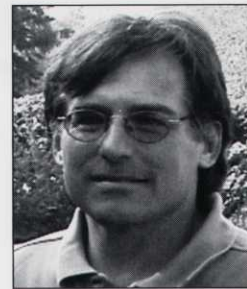


## PART III

# Design Review: 1985-2005

By GARRETT GILL, ASGCSA  
Gill Design, Inc.



### Prelude

Jack Mackenzie asked me develop an article on changes in golf course design from a more recent historical perspective. I have chosen the twenty-year period from 1985 to 2005 for three reasons.

First, this period represents one of the greatest periods of golf growth and, more recently, one of the most severe declines. Secondly, this time includes significant sophistication and advancement in golf turf grasses, maintenance equipment technology and golf club/ball technology. Thirdly, as a design company, we are celebrating our 20th year of professional practice in golf course architecture.

Part I presented in the November-December issue of *Hole Notes*, reviewed the basic design changes we have seen as golf course architects from 1985 to 2005. Part II examined the changes during this twenty-year period in maintenance considerations and practices and their more subtle impact on golf course design. This final part will discuss changes in golf participation, golf as a business and legal issues during this period.

### Golf participation - the baby boomers have yet to arrive...

I believe golf managers will agree that the industry has yet to feel the impact of the baby boomer generation influence. What we may be experiencing is a shocking awakening. The reality is baby boomers are not flocking to the golf courses as anticipated but rather are pursuing other less expensive or less time-consuming leisure activities.

In a recent December 2004 study, "The Lives and Times of the Baby Boomers," written by Mary Elizabeth Hughes and Angela M. O'Rand, from Duke University the following findings were presented and reported.

#### 1) Baby boomers are diverse:

Immigration has played a major role in increasing the diversity of the baby boomers. About 12 percent of the early boomers (born between 1946 and 1955) are foreign-born, compared to 15 percent of late boomers (born between 1956 and

over time, but the percentage of Hispanic and Asian Americans has increased dramatically.

#### 2) Diversity has not led to equality:

Baby boomers are the first generation to come of age after the Civil Rights era. Yet the authors found differences of income according to race, ethnicity and country of birth so entrenched that, in effect, they are ethnic classes. Blacks in the boomer generation, for example, are no better off relative to whites than their parents and grandparents. And educational levels also are unequal across the baby boom generation, which is often described as the best-educated generation in history.

#### 3) Many boomers live in poverty:

At midlife, boomers have the highest wage inequality of any recent generation. Late boomers have the highest levels of poverty since the generation born before World War I. One in 10 late boomers lives in poverty at middle age.

#### 4) Baby boomers are likely to extend midlife well into what used to be considered "old age."

They will continue working longer, and responsibilities such as paying for college or having children at home will extend to older ages. They also are likely to enjoy good health and remain "actively engaged" longer than previous generations.

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Table A-1

Population	Participation Rate* (Percent of Population Age 12+)						Number of Golfers (Thousands)	Percent of All Golfers
	0%	5%	10%	15%	20%	25%		
Total							26,448	100.0%
Gender								
Male					13.5%		21,315	80.6%
Female	4.4%						5,131	19.4%
Age								
12-17 yrs			3.3%				2,036	7.7%
18-29 yrs				11.9%			5,501	20.8%
30-39 yrs					13.5%		7,114	26.9%
40-49 yrs						12.8%	5,131	19.4%
50-59 yrs					11.3%		2,909	11.0%
60-64 yrs					11.2%		1,217	4.6%
65 and over			7.8%				2,539	9.6%
Household Income								
Under \$20,000		3.4%					1,402	5.3%
\$20,000-29,999			7.2%				2,010	7.6%
\$30,000-39,999				9.7%			2,777	10.5%
\$40,000-49,999					11.5%		2,982	11.2%
\$50,000-74,999					14.8%		7,035	26.6%
\$75,000-99,999					18.1%		5,739	21.7%
\$100,000 and over					20.3%		4,522	17.1%
H/H Education								
Non-HS Grad		2.7%					691	2.5%
HS Grad			3.2%				4,258	16.1%
Some College				9.5%			9,389	35.5%
College Grad					18.1%		12,139	45.9%
H/H Occupation								
Prof/Mgmt/Adm					19.3%		11,345	42.9%
Clerical/Sales					15.1%		3,808	14.4%
Blue Collar					12.2%		6,182	23.3%
Other					8.7%		1,613	6.1%
Retired/Not Employed					8.8%		3,517	13.3%

\*Percentage of the given population or demographic segment who are golfers.  
†Head of household

1) Percentage of given population or demographic segment who are golfers.

