



DIFFERENT POINT OF VIEW

Rather than trying to wow customers with amenities, Affinity Management seeks to enrich their lives with service

A BRAVE NEW WORLD
Modern retailing requires imagination and innovation

VITAL SIGNS
Experts measure and debate the health of the game





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« Darius Rucker

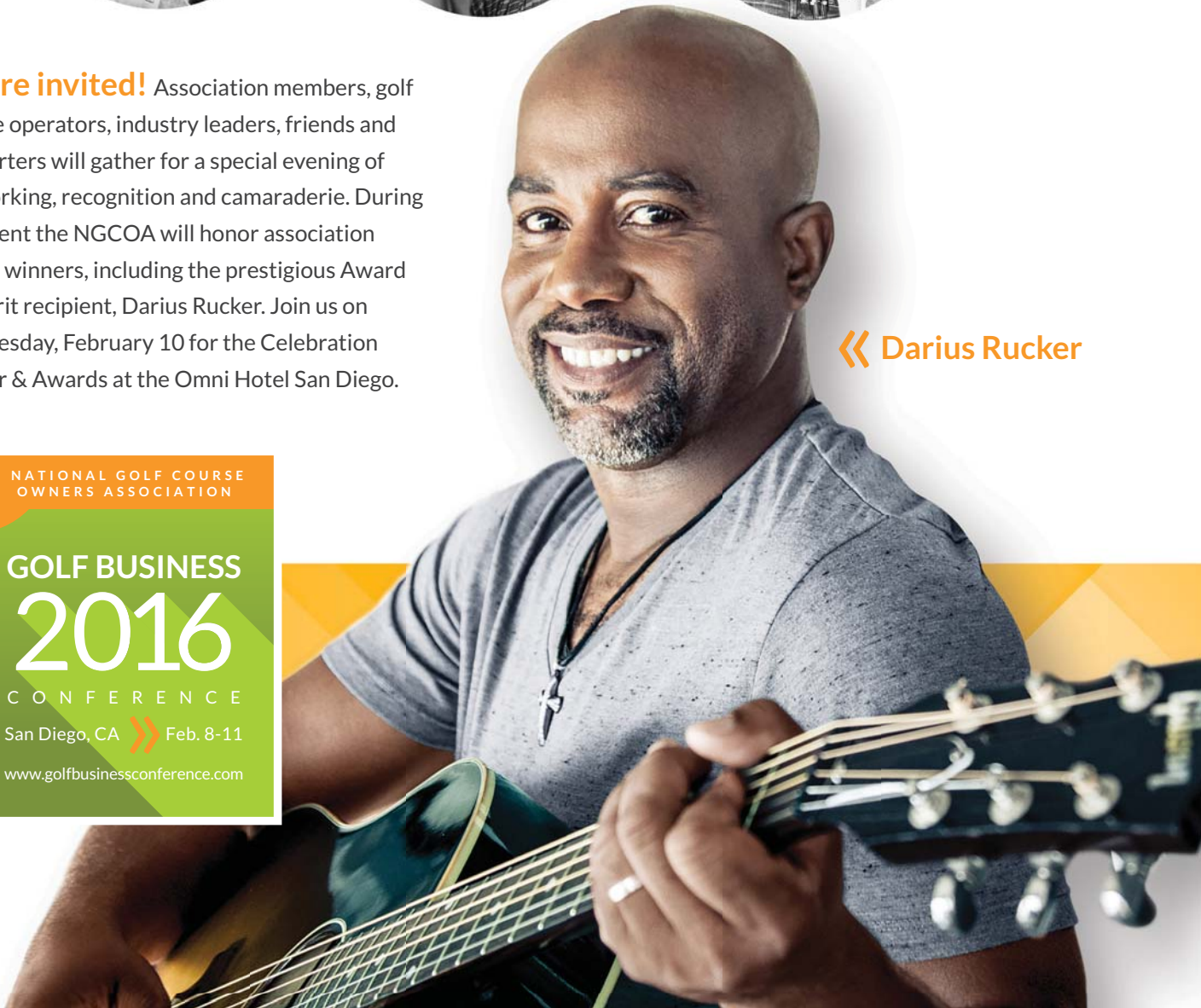
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GolfBUSINESS

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JANUARY 2016

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DIFFERENT POINT OF VIEW

Unlike many management firms, Affinity Management focuses solely on private club operations. Their clients range in size and scope, yet managing partner Damon DeVito says the company's philosophy is surprisingly simple: listening to members and figuring out how to make their lives better at the club. It isn't a novel concept, yet in the current era, it's one that's all too easily overlooked.



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A BRAVE NEW WORLD

The center of any facility is the golf shop, but golf retail remains an animal that confounds many course owners and operators. To thrive in the modern age requires imagination and innovation to stimulate sales and engage customers.

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VITAL SIGNS

Few will argue that the game and business are struggling, but opinions vary greatly as to just how sick golf truly is. As the industry prepares for a new season, experts measure and debate the health of the game.

GolfBUSINESS INSIDE

JANUARY 2016



VANTAGE POINT



NEWS & VIEWS



SINGLES

PAVING A DIFFERENT ROAD

Like many people, Terry Smith got into the business with grand visions. It hasn't been easy, but he and his family are using the fruits of labor from a separate business to solidify the foundation of Rock Hollow.



EXCLUSIVES

WATER WORKS

California is in the throes of one of the worst droughts in history. Rather than doing nothing, the management and members of Diablo Country Club near Oakland are trying to decide their own water-related fate by building a water treatment facility.



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A one-year trial using propane-powered grounds equipment has helped Scott Corwin and Renaissance Vinoy GC realize significant environmental benefits and cost reductions.



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Jay Karen
CEO
NGCOA

It's customary for January to be the month when commitments are made for the ensuing year, a time to mark new beginnings and to look forward, not backward. When we do this, though, it's helpful to remember the past, lest we repeat those things we wish not to (i.e., starting that annual gym membership, only to give up after six weeks). Why buy the gym membership again, when you're pretty sure (admit it) that this time won't be the time you stick to it? If you want to drop that extra 20 pounds, why not change your strategy? The two-faced Greek god Janus (January's namesake) would be pleased that you're looking forward while remembering the past!

As I traversed the country and crossed the pond this fall, I spoke with hundreds of course owners and operators and invoked the old saying, "Insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting a different result." But I put a new spin on it for golf: Insanity in the golf business is doing the same thing over and over and expecting the SAME result! Are you not happy with the performance of some of your staff? Make a change. Not happy with the yield you're getting from your old-fashioned price strategy? Make a change. Not happy with the agreement you have with that tee time distributor? Make a change. Change doesn't always mean letting go of what you have; it could mean having an honest conversation about what you need and expect. And (here comes the important part) holding yourself and the other party accountable. That's the tough part.

The winds of change are definitely blowing at NGCOA. We're finalizing a new strategic plan for the organization. And in order to make good on that plan, it's necessary to make some important changes, the most important of which is organizing our staff to mirror the plan. To that point, we have promoted our long-time editor-in-chief, Ronnie Musselwhite, to the role of director of education to ensure we have the best content across all of our methods of delivery (magazine, conference, webinar, podcast, online, etc.). We're also pleased to add Ronnie Miles, after a solid career in the military and golf operations, to the staff as director of advocacy and commerce. His role will be to supervise and lead all of our efforts to protect the interests of course owners and operators in public policy and the marketplace (think: Golf USA Tee Time Coalition), as well as our efforts to stimulate rounds and revenue for course operators. After success building an Internet service provider, a church and print newspapers (at a time when others are declining), Bill Northrop recently joined the team as our new director of membership. Sheff Webb, with years of success under his belt in major league sports sponsorships, is now our director of corporate partnerships. In order to make good things happen in the areas of education, advocacy and commerce, Bill and Sheff will ensure we have the necessary support, involvement and resources.

