented and patented by Augusta's Marsh Benson.

The PGA Tour has since announced that SubAir systems will be part of its \$26 million major TPC Sawgrass renovation, which starts the day after the 2006 Players Championship and includes a massive golf course overhaul to be supervised by Pete Dye.

The British Open saw another Nicklaus farewell, this time on the grandest stage in all of sport. With bright sun and fans filling every open space around the final hole at St. Andrews, Nicklaus' unforgettable birdie on the final hole made for a fitting conclusion to his career in the Open Championship.

Woods put on his second straight dominating performance at St. Andrews, though it was the meticulously groomed Old Course that got more attention than usual thanks to the Royal and Ancient Golf Club's setup antics.



Augusta National — no surprise here — made its share of news in 2005.

Forced to lengthen the course, tees were built outside the Old Course's well-defined boundaries. In an unprecedented move, the R&A introduced a "moveable" out-of-bounds line between the first and second holes to preserve traditional boundaries.

And you thought your green committee was a little nutty?

The R&A also introduced defined fairway contours on a course long known for its absence of such man-made interference. The fourth hole featured a 290-yard carry while the infamous Road Hole (17th) saw its fairway end at 300 yards from the tee, forcing players to lay back so that the R&A could claim that distance had not made the Old Course obsolete.

The battle to host a major championship became even more fierce this year when the PGA of America dropped 2010 host Sahalee Country Club in favor of new favorite Whistling Straits.

Meanwhile, the USGA is already eyeing the highly anticipated Erin Hills Golf Course outside Milwaukee. The rolling, links-like public course is a Dana Fry-Michael Hurdzan-Ron Whitten design that can be stretched to 8,000 yards. The USGA has already awarded it a Women's Mid-Amateur, with a U.S. Open looking like a possibility somewhere in the near future. Best of all, the Erin Hills ownership wants to keep green fees at the course affordable.

Other public venues were in the spotlight as well. San Francisco's renovated Harding Park course cost the city \$16 million to spruce up, but the resulting American Express Championship proved to be one of the year's best

*Continued on page 38*



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**Junction\***  
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*Continued from page 36*

Tour events with huge, festive crowds turning out to watch Woods and John Daly show that golf can be exciting when played on a stage accessible to daily-fee players.

Things weren't so rosy south of Harding Park in San Diego, where the renovation of Torrey Pines South has left residents bitter. The San Diego City Council voted down a North Course redo, 9-0, after residents complained that South Course conditions had deteriorated since the greens were rebuilt to USGA specs. They also argued that the North Course was still fun to play, while the South — host to the 2008 U.S. Open — was not.

"I am struck by the fact that we were asked to approve these changes before there was a design," said Councilman Brian Maienschein of the proposed North Course. "Why do you need an architect like Rees Jones to do maintenance work? I played baseball, and when they talked about maintaining the field, they weren't moving the bases 80 or 100 feet."

Torrey Pines brought in maintenance guru Ted Horton, who helped lead the South in a better direction in time for January's Buick Invitational.

Golf lost several noted figures in 2005, including master golf writer Herbert Warren Wind, architects Jack Arthur Snyder, Floyd Farley and rising star Mike Strantz. Strantz, a North Carolina resident, had just opened his finest achievement, the redesign of Monterey Peninsula's Shore Course. Taking the outdated 1960 Bob Baldock design, Strantz rerouted the holes familiar to 17-Mile Drive tourists and injected his unique style of native plantings, vast sandy waste areas and rolling greens to transform the Shore into a model for future course redesign work.

Which just happens to be the next big trend in design: bring your course into the new century with a fresh look. The American Society of Golf Course Architects (ASGCA) new president, Tom Marzolf, is preaching that courses

establish long-range plans and "life-cycle planning" to prevent reaching the stage that many layouts have: tired or deteriorated conditions that only a costly redo can fix.