2) Head of Household

1964.) The percentage of African Americans has not changed a great deal



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# Golf Design Review—

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5) Economic inequalities are likely to become more important as the boomers age. The least well off may face higher risks of unemployment and worse health at a time when policy changes are encouraging them to remain at work longer. Low wages and job instability also may mean they have less saved than previous generations.

What this suggests to me is that the golf industry cannot rely on the baby boomers to sustain or increase golfer participation rates or that if there are increases, they will be much less than expected. The fallacy of placing all hope into the baby boomer legend is that eventually their influence will pass as their group diminishes due to age. Conceivably, the



No. 3 at The Ponds at Battle Creek, Ramsey County Parks

golf industry may be even in a worst state that it is now.

Again as an industry the accompanying 2001 / 2004 summary from the National Golf Foundation reflects a widening of the gap in who can afford to play golf. The 2001/2004 comparisons also reflect the decrease in new golfers coming into the game.

The one golf group that was virtually silent 20 years ago, and that the industry is now responding to is the woman golfer. From the high school and college sports level, women's participation in golf is second to soccer. In the 2004 National Golf Foundation report "Golf Participation in the U.S." usage numbers reflect a 2% annual decrease in male golfers with a corresponding 2% increase in women

golfers. The numbers or trend is more impressive if you compare women / men participation from 2001 to 2004.

In golf course design the response has been towards continued development of forward tees – better, larger forward tees, and championship women's tee sets to balance the comparable tee arrangements for men. Bunker and other hazard placement has been re-thought as well. We are actively comparing landing and rollout positions for women as we had previously for men. We have also noticed women are much more active now on planning and greens and grounds committees than they have been in past years.

*Golf is definitely a business now...*

Twenty years ago, golf was much less a business. In fact it was about that time we first started our consulting work for the American Golf Corporation (AGC).

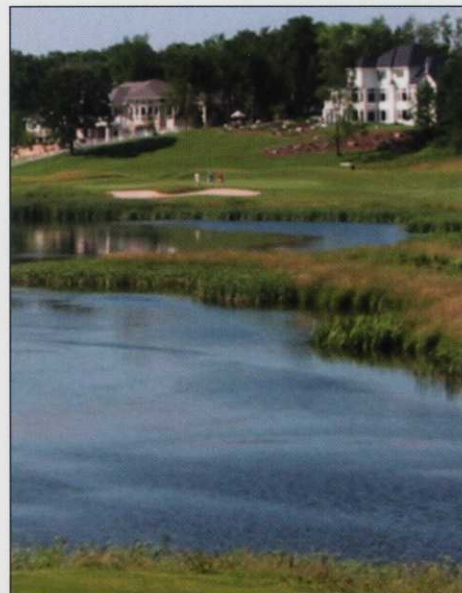
Their basic philosophy was to provide an above average golf experience for the market acceptable price and to be able to do that throughout each day of the golf season. We designed and laid out thousands of miles of cart path on golf courses for the simple reason that it kept golfers on the course and revenue in the clubhouse. AGC superintendents would yield to managers and repair course damage rather than lose revenue and keep carts in

the barn.

The majority of our design actions for AGC were oriented to improving revenue. Irrigation systems were constantly upgraded because AGC could prove that revenue increased by having a quality irrigation system. Courses were never taken out of play. AGC would instruct contractors to work nights to complete the work so that it wouldn't inconvenience the golfer and so that the improvements could be made in the shortest period of time.

We assisted AGC on the evaluation and remodeling of many golf courses as a means to reduce maintenance inputs. We assisted AGC in naturalizing many out of play or limited play golf course areas to reduce maintenance costs. At about this

(Continued on Page 27)



Legends, Prior Lake

## 2004 DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE GOLF PARTICIPANTS

Total Golf Participants ..... 37,900

### Gender:

Male .....72.2%  
Female .....27.8%

### Age:

5 - 11 ..... 6.5%  
12 - 17 ..... 8.1%  
18 - 29 ..... 17.5%  
30 - 39 ..... 21.6%  
40 - 49 ..... 20.9%  
50 - 59 ..... 12.1%  
60 - 64 ..... 4.3%  
65+ ..... 9.1%

### Income:

Under \$20,000 ..... 7.0%  
\$20,000 - \$29,000 ..... 7.9%  
\$30,000 - \$39,999 ..... 9.5%  
\$40,000 - \$49,999 ..... 9.4%  
\$50,000 - \$74,000 ..... 22.7%  
\$75,000 - \$99,999 ..... 18.8%  
\$100,000+ .....24.7%

### Education:

Non-HS Graduate ..... 2.9%  
High School Graduate ..... 17.7%  
Some College ..... 33.4%  
College Graduate .....46.0%

### Occupation:

Prof/Mgmt/Adm ..... 38.4%  
Clerical Sales ..... 16.1%  
Blue Collar ..... 24.5%  
Other ..... 6.4%  
Retired ..... 14.5%

## Golf Design Review—

(Continued from Page 26)

this same time, the more naturalist golf course image was emerging. The two themes worked well together.