Commit yourself to change in 2016, but be sure to approach it in an authentic, intentional way. Hold yourself accountable, just as we are going to hold ourselves accountable to being the organization you want and need. Come to San Diego next month for the Golf Business Conference. I guarantee the time spent with your peers will be just what you need for the changes you want to make. Register today at www.golfbusinessconference.com.

See you there! **JB**

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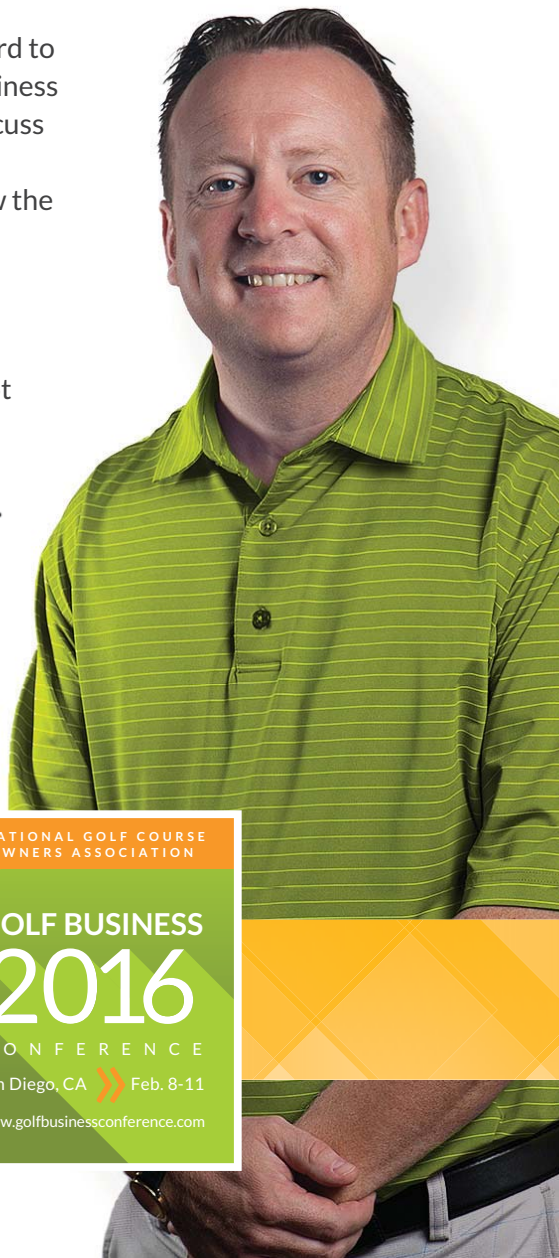
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"I'm looking forward to the 2016 Golf Business Conference to discuss how to increase revenues and grow the game of golf with like-minded people...together. Many great minds make progress a lot quicker together."



Mike Hatch

Owner, Acumen Golf and
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ONLINE

What's on GolfBusiness.com this month



WHAT'S HOT

PROGRAMMING FOR PROFITS From wine and nines to junior leagues to fitness, savvy operators understand that creating a golf experience that appeals to the masses requires much more than a pristine course. In this video excerpt from the 2015 NGCOA Annual Conference, several course operators share a wide range of programs and amenities that can help attract and retain customers and set your business on the path to success.



EXTRA REACH

Did you catch December's *Golf Business ePlus+*, the exclusive digital supplement to *Golf Business*? Chock full of some of the brightest business-boosting ideas from 2015, this is a can't miss resource. Check it out at www.golfbusiness.com.



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TECH TALK

ANDREW LEINTZ
Director of Business Development
DAYTA MARKETING

Pin-seeking Marketing

When you're on the course and in "the zone," you're hunting pins. Your target is specific and well-defined. You know you'll stick it within three feet. Now, golf course marketing professionals can be pin-seekers off the course.

Paid Facebook advertising allows for pinpoint targeting. Facebook's Ad Manager platform enables golf course operators to target consumers by location, age, interests, behaviors and more. For example, a golf course located in Denver, Colorado, could use the following targeting metrics: individuals who live within a 25-mile radius, ages 25 to 65, have a \$75,000-plus income, are likely to buy golf products based on previous buying habits, and enjoy luxury sports. These metrics would result in a potential audience reach of 69,000 people. In other words, this golf course could appear in the Facebook newsfeeds of 69,000 Facebook users who match the above criteria.

Facebook advertising is goal-oriented. Campaigns can be set up to boost your posts, promote your page, send people to your website, increase conversions on your website, reach people near your business, raise attendance at your event, get people to claim your offer, or get video views. Through Facebook advertising, you're communicating with people who are most interested in your message. The estimated cost of reaching a minimum of 16,000 active users from the above campaign? \$30. That's no typo, thirty bucks. It's like shooting a 59!

THE START

NEWS & VIEWS WITH A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

VISIONS OF GRANDEUR

It's winter, and many parts of the country are shrouded in a veil of white. Yet somewhere, even if it's simply in the recesses of your mind, someone is striding the fairways of a sun-kissed golf course, imbibing the intoxicating beauty created by the careful blending of the natural and artificial. Indeed, it's hard to envision a scene this sublime when the days are short, the nights are long, and all of nature seems to be conspiring against you. But the wonderful thing about time is that it's cyclical, and regardless of how bleak the landscape looks in your particular region, you can find solace in the fact that the seasons will change and brighter days are just ahead.

No Slowing Down

You know the course closure cycle is entrenched when you hear about a Frisbee golf course—laid out on a repurposed golf course—that is, itself, threatened with shutdown. A recent KUTV News report from Salt Lake City foretold the demise of the Roots Disc Golf Course, on the grounds of the former Jordan River Golf Course, a muni that bit the dust in 2014.

With 2015 barely in the books, observers are naturally wondering if net reductions in America's course count will grind ahead into a second decade. Course supply peaked in 2005, leading to overcapacity that prompted a culling of the herd—older, creakier layouts have proven most likely to drop away. An example of this occurred last August in Sacramento, where Rocklin Golf Course, a 52-year-old semi-private beset with deferred-maintenance issues, announced its imminent demise. The head of the ownership group said that rather than maintain the turf to golf standards, he would “let the property turn to thistle,” a



Course closures appear to show no signs of slowing in the year ahead.

colorful phrasing not generally heard.

“Closures have maintained a consistent trajectory for the past several years,” comments Greg Nathan, senior vice president of National Golf Foundation. “We have verified between 160 and 185 for each of those years, versus 11 to 20 new course openings.” Taking a step back from the data, Nathan further notes that the shutdown pattern “is not cause for alarm—it’s part of the gradual market correction that started in 2006.”

Like most field data that’s gathered on a national scale, these closures are tougher to record and tabulate than one might think. The shuttered-course trackers at the NGF keep two tallies: one of all facilities and one expressed as 18-hole equivalents (18-HEQs), a better overall in-

dicator of supply. At the end of 2014, there were 14,437 HEQs, or 128 fewer than at the end of 2013. Calculating its way to that 128 figure, the NGF first counts the courses that appear to have closed for good, adds the ones that closed for major renovation, subtracts the (few) brand new courses coming online, subtracts the ones that have returned from major renovation, then subtracts the courses that opened following prolonged closures not related to renovation. That yields net closures, which gets subtracted from total 18-HEQs.

Nathan bemoans the difference in the way golf’s contraction unfolds and is perceived, as compared to what happens in other public-facing industries. The nation’s consumer economy is so extensively franchised and chain-based that reductions in so-called “units in operation” tend to happen in a fell swoop. “If there are too many Starbucks, the decision to close a few hundred of them gets announced and executed in a tight timeframe,” Nathan points out. “They simply tear off the band-aid.”

