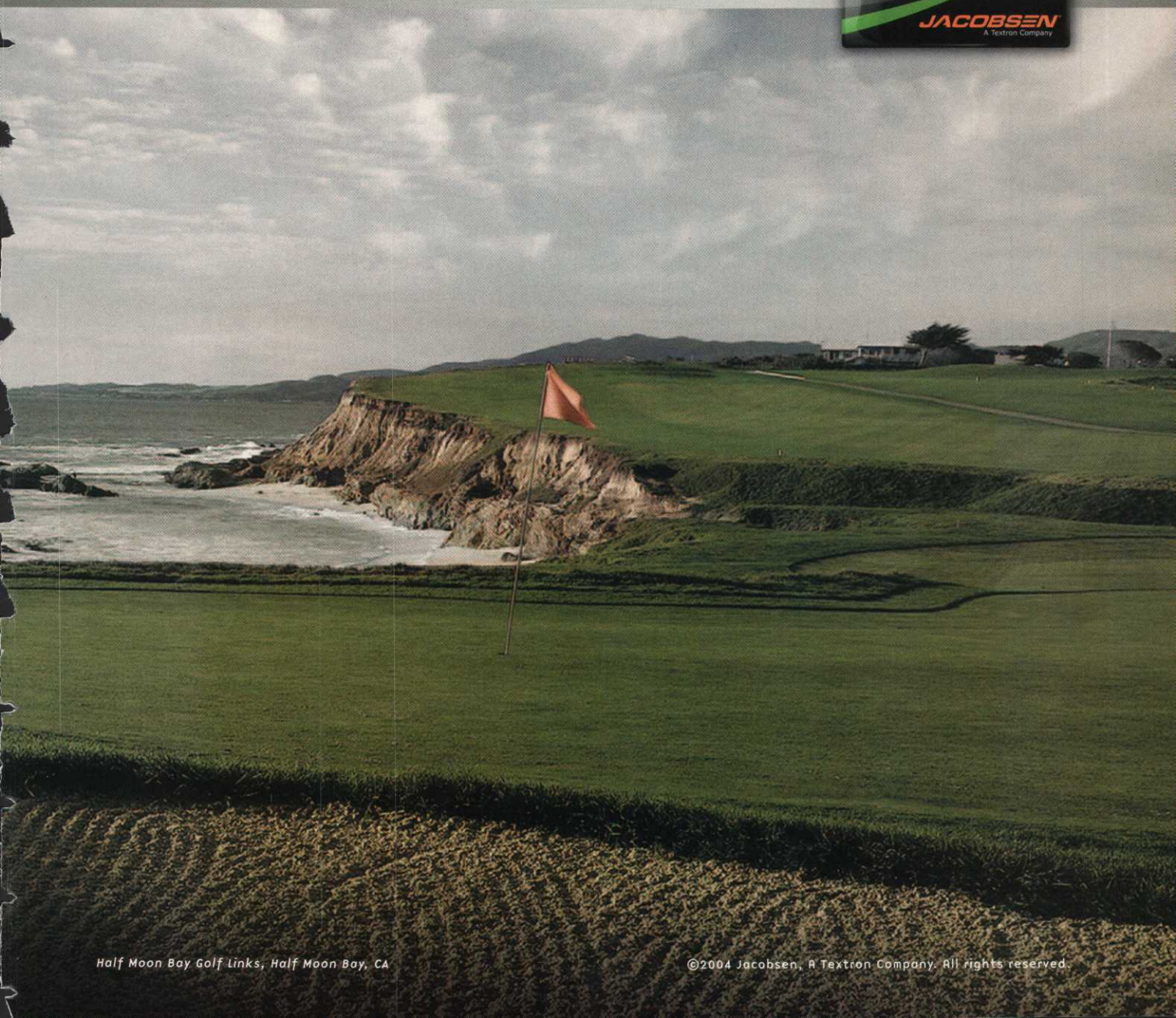


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## Wanted: Golf Fanatic with a Fabulous Phone Voice

BY HEIDI VOSS

**A**s a club-marketing consultant, part of my job is to assist clubs in finding membership directors. One might think this would be easy, but it's very difficult.

Most people who apply for the job believe they'll be perfect for it because they love to play 36 holes of golf daily. But in reality, you could take a survey of directors and they would tell you that they get to play golf about once a month, and that they play less now than before they assumed their roles.