**Golf has evolved from a weekend sport** where the courses were filled to capacity by a diverse group of unrelated individuals to a mid-week sport where the course is filled by corporate golf outings and banquets. As we know, there is very little problem finding a tee time now on a Saturday morning.

**We have seen the practice facility industry develop and mature.** Twenty years ago, developing a stand-alone practice range facility wasn't given much consideration. But throughout much of the 1990s many such facilities were developed. As one manager friend said to me "this is a pretty good business... they give you \$5.00, you give them a club and a bucket of balls, and you get the club and the balls back!" What makes practice ranges popular is the relative low cost to participate; minimum time commitment, and I believe the fact that one doesn't need

to post a score.

**We are glad to be active in the design of the alternative course or recreational courses.** Golf courses such as 9-hole par 3's and 9- or 18-hole executive length facilities I think will continue to become more and more popular for many of the same reasons as practice ranges. Our firm greatly enjoyed developing our executive course designs. In the metro area we completed Glen Lake, Minnetonka, Arbor Pointe, Inver Grove Heights, Ponds at Battle Creek, Maplewood, and the Bridges, Moundsview. All of these courses have been based on the philosophy of making the golf challenging yet fun to play. Our courses hold the golfers interest throughout every hole. In every respect, they were as challenging to design and as rewarding to play when finished as a full-length regulation or championship 18.

**Residential golf developments were excellent business tools.** Nationwide over 70% of the new 18-hole courses built from the late 1980s through early 2000 contained a residential component. Locally, in this period we designed Crystal Lakes, Lakeville, Cedar Creek, Albertville, West 9 Pebble Creek, Becker,

The Legends, Prior Lake, and White Eagle, North Hudson, Wis. However since 2002, even with the low interest rates, the residential golf development market has been quiet, in part I believe, due to the saturation of courses and the decline of play.

**Lastly, I have not heard the term "new 18" being said too often.** As in the past, golf design is cyclic in nature. Right now we are spending much of our time on renovation projects. In May, the new Highland Park National will re-open for the city of St. Paul. It has been two years and Denise Kispert and her crew have worked hard bringing the course in.

The new 18 will return, but I believe it will be different than we have experienced to date.

*Send lawyers, clubs and money...  
(Warren Zevon)*

As golf course architects, our professional liability insurance has risen about on par with health care costs and it's not because we are a bad risk. It is because golf courses have been seen as a relatively easy mark.

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LARRY THORNTON



## Golf Design Review—

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When you think about it, there are many areas of concern. From chemical applications, errant golf shots, golf carts, kids and alcohol there are many issues that managers, superintendents, and designers must address. Michael Kraker, a lawyer friend of mine, has developed a law practice and consulting service to golf course clients on the basis of "Foreseeability" and the premise of 1) "design it safe" suggestions for course designers, owners and developers; 2) "keep it safe" recommendations to directors of golf, superintendents and managers on golf operations; and 3) "drive it safe" where Mike lists basic protocols for golf cart operations. As you negotiate the [www.golflawyer.com](http://www.golflawyer.com) web site, you can get a sense for the many issues that must be address in the design, operation and maintenance of a golf course. We tend to listen to Mike.

The legal issues are complex. We mix golfers of different ages and abilities with different technologies and playing experience. We place them in unfamiliar sur-



*We did lots and lots of cart paths.  
Cart paths made money.*

roundings with little more than a scorecard for direction and ask them to play safe within their abilities.

Needless to say, golf course legal issues 20 years ago are much different than they are today. Today, the reasonable man doctrine, which essentially is the default expert, requires designers, owners, managers, superintendents and contractors to take every reasonable and foreseeable, step necessary to protect the user, non-participant, owner, adjacent property owner and the natural environment. As

presented in Part 1, design widths for residential golf corridors have expanded because of advancements in golf club and ball technology. Golf cart paths are designed wider and engineered like modern roadways with speed limits, guard rails and warning signs. Pond banks are designed with a shelf to keep golfers from slipping beyond reach. More grading is done to improve visibility and protect adjacent play areas. We have been trained to label and note every exception and to restate the obvious twice.

### In Closing

I'd like to say thanks for giving me the opportunity, through all of these pages, to express myself through words about golf and my feelings about the game and its design. It may be another 20 years before I get the courage again.

\*\*\*\*\*

(Editor's Note: This is the third article in a 3-part series of *Golf Course Design*. Part I was published in the November-December 2004 issue of *Hole Notes* and Part II was published in the January-February 2005 issue of *Hole Notes*.)

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