But here in the golf industry, downsizing occurs in water-torture fashion, with each closure a cause for local handwringing that often spurs national stories that end with a question about whether the entire golf industry is doomed. The next checkpoint for the closure watch comes in the spring, when 2015 data gets released. If there are industry people who feel equilibrium has been reached, they’re apparently keeping it to themselves. —David Gould

Don't Miss It

WHAT: Golf Business Conference & Golf Industry Show

WHEN: February 8-11, 2016

WHERE: San Diego, California

WHY YOU SHOULD PARTICIPATE:

The world's largest gathering of course owners and operators features a week's worth of networking, problem-solving, sharing of information and fun. With more than 500 exhibitors, the Golf Industry Show is the premier learning and solutions-driven marketplace for course operators.

For a complete listing of industry events, see page 53.



NGCOA and PGA of America Launch GOLF USA TEE TIME COALITION

IN MID-NOVEMBER, THE NATIONAL GOLF COURSE OWNERS ASSOCIATION and the PGA of America announced a partnership to form Golf USA Tee Time Coalition. The group, which will provide education for golf course owners and operators, is designed to serve as an industry monitor for compliance of third-party online tee time providers.

"This coalition demonstrates a strong commitment to ensuring those who market our industry's inventory are engaging in proper business practices that are helpful—not harmful—to those who supply the inventory," says Jay Karen, CEO of the NGCOA. "Course operators and online tee time providers need to operate in symbiosis, and having an education and ombudsmen entity will support that end. It's a great first step."

Formation of the coalition is a crucial follow-up in a multi-phased strategy that began last June when the NGCOA unveiled its Guidelines for Online Distribution of Tee Time Reservations. This comprehensive set of guidelines, which was fully endorsed by the PGA of America, set forth a framework

for third-party online agents and golf course owners and operators to conduct business together.

Under the new partnership, the Golf USA Tee Time Coalition will engage companies that publicly support these guidelines. The coalition will hire a dedicated compliance officer who will be based in NGCOA headquarters in Charleston, South Carolina, and seek to educate golf industry leaders about its mission strategy, and inform the public about the value of the golf industry and particularly, the online tee time sector of the golf industry. The entity will also feature an advisory council with representatives from supporting tee time companies, and offer a compliance hotline to report violations against the NGCOA guidelines.



TWO OPERATORS/ TWO QUESTIONS

Most course operators begin their careers out front greeting customers, then once they climb the ladder, they trade tee sheets for spreadsheets. Here's how two operators balance running a business and saving some time for meeting customers.

Golf Business: How important is it for you to give "face time" to your customers?

Tuck: Our courses range from Northern Virginia to Memphis to Florida, so we have to rely on our site staff as our customers' main contacts. My son and I visit each of our properties several times a month, and we always



Barton Tuck
OWNER/PRESIDENT
WINGFIELD GOLF
GREENVILLE, SOUTH CAROLINA

Beverly Marler
GENERAL MANAGER
SEDFIELD COUNTRY CLUB
GREENSBORO, NORTH CAROLINA

make sure we're visible to the members, speak to them, and answer any questions. We know a lot of the members, but the main front line has to be the employees on site.

Marler: It's incredibly important to give our members face time. Obviously, the head pro and counter personnel need to be out front. I need to be available for an array of different

events so membership can voice concerns, praise, ideas or anything else. If I'm always in my office instead of giving them face time, they're a lot less likely to tell me what's going on.

GB: Do you miss being able to spend more time with your customers?

Tuck: A CEO has to discipline his time and communi-

cate with people differently than when he started out as a small operator. I'm getting a little older, but I still enjoy being at all our properties with our customers. We manage nine properties, and if we decided to grow, they would be close to our other properties so visiting all of them regularly would be easy.

Marler: I started on the accounting side, so I really didn't get much face time early in my career. I didn't get out front with the members until I became general manager in early 2011. Even though I took a somewhat opposite route, I realized the importance of face time once I began working for the membership and being visible daily to hear their ideas and comments. —Steve Donahue

VIEWPOINTS

GOLF PROFESSIONALS AND DIRECTORS OF INSTRUCTION OFTEN PLAY IN TOURNAMENTS TO KEEP THEIR GAMES SHARP AND COMPETITIVE JUICES FLOWING. SUCH IS THE CASE AT DURAN GOLF CLUB IN VIERA, FLORIDA, WHERE GENERAL MANAGER DAVID TOMCZAK ENCOURAGES DIRECTOR OF INSTRUCTION JUSTIN BLAZER TO PLAY IN AS MANY TOURNAMENTS AS POSSIBLE, PROVIDED IT DOESN'T INTERFERE WITH WORK.

David Tomczak: The competition level Justin encounters in tournaments helps increase his awareness levels with his students, who definitely benefit from that. There's no question Justin's playing ability and reputation help draw golfers to our instruction program. Anything you do that brings accreditation for what you've done—whether it's competing at a high level in golf or accreditations in teaching—establishes and separates you from others trying to do the same thing. You have to be passionate to be in the golf business, and Justin has a high level of passion for the people he works with and in his vision of the game of golf.

Justin Blazer: One of the big reasons I got into this business was the ability to play in tournaments and still chase my dream a little bit and have the opportunity to qualify for the PGA Championship. I love to play. Tournament golf allows me to put myself in my students' shoes as to how they should prepare for their league tournaments. It's tough to squeeze in the tournaments, especially when you're trying to drive business and establish yourself. In my first 20 months at Duran Golf Club, I haven't had a chance to play in as many tournaments as I would have liked to because of that. —Steve Donahue



An Eye To the Skies

With a monster El Niño meteorological component, plus other traits the weather experts are buzzing about (including a North Pacific warm-water mass called “The Blob”) this winter promises to be an eventful one. You have to go back some 15 years and then another 30 to find El Niño patterns that rival the current one. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s Climate Prediction Center, along with several non-government forecasting groups, is using dramatic terms to describe this climate feature, which centers around a vast, abnormally warm pool of ocean water along the equator west of South America.

One El Niño characteristic the country has already witnessed is positive for golf—that’s the relatively quiet Atlantic fall hurricane season. That enormous El Niño swath “acts like a tea kettle,” according to Global Weather Oscillations, Inc., sending “moist, steamy air rising into the atmosphere.” All that moist and warm air aloft produces a wind shear that inhibits the formation of powerful hurricanes—that’s why El Niño cycles, this one included, make things easier in the Caribbean and along the Eastern Seaboard. But garden-variety rainfall is looking to be above average in the Southeast. According to Anthony Barnston, a Columbia University researcher, our power-packed 2016 El Niño means “Florida is expected to have above-average winter rainfall, and some of the rain may come with storminess in terms of wind, but nothing dangerous.”

The Weather Network, a respected climate-analysis group based in Canada, warns people in

the eastern United States not to pay too much heed to charts that show near-normal temperatures or precipitation for January through March, based on how that reassuring projection is derived. The winter east of the Mississippi will begin in mellow fashion, TWN points out, then likely turn mean.

"Later in the season, especially during February, we expect several weeks of classic winter weather over the eastern third of the country," states Dr. Doug Gillham, a staff meteorologist. "This period will likely feature several winter storms from the south central Plains to the Northeast, with a higher-than-typical threat for significant snow and mixed precipitation deep into the South." Not good for business, either of those scenarios.

Over at Weather Underground, a web-based meteorology company with a big following, drought in California is helped more than hurt by this El Niño. "Some improvement is likely in central and southern California by the end of January, but not drought removal," says a Weather Underground report. "More relief is possible for California during February and March. Drought removal is likely across large parts of the Southwest, while improvement or removal is also likely in the southern Plains. However, drought is likely to persist in the Pacific Northwest and northern Rockies."

The apparent reason for stronger El Niño patterns is steadily rising global temperatures, many sources suggest. The World Meteorological Organization, along with NOAA and other agencies, was unofficially calling 2015 the new hottest year on record, and 2011 to 2015 the hottest five-year period on record. Extremes breed extremes, most weather experts are quick to point out, suggesting that beyond this cyclical appearance of El Niño more climate-based disruption awaits, for golf and for many other economic sectors. —David Gould

WHAT'S HOT In My Shop



LINDA MORTAROTTI • RETAIL MANAGER/BUYER

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"It felt like we were part of the body and soul of what we were developing."