So the big question is: "What do they do all day?" I was asked this once by a member of the club's wait staff. He had seen me chatting happily on the phone,

touring around on the course and dining with folks while enjoying tableside Caesar salads and cherries jubilee.

His exact words were, "How do I apply for your job?"

I'm pleased my job appears so glamorous, but in reality a director spends many hours on the phone and in



meetings with potential members answering their numerous questions, as well as overcoming their buying objections. This is especially true with all of the recent competition between clubs in the marketplace.

How do I find the right person for this job? I look for a gregarious person who thrives in the company of others and isn't afraid to jump in and cater to a member's every need. This person

can also drive an SUV across an area that appears to be strip-mined while describing the new par three that will play over the water feature that currently doesn't exist.

Contrary to popular belief, you don't need to be female to be a great membership director. You must, however, be willing to work eight days a week and be at the beck and call of your members and club manager.

When I feel I have the right candidate, I administer a personality profile test, conducted by Profiles International, for comparison with others in the industry that have done outstanding jobs. If the test, with questions like, "Would you rather fly the helicopter or ride in the helicopter?" doesn't make them crazy, I am usually rewarded with a terrific gauge of how successful this person is going to be in the club membership position.

Once on board, the director is encouraged to spend the day with each department head to learn about their roles on the team. From an agronomic perspective, the prospective members today know much more about grass types, irrigation, bunker styles, green speed and all of those things that make them a prime candidate for serving as the green

chairman. Just kidding! Seriously, though, nothing impresses a prospective member more than the membership director who knows each golf hole's length and the smart landing areas.

I still run into clubs that want to run the membership program by committee. This invariably leads to asking busy members to allocate time to try to track down even busier prospects. This is the immediate key to failure. We don't ask members to mow the grass and cook their meals, so why should we expect them to spearhead the largest revenue generator at the club?

A hot, ongoing debate I have at my house with my superintendent husband is, "Who is the most valuable employee at the club, the membership director or the superintendent?" Without green grass there would be no sales and without sales there would be no green grass.

Therein lies the conundrum.

*Voss is president of Bauer Voss Consulting, a club marketing consulting company. Voss specializes in new development, club conversions from public to private and member buyouts. For more information, contact [www.bauervossconsulting.com](http://www.bauervossconsulting.com).*

