

Golf's

There is a widespread perception that the game of golf in the United States is continuing to grow as it did in the 1980s. It is not.

gotta get going...

At The Country Club, Pepper Pike, Ohio, members' children are given golf lessons, as a way to spark their interest.

By JOSEPH F. BEDITZ, President/CEO, National Golf Foundation

Although the game of golf continues to flourish, it has, in fact, been standing still for the past six years with regard to two important measures of growth:

1) the number of golfers and 2) course visits.

On the other hand, new facilities are being developed at a record rate and golfers are spending more than ever each year for equipment and playing fees.

Golf facility supply

In the U.S., over the past five years, growth in golf facility supply has significantly outstripped demand for golf as measured by course visits, or "rounds of golf." However, in the five-year period prior to that, the reverse was true.

The number of golf courses in the U.S. stands at 15,703, an increase of 2,350 courses over the past 10 years. While this sounds like a lot, it actually represents only a 1.6 percent compound annual growth rate in supply. Nonetheless, this is a large number of golf courses and conservatively represents an investment of about \$10 billion over the 10-year period.

And the outlook for this segment remains bright. There are 850 new courses under construction, and another 800 new courses far enough along in the planning process to be considered "likely to go forward."

Golfer demand

Over the past 10 years the number of golfers and course visits have both increased. The number of golfers has increased from about 20 million to 25 million, and the number of course visits from about 400 million to 500 million. All of this growth occurred between 1985 and 1990. Since 1990 the number of both golfers and rounds played have remained essentially level.

Prospects for growth

The single most important trend affecting golf's future is not related to the game itself, but rather with America's changing demographics. Our population is aging at an unprecedented rate.

Research shows that golfers play more and spend more as they age. All things being equal, we expect golf demand to increase steadily as a direct result of the aging of the baby boomers.

To ensure golf's future, we must see to it that the full spectrum of cost alternatives remains available so that golf can justify its claim that it's not a game for the privileged few, but rather a game for all.

—Excerpted from remarks by Mr. Beditz at the 1997 International Golf Conference, St. Andrews, Scotland. Used by permission.