—TERRY SMITH

By Steve Donahue

PAVING A DIFFERENT ROAD

It hasn't been easy, but Terry Smith is using the fruits of labor from a separate business to solidify the foundation of Rock Hollow

When Otto McMahon opened his new road construction business seven decades ago, he couldn't have imagined it would pave his family's way to golf course ownership. But that's what happened when Rock Hollow Golf Club came online as an 18-hole course in 1995. The opening represented the culmination of five generations of blood, sweat and tears.

Located in Peru, Indiana, Rock Hollow is a daily-fee facility that was the brain-child of Terry and Rebecca Smith, who, in 1992, opted to build a golf course instead of a winery because the National Golf Foundation predicted a golf course per day needed to open in the United States to accommodate projected demand.

"Well, that didn't happen," says Terry, the owner. "We were shooting for 20,000 rounds a year, but we've been at about 12,000 to 13,000. We haven't had a profit-

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Business is tough,
but Terry Smith
remains all smiles.



able year yet, but we're doing a little better in 2015. We'll probably be in the 14,000 to 15,000 range."

McMahon, Rebecca's grandfather, started his construction company in nearby Rochester in 1923. Rebecca's father took over the business, eventually hiring Terry. The construction company expanded and, in 1972, it acquired the company that owned the land and stone quarry upon which Rock Hollow now sits.

Five years later, Terry branched off. From 1995 to 2012, his company, Rock Industries, had three divisions: Rock Hollow Golf Club; the stone business, which he sold in 2012; and a nearby real estate subdivision. Terry only built three houses on Rock Hollow—his, and those of sons Chris (a veteran on the PGA and Web.com tours) and Todd (Rock Hollow's head professional). Another son, Terry, lives four blocks from the course.

Pete Dye associate Tim Liddy designed the course, but the Smiths—whose company had the ability and most of the heavy equipment needed—built it.

"We were fortunate," Terry says. "I had to buy several pieces of equipment, but we definitely saved money. More importantly, it felt like we were part of the body and soul of what we were developing. We weren't just sitting back and paying someone else to do it."

Eight family members who represent three generations work at the club. In fact, an early incident personifies Rock Hollow's family pride. Before the course opened, after the fairways were grassed, so many pebbles remained on the seventh fairway that 20 family members crawled on their hands and knees, the width of the fairway and length of the 429-yard hole. Each carried a bucket, which they emptied into wheelbarrows along the way.

"Fortunately, it was the only hole we had to do," chuckles Terry. "It wasn't fun at the time, but it developed a lot of memories for us."

These days, Rock Hollow hosts approximately 25 outings during summer, as well as numerous tournaments

continued from page 23

and a June junior clinic for up to 120 children, ages 3 to 12. "Those really help the bottom line," Terry notes.

Meanwhile, Rock Hollow's no-frills pavilion, which is located adjacent to the golf shop, seats approximately 100 people. "We haven't promoted the facility as a banquet hall," Terry says. "Golfers going in and out of the golf shop obviously couldn't sit down and have a hot dog during a wedding reception, so we really haven't made it a big part of the business."

"It's kind of promising what we'll be able to do in the next few years."

Terry initially paid an architect to design a clubhouse, but shelved the idea when he determined investing big money in facilities would compromise the course design and maintenance, which he felt were more important. "Our facility isn't as glamorous as a private country club's," says Terry, "but not building a clubhouse has helped us do as well as we have."

Each December, the family discusses Rock Hollow's viability and whether or not the business should continue. Every spring, however, the course opens, thanks to the success of the family's former stone business.

"We didn't borrow any money to build the golf course," Terry says. "We've never borrowed money to buy any equipment or anything else, so we have no debt, and the rock business was subsidizing the course. After we sold [the rock business], we invested some of that money in the event of a cash shortfall, and we've had to use some of that."

On a brighter note, regional course closings are steering new golfers to Rock Hollow, which encourages Terry. "Unlike many of these courses that are closing, we've been able to maintain our course to a high standard, and that has brought us more play," Terry says. "It's kind of promising what we'll be able to do in the next few years. I'm hoping we can turn [the business] the other way and be able to make it profitable." **RB**

Steve Donahue is a Connecticut-based freelance writer.

LIGHTS OUT

CENTENNIAL GOLF CLUB WAS "LIGHTS OUT" LAST AUGUST.

The Carmel, New York, daily fee's inaugural "Friday Night Lights" event was a rousing success. Staff created a temporary par-3 course on Centennial's large practice range under stadium lights and, for \$25 per person (children age 16 and under were free), participants played golf to music, and enjoyed appetizers, wine, domestic beer and non-alcoholic beverages. Nearly 90 people, including 30 children, attended.



Centennial's setting certainly proved fitting. The facility's range features four poles with permanent stadium lighting, negating the need to rent portable lighting. Painter's lights and solar-powered walkway lights were purchased to illuminate darker areas. The lights were on for about four hours.

"We're located in the woods," says general manager Kevin DeDonato. "If we didn't have stadium lights, there's no way we could have had this event."

According to DeDonato, the cost to create the par-3 course's four holes was "very minimal." The longest hole was roughly 65 yards. Two holes played left to right and two holes right to left, each slightly angled. Moreover, the range's six bentgrass greens were mowed, top-dressed and rolled, and bunkers raked, for several weeks prior. "We made sure nobody was in the firing zone," laughs DeDonato, adding there was also a SNAG Golf setup for kids with a flop-shot wall.

Away from the course, beverages, meatballs, chips and salsa, sausage and peppers, and wings were served on the club's patio. Participants even provided incremental revenue by purchasing additional alcoholic beverages and food from the restaurant, and balls and hats from the golf shop.

"The event was probably a break-even for us," admits DeDonato, "but the intention wasn't to drive revenue or make money. We wanted to get the community involved in golf, and [get them] to visit our facility and grow the game." —S.D.

IN THE FLING of Things



A fling has apparently prompted a love affair at Brookview Golf Course. Locals appear smitten with FlingGolf, which the Golden Valley, Minnesota, municipal facility introduced in April 2015.

"We're always thinking how we can attract non-golfers with something different,"

says assistant manager Kim Straw, whose facility offers an 18-hole regulation and a nine-hole par-3 course as well as lawn bowling, and is introducing winter disc golf.

FlingGolf, similar in its rules to regular golf, requires no course changes or extra maintenance. It's played on Brookview's par-3 course, using sticks that feature a curved channel from which golf balls are flung after a running start, much like lacrosse. A notch on the side of the stick's head is used to push putts toward the hole.

"The cool part of it is that it works nicely for somebody who isn't a golfer who wants to play with a golfer," says Straw, who points out that foursomes with two golfers and two Fling golfers are common.

Brookview's only expenditure was purchasing a package of 12 FlingGolf sticks. Staff had no idea how many FlingGolf rounds to expect in the first year, but 75 were played through mid-September, prompting Straw to project "well over 100" rounds by season's end.

Walking Fling golfers pay the \$12.50 nine-hole, par-3 green fee and \$2 to rent the stick. Brookview offers senior and junior rates and, on Fridays, a \$9 "Flinging Fridays" special: \$7 green fee and \$2 stick rental. Carts, which some prefer, cost \$15 per rider.

According to Straw, Fling golfers are also purchasing golf balls, eating lunch, and drinking soda and beer. What's more, he's hosted multiple FlingGolf outings, including a corporate group of 12, none of whom had ever played golf. "In fact," says Straw, "many people who have tried FlingGolf here aren't golfers."

Brookview—which held several free demo days as a how-to-play primer—will again offer the alternative in 2016, and Straw is considering ordering additional sticks, as more groups have already expressed interest. "If FlingGolf starts taking off next year and people are more comfortable playing it, we'll start seeing more repeat customers," Straw adds. —S.D.



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"We're down to watering our greens and tees regularly, and have cut out areas around the outskirts, so we're managing so far."

