

ASGCA members designing top-ranked courses

Based on an article in *Golfweek/Golf & Travel*, a correlation between highly-trained architects and top-ranked golf courses can be identified. Of the 100 best modern courses designed since 1960, 88 of them have been designed by members of the American Society of Golf Course Architects.

The stringent membership applications process also ensures a high level of professionalism and skill. For initial membership consideration the applicants must have been engaged in the practice of golf course architecture for at least five years and have designed at least five courses, from preparing plans and specifications to observing the construction and completion. In addition, applicants must be responsible and ethical.

In the meantime, the ASGCA continues to focus on designing affordable and accessible golf facilities for the increasing demand. One way to promote affordable golf is through the use of less-expensive

local materials for bunkers, greens and other features of the golf course. Not only does this reduce costs but may actually add to the challenge of the course. For example, the use of local sand materials can increase the challenge of bunkers due to the different characteristics from a more standardized, and more expensive product. Reducing irrigated turf areas and increasing natural areas also contribute to more affordable but challenging golf.

One difficulty in keeping golf course design affordable is the demand by golfers for perfect playing conditions.

According to ASGCA president Bob Lohmann, "we need to get back to the roots of the game, when varied lies and unmanicured turf were understood as part of the challenge and charm of the game. Not demanding perfection would contribute to our ability to provide affordable facilities."

Past-president Judy Bell agrees, saying "the bounces, runs and swales are part of the game". □

1997 golf participation up 7, 15 percent

According to the National Golf Foundation, in 1997 the game of golf had its first significant increase in participation in seven years. The last time the numbers looked so good was in 1990 when the number of golfers increased by 15 percent and the number of rounds by 7 percent. Unfortunately the numbers decreased the following year by a nearly equal amount and stayed there.

In 1997 the number of golfers increased by 7 percent and the number of rounds by 15 percent. The increase appears to be fueled by significant increases in beginning golfers (51%) and junior golfers (34%). Increases in avid and moderate golfers, 6 and

30 percent, respectively, are also promising as these player segments account for a majority of the spending in golf. The next step, according to NGF President and CEO Joseph Beditz, is to make sure the industry retains as many of the new golfers as possible and ensure that they become long-time frequent golfers.

The outlook, says Beditz, will depend on how many occasional golfers and how many of last year's beginners stay in the game. Beditz believes that the new player development initiatives being undertaken by the USGA, World Golf Foundation and other golf associations will be instrumental in maximizing the potential for continuing

NGF's new market research program

The new market research program for the National Golf Foundation is expected to enhance its measurement of golf participation levels and rounds played in the United States.

The *American Golfer Survey* is the largest effort of its type by the NGF or any other golf industry research organization. The program will involve 300,000 households and 30,000 golfers each year. Each month 25,000 nationally representative households will be screened to measure golf participation and rounds played. In addition, 2,500 randomly selected golfers will be surveyed to determine their spending on, awareness of and preferences for specific products and services.

Another useful feature of this survey methodology is the inclusion of a customized monthly research element which will allow NGF member companies to collect golf consumer and market data that is of specific interest to them.

Joseph Beditz, NGF President and CEO, is confident that the new program will be useful. "In addition to providing a new constant stream of timely and nationally projectable data on golf participation and rounds played, this program will enable us to systematically measure spending as well as other important golfer behavior and attitudes." □

increases in the years to come.

"Only time will tell," says Beditz, "whether golf is ready to resume the steady climb it was on in the late 1980's. As always, what happens in rounds played will be dictated largely by the weather and so far this year play is down overall due to El Niño's disastrous impact on playing conditions throughout the Sun Belt." □