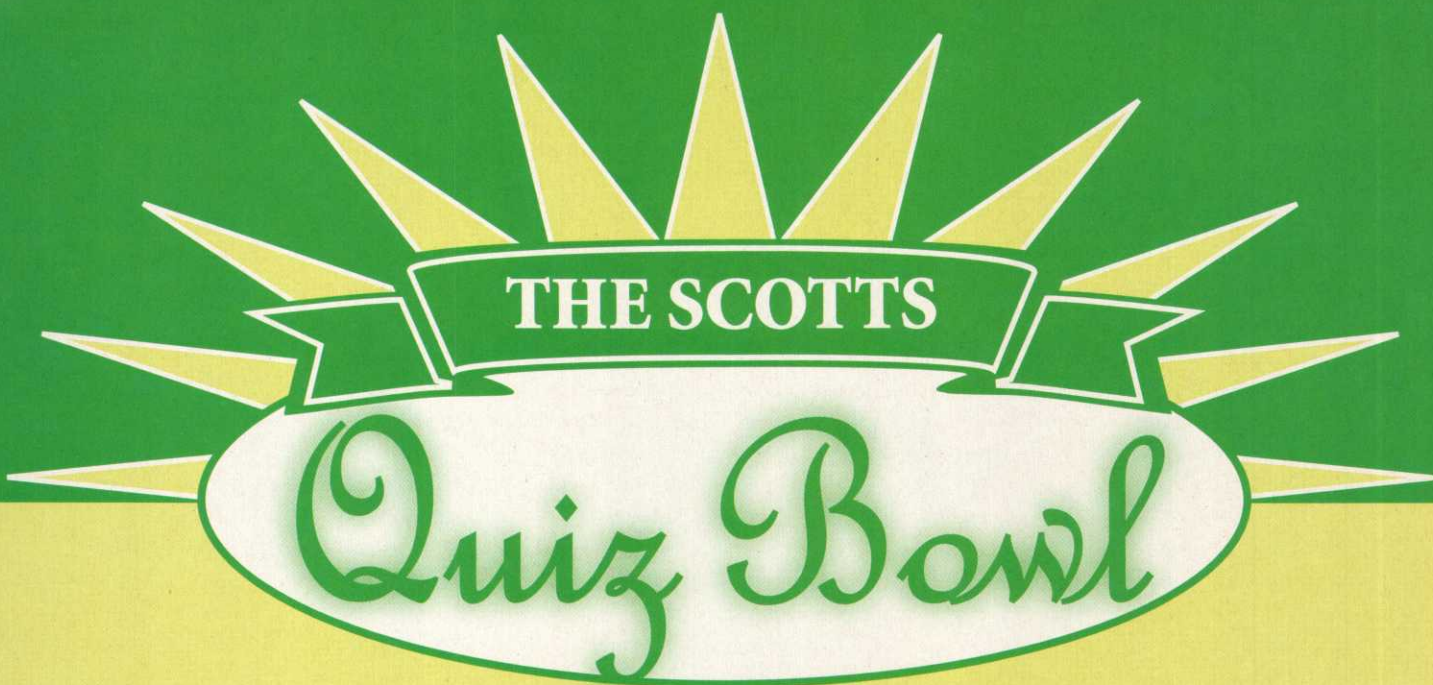
### Three Requisites for the Job

**1 GREGARIOUS WITH A CAPITAL "G"** — This person thrives in the company of others and isn't afraid to jump in and cater to a member's every need.

**2 ONE DOESN'T HAVE TO BE FEMALE** — But you do have to work eight days a week and be at the beck and call of your members and manager.

**3 AGRONOMICALLY INCLINED** — The person knows grass types, irrigation, bunker styles, etc.





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## PROFILE/BILL FOUNTAIN

*Continued from page 50*

Golfdom asked Fountain to share his thoughts about the golf business and give readers more insight into the owner that some call "The Banana Man."

**Golfdom:** *What's the most important issue facing golf course owners?*

**Fountain:** We still look at golf in the traditional way. Golf, as an entertainment option, takes a tremendous amount of time. However, our society, for a number of reasons, has eroded personal time for recreational activities. The game has not changed significantly since it started. When I look at other



sports and see how they have evolved, I feel golf is at a crossroads where change will be good for the growth of the game. We need to become more creative and mold our businesses to address the amount of time we spend playing the game. Perhaps that means an 18-hole course broken up into three six-hole courses that could accommodate six-hole play and leagues but still allow 18-hole events.

Who would have thought 20 years ago that beach volleyball would be an Olympic sport, or that riding a skateboard 40 feet in the air could make you millions?

**Golfdom:** *What's the key to a good*

*owner/superintendent relationship?*

**Fountain:** Trust, honesty, respect.

**Golfdom:** *Finish this sentence: "The best thing that could happen to the golf industry would be..."*

**Fountain:** ... the freedom for businesses to have the ability to entertain their clients and expense them on their business accounts.

**Golfdom:** *What is the best investment you ever made in your business?*

**Fountain:** The building of relationships with my partners, team members and others in the golf industry.

**Golfdom:** *Who are the three most influential people in the golf industry?*

**Fountain:** Mother Nature because of the weather, Alan Greenspan because of interest rates and George Bush because of our freedoms.

**Golfdom:** *Who is your favorite golfer?*

**Fountain:** Tiger Woods.

**Golfdom:** *If you could have lunch with anyone, who would it be and what would be the first question you would ask?*

**Fountain:** God. And my first words would be to say, "Thank you."

**Golfdom:** *What do you do in your free time?*

**Fountain:** Spend time with my family.

**Golfdom:** *What was the last book you read?*

**Fountain:** "Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap ... and Others Don't," by Jim Collins.

**Golfdom:** *What's your favorite movie?*

**Fountain:** "Caddyshack."

**Golfdom:** *With which club in your bag do you hit the best?*

**Fountain:** My 5-iron. ■

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## FUN AND VALUE FACTORS



**A GOOD DEAL.** Green fees at Rustic Canyon are a mere \$35 during the week and \$50 on the weekend with \$10 extra for a golf car.

*Continued from page 48*

attached to Rustic Canyon. Too often modern design has celebrated courses overdosing on total difficulty — plenty of length, lots of water and a good number of bunkers and implemented hazards that are simply in place for cosmetics and require an inordinate amount of upkeep time.

Located less than 60 minutes from Los Angeles, Rustic Canyon proves that interesting design can give players the fun aspect they desire when playing.