— JASON WALTER

By Kyle
Darbyson

WATER WORKS

California's historic drought has driven one Oakland-area private club to extreme measures to achieve water security

As California's historic drought stretches into a fifth year, it's indeed become challenging times for the state's 900-plus golf courses. So it should come as no surprise, really, that some course operators are exploring innovative and responsible options.

Take, for instance, the historic Diablo Country Club. The private club, located 30 miles east of Oakland, saw its available water supplies slashed by 40 percent in 2015, the first mandatory cutbacks the facility has experienced.

"We're down to watering our greens and tees regularly, and have cut out areas around the outskirts, so we're managing so far," says director of golf Jason Walter. That said, he and other pragmatic industry professionals know another bad snow

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A full-page photograph of a man, Jason Walter, standing outdoors next to a large, textured tree trunk. He is wearing a light blue sweater over a dark collared shirt and dark trousers. He is smiling and has his left hand on his hip. The background shows rolling green hills under a clear sky. The ground is covered with dry leaves.

Like most California operators, Jason Walter (r) and Frank Cordeiro are dealing with major concerns related to water.

season could lead to further cutbacks. "If that happens, we don't know where that 40 percent goes to. It could go to 100 percent."

A significant water reduction was only a worst-case contingency a few years back when the club began investigating alternative sources of irrigation. But now that it's a distinct possibility, management and leadership has committed to building its own water treatment facility. "It's our insurance policy against the future," Walter notes.

The idea first surfaced around 2010. Diablo hired Brezack & Associates Planning, an area water resource consultant, to audit the club. Results from the audit pinpointed potential energy savings, sustainable practices and the opportunity for viable, responsible and predictable alternative sources of water for irrigation.

Soon after, Jim Brezack, principal consultant, began reviewing alternatives that would allow Diablo officials to secure and maintain a sustainable water source. Early on, the primary concern was the rising cost of potable water, which the club used to irrigate. But as the project evolved, the concern shifted to simply accessing irrigation water. "Recycled water was an obvious alternative," Brezack says.

Unfortunately for Diablo, it sits miles from any recycled water service area, and the local utilities showed no interest in footing the bill to link the club to this reclaimed water. "We've had to adapt a 'go it alone' philosophy right from the start," Walter says.

So-called satellite water treatment facilities are typically built by municipalities or large-scale commercial developments. "I won't say it doesn't happen, but recycled water treatment plants built by places like Diablo are certainly rare," admits Brezack, who is guiding the course through the convoluted maze of regulatory, financial and technical challenges standing in the way of the plant's construction.

If approved, the plant will occupy between 6,000 and 8,000 square feet. Diablo is relatively small (around 120 acres) and surrounded by multi-million dollar homes, so noise, odor and aesthetics must be considered and mitigated as part of the design and planning.

Those criteria limit the club to a handful of options, with one type the preferred choice for the club's needs—a

continued from page 27

membrane bioreactor, which is a combination of membranes that act as filters and naturally occurring microorganisms that break down the waste. "In terms of controlling acoustics, vibrations and odor," says Brezack, "there's really nothing better."

To link into local wastewater systems, the project would also require about one mile of pipe to be laid. Both federal and state environmental laws come into play, but Brezack doesn't foresee significant roadblocks. "There's a real appetite for these kinds of progressive solutions, and governments are eager to help facilitate them."

Further muddying the regulatory landscape is the involvement of multiple local utility providers. Those providers—East Bay Municipal Utilities District and Central Contra Costa Sanitary District—are working as partners on all aspects of the plan.

Once the regulatory hurdles are cleared, funding is the next barrier. Estimates put

the project between \$8 million to \$10 million. That's a steep price tag, but Brezack is working to round up help from state and federal governments. Both offer low-interest loans to finance similar projects, but the terms of eligibility aren't written for golf courses; they're written for municipalities and non-profit entities.

If available to the club, success could mean loans at less than 2 percent over 30 years. Payments would arise out of assessments, although experts suggest the project could pay for itself in as little as 15 years when water cost savings are considered. According to Frank Cordeiro, Diablo's general manager and chief operating officer, "the capital costs and the price-per-gallon are more expensive than our current source. However, this decision is based on much more than cost. Diablo is pursuing this because it is the right thing to do."

Admittedly, there are still a lot of "ifs"

involved in the project, but Diablo is committed to seeing this through. "They want to be irrigating with recycled water by the 2017 season," Brezack says. "We want to be ready to go once we get the green light from the agencies and the membership."

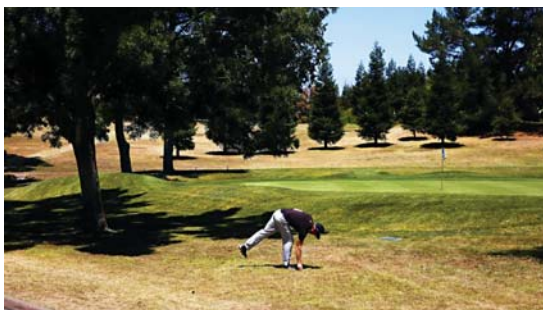
When it does come online, the satellite treatment plant will supply 70 percent to 100 percent of the water the club uses each day. That would secure the future of the century-old club in an era of water insecurity.

Brezack says this type of project is bound to become more and more popular given the area's water insecurity. "There are still pitfalls to this project, but I think the situation we're in in California means the time has come for more and more golf courses to use recycled water."

For Diablo's 436 members, that time is hopefully soon. **FB**

Kyle Darbyson is a Vancouver-based freelance writer.

Making Ends Meet



While officials at Diablo Country Club near Oakland, California, hunt for more water to irrigate their turf, North Ranch Country Club in Thousand Oaks recently removed 37 of its 175 irrigable acres as part of its local water district's turf buy-back program.

It's the latest in a long line of conservation efforts by the upscale private club. Long-time superintendent J. Ryan Bentley says he's had to change the way he waters, what kinds of grasses he plants

and what types of fertilizers he uses. "The drought has made us rethink just about everything," he notes. Even with those efforts, annual water costs at North Ranch have increased from \$400,00 in 2005 to \$1.5 million today. Before enrolling in the Cal Water-Westlake District's turf replacement program, Bentley and other senior leaders at the club did a considerable amount of due diligence, talking to golf course and landscape architects, the water district and the board at North Ranch. Deciding which areas to remove was also a group decision. Bentley engaged with those same landscape, golf and irrigation architects. "Then the green committee, homeowner's association representatives and board of directors all weighed in."

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When shovels finally hit dirt, crews hauled away the unwanted turf to be turned into compost. Some was also kept on site to be used as fill. "The material has helped offset some expenses we normally accrue during the course of a season," Bentley explains. In accordance with the program's guidelines, Bentley replanted the areas with specific types of vegetation. "A mix of native and naturalized wildflowers, re-vegetation shrubs, large California sycamores and live oaks," he says.

Cal Water's program is just one of dozens of similar programs running across the state. For North Ranch, participation in the program netted \$2 per square foot of turf removed, in addition to water savings reaching into the millions of gallons. Good business that's good for the environment—a true win/win. —K.D.

CLASS IS IN

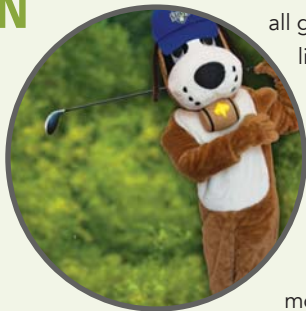
NORTHLAND COUNTRY CLUB IS A MAGNIFICENT, Donald Ross-designed gem just west of Lake Superior in Duluth, Minnesota. Its membership is thriving, the balance sheet solid. In fact, it was named one of the Top 100 classic golf courses in the country a few years back.

With so much going for it, why is management of Northland opening its gates to student-athletes from nearby College of St. Scholastica? According to head professional Kim Webster, the answer is quite simple: "It's the right thing to do."