Part of Marzolf's emphasis is to ensure that courses better account for aging components of their design, such as irrigation and improved drainage, to lessen the need for cost future expenditures.

The most bizarre aspect of the redesign trend may be the number of courses bringing their original architects back to liven up their own works or to fix mistakes made. *Golf Digest's* Ron Whitten wrote about finding the trend fascinating since so many architects are getting second chances. He cited *Golf Digest's* Best New Course of 1985, Jack Nicklaus' Loxahatchee, where the course was framed by pointed knobs covered in plenty of lovegrass.

"I decided I really didn't like them," Nicklaus said when announcing that he was being brought in to redo his own design. "So we tried to modernize it, bring it into the framework of today's game."

Another striking aspect of the redesign trend is the skyrocketing cost of fixing up an existing course. Donald Trump estimated (with pride) that the redesign of one hole at his "re-branded" Trump National Los Angeles design cost \$61 million.

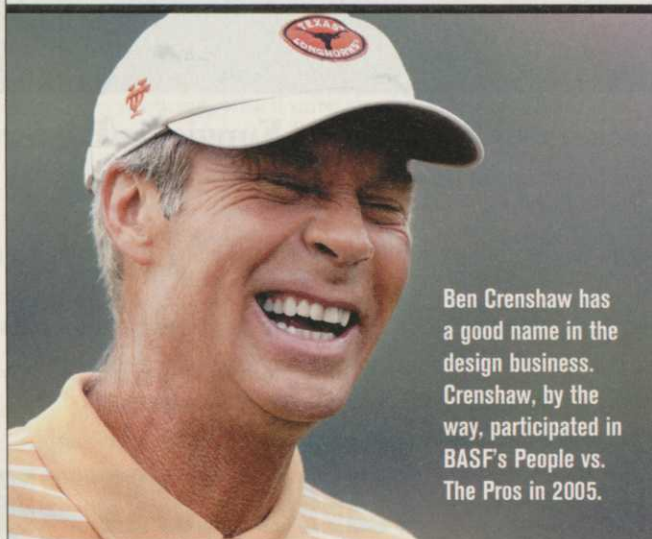
The Golf Resort at Indian Wells and the city of the same name announced they were embarking on a planned \$45 million renovation. *The Desert Sun* reported that "some changes in store for the public golf resort are an \$18 million course expansion that will add six new holes to the existing 18-hole course. The rest of the \$45 million will be used on a new clubhouse and colorful landscaping, such as wildflowers and tumbling waterfalls."

A comprehensive *Golf Business Monthly* story also opened many eyes by adding to the typical 19th-hole discussion on the value of name architects.

Dan Gleason wrote about South Carolina-based Sportometrics' intensive quantitative research on the value of a name designer. "There were 80 variables that went into a study that took into consideration the green fees charged at the courses designed by high-profile names and included both public green fees and private club guest fees. Ben Crenshaw's name generated the highest added value in the study."

He also quoted David Fry of WCI Communities, who put the celebrity designer debate into perspective. "I can't forecast the true value of the celebrity name of an architect," he says, "even after the course is operational and all the homes and memberships are sold. The bottom line is building a quality product, regardless of the name you put on the course. That's where the rubber really meets the road." ■

*Geoff Shackelford can be reached at [GeoffShac@aol.com](mailto:GeoffShac@aol.com).*



Ben Crenshaw has a good name in the design business. Crenshaw, by the way, participated in BASF's People vs. The Pros in 2005.