In 1999 the County of Ventura put out a notice to interested developers for the creation of another golf course for recreational purposes and income. The land was in its native state prior to any construction and consisted of slightly more

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than 200 acres. Highlands Golf LLC built the course for about \$3 million.

Architect Gil Hanse, based in Malvern, Pa., was chosen because his vision for the land was compelling and far removed from the cookie-cutter, pro-forma layouts that routinely dot the Southern California landscape. Assisting Hanse was design partner Jim Wagner and classic design enthusiast, author and *Golfdom* contributing editor Geoff Shackelford, who lives in nearby Santa Monica.

Shackelford says it's nice to hear golfers describe the course as "fun."

**Gil Hanse's vision for the land was compelling and far removed from the cookie-cutter, pro-forma layouts that routinely dot the Southern California landscape.**

"Many golfers have almost seemed worried they were going to insult us by complimenting the course as fun," he says. "That says a lot about the state of architecture when 'fun' is an almost dirty word."

Rustic Canyon's success as a design was noted by different publications. *Golf Digest* awarded the facility its Best Affordable Course for 2003. It's inexpensive because less than 17,000 cubic yards of material was moved during construction. And clearly the cost to play has been a driving force in keeping tee sheets filled.

Green fees at Rustic Canyon are \$35 during the week and \$50 on the weekend (golf cars are an additional \$10). How does that compare? Go down the road to neighboring Simi Valley and you'll find two Pete Dye-designed layouts at Lost Canyons that routinely charge triple-digit fees to play at peak times.

### Diversity rules in Aurora

The twin concepts of fun and value are also anchored in the taxpayer-owned facilities. As Colorado's third-largest city, Aurora (popula-

*Continued on page 58*

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## FUN AND VALUE FACTORS

*Continued from page 57*

tion: 290,000) has consistently demonstrated a successful multicourse operation providing both residents and non-residents a quality product that

maximizes value through a diversity of quality course options. With seven golf facilities, Aurora offers a multidimensional



**DENNIS LYON.** "Value is more important than price."

approach few communities can match.

Aurora's first public course opened in 1968 with Aurora Hills. Since that time the total operation has expanded quickly and produced 2003 revenues of \$5,177,291 with a total of 292,441 rounds played.

"In today's market golfers have multiple choices where they can play," says Dennis Lyon, certified superintendent and director of Aurora's Golf Division. "The fun and value equation is an important consideration in making the decision where to play.

"Value is more important than price," Lyon continues. "As long as golfers perceive a good value, they will pay the price they can afford."

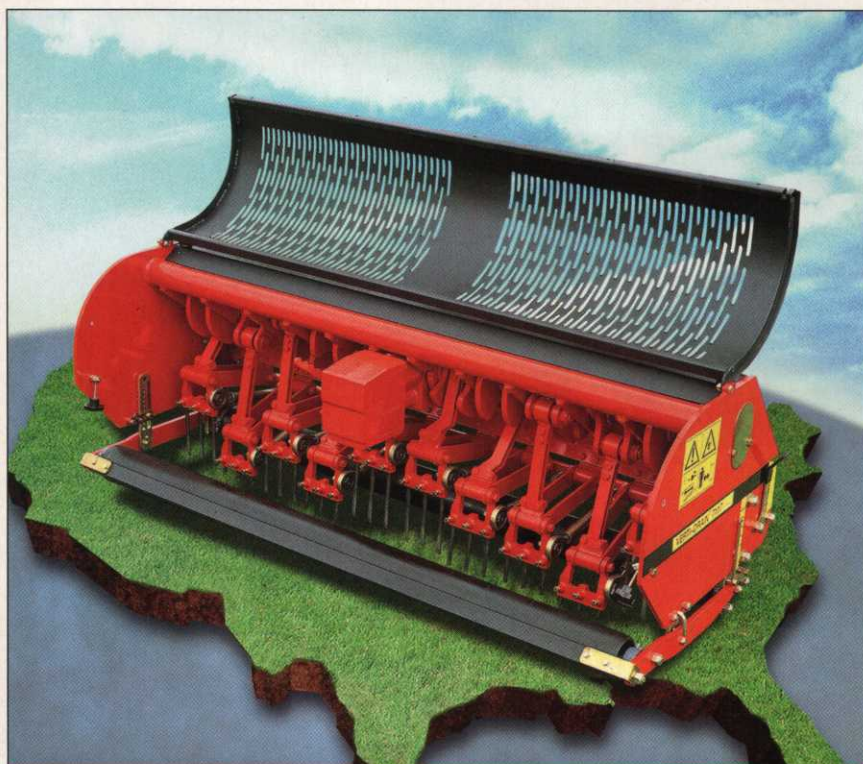
Located east of Denver, the Aurora philosophy is simple: provide a consistently fun and value option for all who use its facilities, whether they're beginners or seasoned players.