The golf team at St. Scholastica is in its infancy. Administrators there tapped local Duluth golfing legend Eric Anderson to head up the golf program, and the 1996 Minnesota State Junior Public Links Champion fielded his first team in fall 2015.

As soon as Webster heard her friend was fronting the fledgling program at St. Scholastica, she approached the board about offering the facility as a home course. "Obviously, it's a win for Scholastica, and a win for the club as we continue to be a positive member of the Duluth community."

Welcoming the Saints is just the latest example of that civic mindedness—less a business model and more a manifestation of the friendly nature Minnesotans are famous for. The club also opens its practice facility to two local high schools and hosts a variety of local amateur events. "It



all goes under the guidelines of trying to support the community," Webster notes.

In his first year as head coach, Anderson attracted 15 students to the team, mostly athletes from other school programs like hockey, basketball and tennis. The coach says the value of practicing at a facility like Northland can't be overstated. "It's a long golf course with diabolical greens," he says. "Our kids will step onto new golf courses with the confidence that comes from playing a difficult course every single day."

While her move was certainly altruistic, Webster does see a business opportunity in welcoming the students. Many of the soon-to-be graduates will settle in the area, and the goodwill earned by Northland should result in increased memberships. "There's nothing set in stone yet, but we are looking at some ways to encourage them to look at membership when they graduate."

So far, Anderson is relishing the opportunity to coach student-athletes. "It is a lot of fun to watch them experience all the joys of college golf for the first time," he says.

The club's 380 members also seem to enjoy the experience. Anderson notes the club has welcomed the young, skilled athletes with open arms. "I think they feel good about being able to share their facility with young players who are making an effort to improve themselves as golfers and people." —K.D.

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Scott Corwin is reaping the rewards of a propane test pilot program at Renaissance Vinoy Golf Club.

"If there's any way we can show that golf courses are doing the right thing, then we need to do that."

—SCOTT CORWIN

By Rob
Carey

WHEN LESS EQUALS MORE

A one-year trial using propane-powered grounds equipment has helped Renaissance Vinoy GC realize significant environmental benefits and cost reductions

Rolled out in late 2013, Marriott Golf's Environmental Sustainability Practices Award (ESPA) scorecard encourages each of the division's 25 North American facilities to adopt as many as 100 practices that conserve resources and protect nature. Scorecard components include the Audubon Sanctuary certification, a documented water-conservation plan and irrigation audit, reduced fertilizer and pesticide applications, and even subtle elements such as installation of skylights, light-switch timers and low-flow showerheads in the maintenance buildings. Less than a year after the scorecard's launch, Marriott Golf got an opportunity to participate in a test that, if successful, could significantly bolster its properties' environmental achievements in an area that's central to the scorecard: reduced carbon emissions.

R&R Products, historically a maker of replacement parts for the major manufacturers of golf-grounds

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equipment, received a grant through the Propane Education and Research Council (PERC) to supply eight golf properties with propane-powered machinery for 12 months in return for documentation on each unit's carbon emissions, fuel usage, maintenance needs and overall cost to operate. So Jim Coker, R&R's director of propane applications and a veteran of the lawn and garden landscaping niche, approached David Robinson, senior director of golf grounds for Marriott Golf, to gauge his interest. Soon after, Vinoy Renaissance St. Petersburg Resort & Golf Club in St. Petersburg, Florida, was chosen as one of three Marriott facilities to incorporate a few propane-powered fairway mowers, greens mowers and bunker rakes into its fleets for 2015.

The timing was ideal. Scott Corwin, Vinoy's superintendent for the past 11 years, had just finished making changes based on his facility's irrigation audit around the same time. "We swapped out several nozzles, altered some full circles to half circles particularly around our lakes, and moved some heads that already had adequate coverage," he says. "All of this made our system a good deal more efficient."

Moving beyond the irrigation system, the next item on Corwin's agenda was to analyze a carbon-footprint assessment of his course's operations. "The assessment involved things like how many linear feet of cart paths we have, how much fuel we were burning in customer carts and grounds equipment, and what our daily mowing routine was for playing areas and natural areas," he says. "This was where the R&R initiative came in because using propane would be another way for us to reduce mower emissions."

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The propane-powered machines that were added to Vinoy's existing course maintenance fleet included one fairway mower, one greens mower, one trim mower and one bunker rake. After less than two hours of initial training, Corwin says using the machines "became habit pretty quickly" for Vinoy's 15-person grounds staff. "When my operators got done washing their equipment, they didn't have to go to the diesel pumps and worry about spillage leaching into the ground," he notes. "They just switched out the propane tanks, and the supplier took away the empties the following week."

Throughout the year, Corwin's head technician documented how much time and fuel it took the diesel- and gas-powered machines to mow tee boxes, greens and fairways versus the propane-powered machines. He also tracked maintenance requirements for all machines. In each area, Corwin found it more economical to use propane. "But the most important thing to us was that it reduced our facility's carbon footprint and the emissions we put into the air," he adds.

Nevertheless, the cost savings gained from the four propane-powered machines were significant. According to Corwin, Vinoy spent at least \$10,000 less on fuel in 2015 than in 2014. What's more, management is now looking at retrofitting some of the facility's gas mowers to propane, which would cost about \$1,000 apiece.

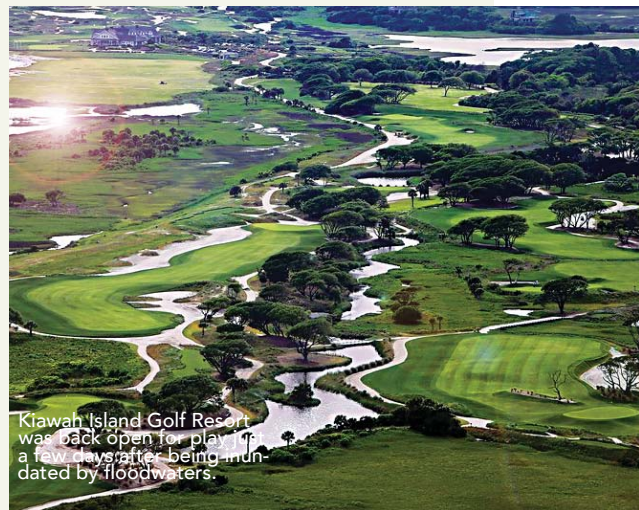
"Our goal is to try to get to using only propane grounds equipment and electric golf carts within five years," Corwin notes. "If there's any way we can show that golf courses are doing the right thing—what we do for the environment—then we need to do that."

Despite the promising numbers, Marriott Golf's Robinson isn't certain that propane will necessarily be the dominant fuel of the future for golf grounds equipment; however, he's confident it will be a sizable part of the mix. "Battery-powered equipment has been around quite a while, and we've used that over the years," he says. "There's fuel-cell technology out there, too. But the propane technology has been around a long time in other niches, so it's a matter of getting our own niche aware of its possibilities." **RB**

Rob Carey is a freelance writer and principal of Meetings & Hospitality Insight.

PROOF POSITIVE

When a coastal storm dumped more than 20 inches of rain across parts of the Southeast in early October, Kiawah Island Golf Resort's 90 holes of golf were inundated. "The 17th hole of The Ocean Course



was under several inches of water, and Oak Point had the Kiawah River come up and over top of it, leaving a lot of seaweed and debris," says Mike Vegis, the resort's public relations director. "But we have paspalum on our greens, so there was no damage at all."

The maintenance department managed to pump all standing water off the five courses within 36 hours, and debris removal and course prep was completed three days later. But with October being a strong time of year for Southeastern golf, the resort decided that it had to put out a convincing message—quickly—that the golf experience there was uncompromised. So the day the courses were ready, Roger Warren, president of Kiawah Island Golf Resort, faced a camera while standing behind the 18th green of the Turtle Point course and spoke for just over a minute. He described the storm, how the cleanup went, and how the courses were back to the condition that resort guests would expect. The credibility of his message was strengthened by what viewers could see behind him: The lake running the entire length of Turtle Point's finishing hole was at its normal level, and the fairway and green were clean and unblemished.