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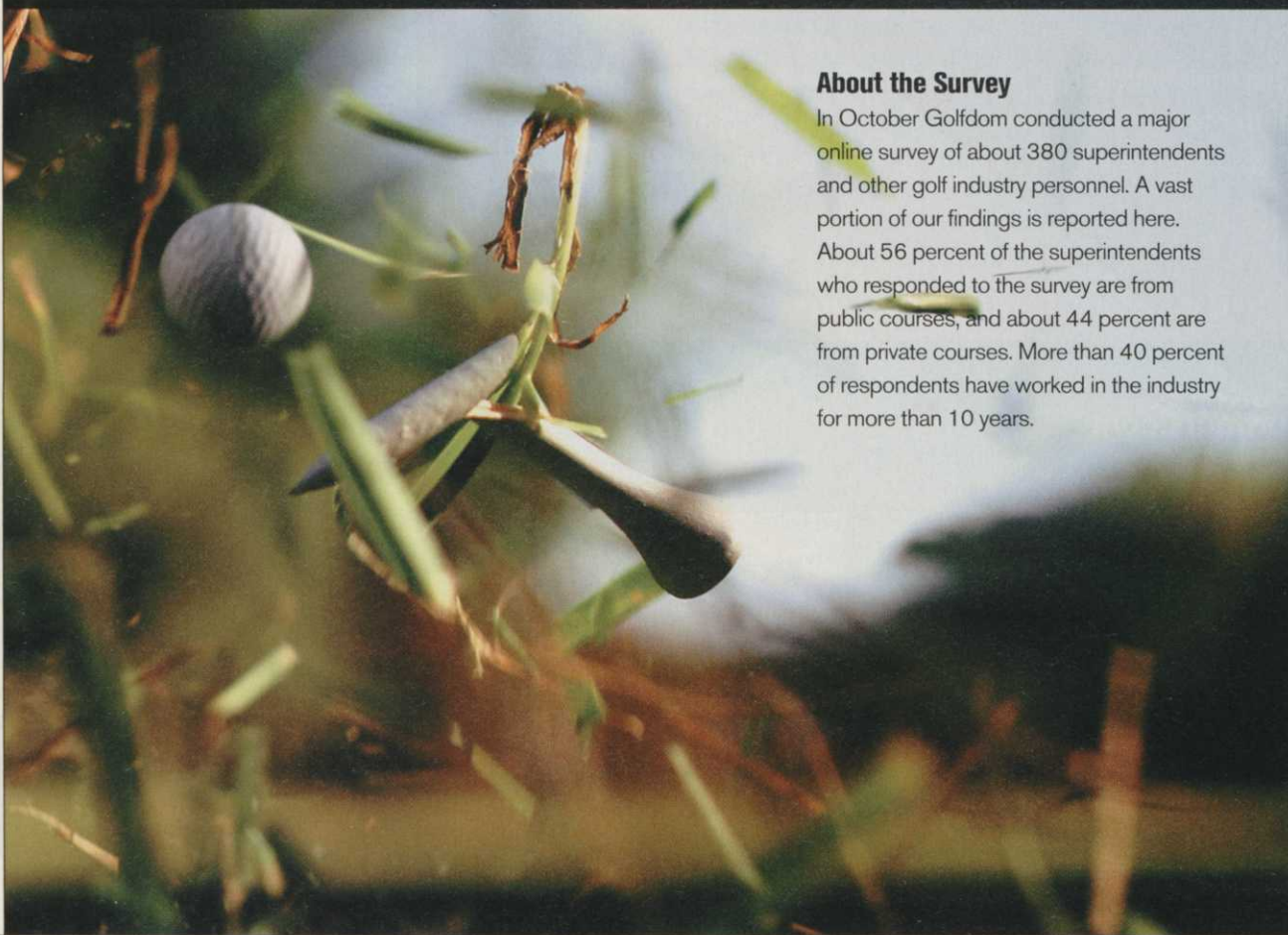
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# Up and Down

A look back at the year in statistics and sayings, including results of our recent superintendent survey and the best quotables of the year from some of the industry's most interesting characters



## About the Survey

In October Golfdom conducted a major online survey of about 380 superintendents and other golf industry personnel. A vast portion of our findings is reported here. About 56 percent of the superintendents who responded to the survey are from public courses, and about 44 percent are from private courses. More than 40 percent of respondents have worked in the industry for more than 10 years.