The community provides a nine-hole par-3 option at Centre Hills for those just getting started. For those who prefer a more challenging option, there's Murphy Creek, which hosted the primary Denver-area qualifier for the 2003 U.S. Amateur.

One of the more compelling points about Aurora and its golf offerings is that rates to play, even for nonresidents, do not exceed \$50 even during weekends and holidays. To get that kind of value and to have a full range of unique facilities clearly shows the kind of game plan other facilities throughout the nation will need to follow in order to make golfers return as happy customers time after time.

The bottom line is the more successful operations understand that fun and value are the ingredients needed to keep them in the black. ■

*Ward is a freelance writer from Clifton, N.J., and editor of Jersey Golfer magazine.*



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**W**ill 2005 be the year we actually see the golf course industry fight back and stick up for itself? Showing unusual — even

unprecedented — bravery in an industry increasingly unwilling to think outside the box, the National Golf Course Owners Association has issued a thoughtful and informative “Technology Position Statement.”

The NGCOA pointed out that not only is this pointless quest for another extra 10 yards via \$500 drivers and \$5 balls bad for the golf economy, it's costly for anyone who owns a golf course.

“Increased golf ball distance results in errant shots missing their intended target by greater distances than before,” the position paper said. “New golf courses are required to be built with more land in order to accommodate the need for larger safety buffers to either side of the preferred line of play. The effect has been that golf courses take up more land, with subsequent increases in land acquisition, construction and maintenance costs.”

OK, fine. You've heard that before. It gets better.

“In most cases the older courses are faced with a concern due to their inability to expand the safety buffers required with the longer-hitting golf equipment. Owners and operators of older courses are burdened with increased liability costs as a result.”

Getting warmer, aren't we? And now, the piece d' resistance.

“Off-line shots, due to the greater dispersion that is generated by increased distance, also contribute to slow play. Additionally, greater hitting distances subject longer hitters to increased waiting periods between many shots, further impacting the pace of play. The result is diminished enjoyment of the game and increased cost of play.”

Not to quibble with the NGCOA — because, after all, it is going out on a limb here — but the organization's new release also says that it's joining the USGA, PGA Tour, R&A and American Society of Golf Course Architects in their concerns over distance.

Exempting the ASGCA, which has been

## Owners Speak Up. Who's Next?

BY GEOFF SHACKELFORD



THE NGCOA SEEMS  
WILLING TO DO  
SOMETHING TO  
ENSURE GOLF'S  
PLACE IN THE  
HEARTS AND  
MINDS OF SPORTS  
ENTHUSIASTS  
ACROSS THE  
COUNTRY

the lone consistent voice on the distance matter, the other three organizations are only concerned about saving face and padding their swollen trusts. The actual everyday golfer, industry worker or course operator are of little interest to these organizations.

With more than one-third of all courses holding memberships in the NGCOA, it's only a matter of time before other organizations jump on the proverbial bandwagon and demand that the focus return to fun, affordable golf over expensive equipment.

Ironically, all we need now is the actual product to set us free. That comes in the form of a competition ball, or Tour ball or classic course ball or whatever it will be called. All of the manufacturers have developed one for their doomsday scenario when the sport finally can't afford itself anymore. The working theory goes like this: Tour players and other fine golfers would use this ball. In theory, the everyday golfer who thinks he's better than he really is will also use this ball.

The rest who crave nothing more in life than an extra 10 yards will need some incentive to lose the 10 yards that cost them upwards of \$1,000 to attain.

How about a discount on green fees for those who play the competition ball? Or offering the cost price on these balls? Or preferential early tee times to golfers willing to play their home courses as they were intended — and more likely at a faster pace because they spend less time waiting for a fairway to clear?

Either way, the NGCOA seems willing to do something to ensure golf's place in the hearts and minds of sports enthusiasts across the country. Who will step up next?

Callaway? Titleist? Nike? Hootie Johnson and his Green-coated band? 2005 may just tell.

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