Warren's video was posted to the resort's Facebook page, and the resort's sales and golf staffs sent an email blast to their various client and media lists. The video was embedded in the email, and the link to the video on YouTube was provided as well for sharing. The video received more than 2,600 views in the first week alone. And though the resort lost six full days of play, total rounds for the month were off just 18 percent from the previous October. —R.C.

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DIFFERENT POINT OF VIEW

Rather than trying to wow
customers with amenities,
Affinity Management seeks
to enrich their lives with service

By Steve Eubanks



Damon DeVito has a simple operational philosophy at Affinity Management: give members what they want.

The analogy couldn't be better. When asked how his company is different from other operators, Damon DeVito, managing partner of Affinity Management in Charlottesville, Virginia, answers in an unusual but perfect way.

"You know what hotels think I want?" says DeVito, whose company operates seven clubs in the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic and consults for seven others. "They think I want a fitness center, a business center, a high thread count in my sheets and a fireplace in the lobby. You know what I really want? I want a refrigerator in my room, a list of TV channels on the back of the remote, and I want charging stations and power outlets everywhere because I'm sick of crawling around on my knees looking for an outlet."

3Key TAKEAWAYS

The cornerstone of Affinity Management's business is listening to customers and determining how to enrich their lives.

Managing partner Damon DeVito sees it as the company's mission to create an intangible sense of belonging at Affinity-managed clubs.

Like most innovative operators, DeVito believes course owners should be willing to adapt with the times rather than being trapped by tradition.



Affinity Management oversees operations at a host of private clubs throughout the Mid-Atlantic and Northeast.



DeVito pauses to let his answer sink in, then continues, "That's what we're missing in the private club industry: the intangible, often simple, unmet need that can be fulfilled, not by building a new swimming pool or spending a fortune on new fitness equipment, but by simply listening to the membership and figuring out what the club can do to enrich their lives."

It seems so simple, yet it's a concept that's often lost in all the noise. According to DeVito, however, it's what Affinity, which has been in business for 17 years and worked with clubs in 26 states, Mexico, Canada and Europe, strives to do in all of its operations.

"About 25 percent of the industry is private clubs," he says. "And while any management company will take on a private club, very few companies focus solely on private. We've done it for 17 years with a concentration on high-touch. By that I mean, fewer customers that you get to know better."

Unlike some management companies, Affinity is decidedly low-key. You won't find a

list of clubs on its website, and management isn't keen on giving up a client list. It's not because they aren't proud of their work; rather, they simply don't want members feeling exploited by the team that provides them with intimate service.

"We're very brand conscious when it comes to the club's image," DeVito explains. "As a result of that, we're a bit of a boutique. We believe in being there, in being seen, in being engaged. That doesn't mean we drive the management team batty, but they're also not going to go a month without seeing us. They're going to hear from us, in a supportive way, even more often."

Boutique though it may be, the company offers some radical ideas and

"IT'S EASY TO BUILD A POOL
OR NEW FITNESS CENTER,
ASSUMING YOU HAVE THE
MONEY, BUT IT'S TOUGHER TO
UNDERSTAND WHAT NEEDS
SHOULD BE FILLED."

"As the general population grows older, people are worried about walking alone for exercise," he notes. "They're afraid they might fall or whatever. The club could easily solve that problem for members on the cart paths. You could put together walking groups with very little effort and a lot of reward."

On the other end of the spectrum are the younger generations and their apparent need to stay constantly connected. "Rather than have a policy against having cell phones on the golf course or in the club, we should embrace it," DeVito says. "We should have charging stations throughout the club and even in the golf carts, or at least provide those portable chargers."



a different approach to implementation. Ask DeVito a club question and he'll often answer with a story about a totally unrelated industry.

"I used to do consulting [for Boston-based Corporate Decisions, Inc., which is now Mercer and Associates], and one of the industries that always got brought up in seminars was the razor business," he says. "You can't get more pure commodity than razors. But now you have a company like Dollar Shave Club that has turned that industry on its head by making razors not a com-

modity but a subscription service.

"Not only have they eliminated the hassle of going to the grocery store and buying a razor, they've done it with personality," DeVito adds. "They have a monthly Dollar Shave Club newsletter—quick and slightly irreverent with a fun testimonial and a good story or two—but it's something that makes you smile. When was the last time you smiled buying a razor?"

DeVito preaches the gospel of innovation and rethinking what a club should be to anyone who will listen.

Innovation is always a balancing act. DeVito understands that some members will head to the fainting couch if any tradition is upset. "But you have to listen and try new things," he adds. "Kids movie night while mom and dad have a dinner date at the club is something the local restaurant can't do, and something the club might not have done in the past. But as the makeup of the membership changes, it's something that makes perfect sense."

The key to delivering individualized service is listening, not just to what

Standing Out

THE WAY DAMON DEVITO VIEWS THINGS IN THE WORLD of clubs and golf, “the future of entertainment is experiences.” It isn’t a completely novel idea, but it’s one that resonates now more than ever.

“Thirty or 40 years ago, amenities ruled because you didn’t have a swim club with a water slide and a pavilion and a grill as part of your neighborhood association” says DeVito, managing partner of Virginia-based Affinity Management. “The only place you could get that was at the country club. You also didn’t have a well-maintained golf course that you could drive up and play.”

In the past, daily-fee golf meant low-quality golf. That’s no longer the case. “You didn’t have quality dining away from the urban centers,” DeVito adds. “The country club was the place where you knew you could get fine dining near home. Now, you have variety and quality in almost every neighborhood.”

Because of these evolutions, DeVito believes that clubs have to redefine what it means to be a member. And that redefinition must be experiential.

“The strategy is simple,” he says. “Clubs have to provide members with experiences that they cannot receive anywhere else. But implementing that strategy is very difficult and requires a lot of creativity.” —S.E.



“WE BELIEVE IN BEING THERE, IN BEING SEEN, IN BEING ENGAGED.”

members say about the club, but what they say about their lives. To that end, DeVito sees it as the club’s mission to create an intangible sense of belonging.

“It’s easy to build a pool or new fitness center, assuming you have the money, but it’s tougher to understand what needs should be filled,” he says. “So, if we go into a club and the staff doesn’t know what their members do for a living, what charities they support or what boards they sit on, then we know we have a lot of work to do. It’s not just what brand of golf clubs members play and what beer they drink.”

So, how does one gain that ever-so-important customer knowledge? Simple: ask for it.

“We know that if we sit down and have a cup of coffee with members, they’ll tell us about their lives,” DeVito says. “They’ll tell us almost everything. That’s when we can identify needs. That’s when we can begin to make a difference in how

they experience their club.”

DeVito uses yet another analogy to underscore this concept, although this one is specific to the club business. “Does your club allow jeans in the dining room?” he asks. “If not, is your club nicer or not as nice as Congressional Country Club? Because Congressional Country Club, in the heart of our nation’s capital, the only place left in America where people still wear suits to work, has a 148,000-square-foot clubhouse and they allow jeans in every room but one—and nobody goes into the one.

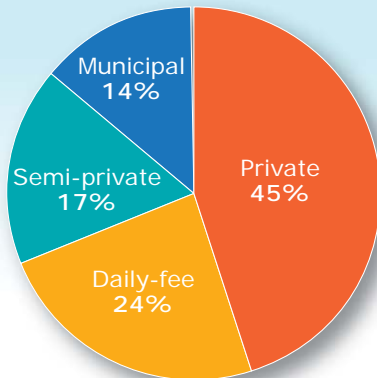
“So, ask yourself,” adds DeVito, “if Congressional, the epitome of an upper-echelon country club, allows jeans and your club, which doesn’t allow jeans, is hurting for members, shouldn’t you consider scrapping the old traditions and giving some new things a try?” **FB**

Steve Eubanks is an Atlanta-based freelance writer and New York Times bestselling author.

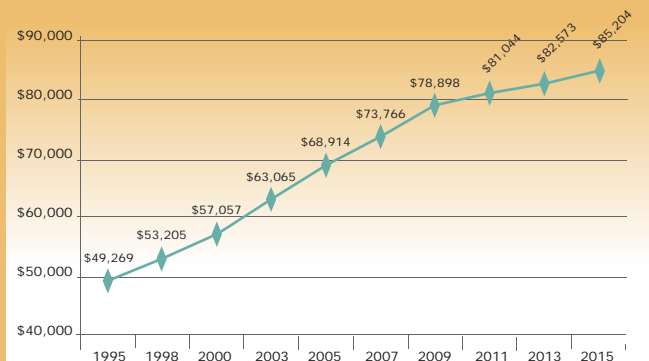
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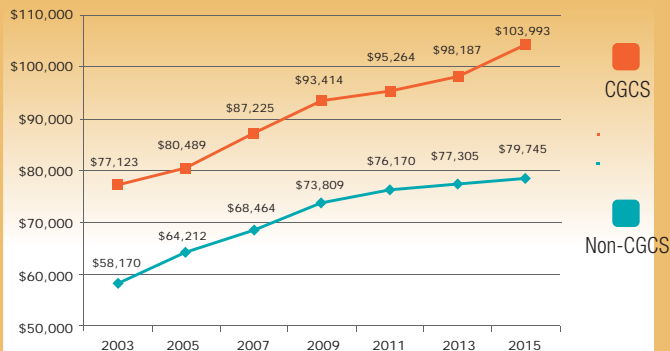
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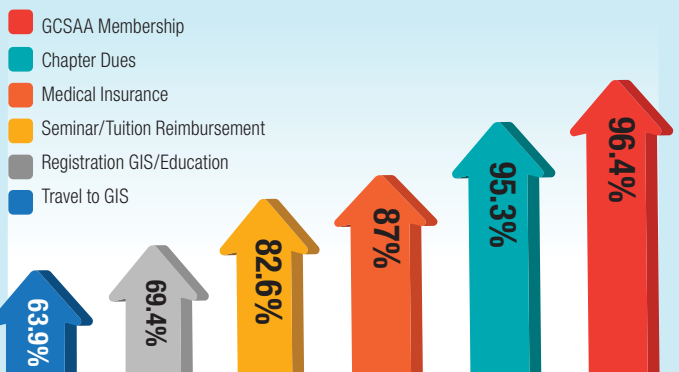
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A Brave New World

By David
Gould

Golf retailing in the modern era requires imagination and innovation to stimulate sales and engage customers

Of all the stores where you can buy golf merchandise, some are in commercial zones surrounded by parking lots, while others border 100-plus acres of turfgrass, bunkers, trees and ponds. That's a big landscape of high-maintenance assets the so-called green-grass store owner must look after. Beyond this distraction, the owner also can't match off-course stores

for buying power or foot traffic. Does it all add up to an excuse for shop merchandising to be an afterthought?

Joseph Pine and James Gilmore would say no. These two economists argue that low prices, while important, don't get people jazzed the way they did when discount chains first became commonplace. In a famous *Harvard Business Review* article titled "Welcome to the Experi-



"This is a one-shot deal, so don't expect it to be here next time you're around."

ence Economy," Pine and Gilmore grant that people still care about bargain pricing, but they're now more likely to be "buyers of experiences." The article states that "commodities, goods and services are external to the buyer, while experiences are inherently personal." For that reason, experiences feel unique and are more highly valued.

In a recent article for *Inc.* magazine, Peter Gasca, owner of a specialty toy manufacturer called Wild Creations, pressed this point further. Gasca was writing in response to a toy shop owner who moaned about lost sales due to vendors offering volume discounts to big chains.

"We're a small company ourselves," wrote Gasca, "and our strategy is to differentiate ourselves on something other than price. We compete on experience." He then described a Charleston, South Carolina, specialty retail store that, in his view, does the same. It's called Wonder Works, and its founder/owner, Christine Osborne, is a vibrant, spirited entrepreneur whose techniques and personal presence bring a difference-making energy to her selling space. "When I take my six-year-old son for a visit to Wonder Works," says Gasca, "we don't expect to get deals from a clearance rack—we expect to have an experience."

In light of these comments, there's obvious logic to what Beth Carpenter, an award-winning on-course golf merchandiser, said recently about shop staffing. "We look for employees who are passionate," Carpenter, of Atlantis (Florida) Country Club, told a forum audience. "We can train for knowledge. We want someone who's excited about the job."

One additional comment from outside the golf industry bears scrutiny. Again, it's a message about the visceral feel of "retail therapy" versus the act of comparison-shopping with the price factor coldly examined. This is from Paco Underhill, author of "Why We Buy: The Science of Shopping." According to his influential book, "two-thirds of the shopping that goes on in malls is impulse buying." For good measure, Underhill extends the concept. "Actually," he writes, "two-thirds of the entire economy is impulse buying."

Chad Maveus, a longtime Pebble Beach assistant who took over the golf operation at prestigious Forest Dunes Golf Club in Roscommon, Michigan, in 2013, leverages that impulse factor in at least one section of his highly successful golf shop. It's a trick Maveus learned during his lengthy tenure as an assistant at Pebble Beach Golf Links in Northern California. Once the season is revved up and core merchandise sales are established, he'll set up a prominent display of eye-catching, higher-fashion apparel not often seen in golf shops, keeping quantities down and never reordering.

"We did that with the Dunning apparel line and we've done it with some other niche brands," Maveus says. "It's not a pressure sell, but there's urgency to it because in a few weeks that little collection will be gone. Therefore, we can say to people, 'This is a one-shot deal, so don't expect it to be here next time you're around.'" Instead of reordering and taking away the urgency factor,

the Forest Dunes team will move on to another novelty purchase—again, some attention-getting goods from a sophisticated, lesser-known brand in small quantities that sell out and aren't seen again.

"Forest Dunes is a great golf course in the middle of nowhere," explains Maveus, who grew up in the region. "We're a destination, with half our play from out of state, so the Forest Dunes logo on high-end apparel really sells." For that reason, staples like solid and striped knit shirts from the popular brands move through quickly, at full margin. "I understand that a non-destination course, even a very nice one, gets a lot less fire-power from their logo," says Maveus, "which means they would have to set their sights considerably lower."

That doesn't mean a non-destination facility operator can't wring as much value from his or her course's brand and logo as possible. A key step toward that goal is having some originality and style to the logo itself. *GOLF Magazine* recently placed this subject front and center with an in-depth Internet article about, essentially, bad logos, although a collection of clean, sharp and memorable designs were also shown.

But if your logo needs help, help is available. A quick web search using keywords about "golf course logo design contests" will reveal a quiet trend happening online: Professional graphic designers from around the world are doing logo designs for no guaranteed fee, just a chance to brag at some prize money. The course owner who signs up and pays a couple hundred dollars will end up with dozens, if not hundreds, of new, fresh logos to choose from. The Falls Golf Club in Vancouver, B.C., recently went this route, as did Friendly Meadows Golf Club in Hamersville, Ohio, and Springdale (Arkansas) Country Club.

Buying mistakes, overloading yourself, not knowing the customer, poor inventory tracking, shaky vendor relations—the list of golf retail blunders is well-known. The main reason on-course golf merchandising is showing so much creativity and good energy these days is that the blocking and tackling is vastly improved over where it was a generation ago. In the past 20-plus years—roughly coinciding with the lifespan of the Association of Golf Merchandisers—there has been an abundant supply of people with the skills, energy and enthusiasm for this part of the business. In part, that's a matter of having a male PGA golf professional become well-trained and legitimately enthusiastic about it.

"We make it into a team challenge and to some degree a competition," Maveus says. "I get buy-in from my assistants, who are all 20-something, in part because on some occasions I will have them sit with the sales rep while I watch the counter." Once his millennial staff pros have finished choosing the footwear and apparel styles they want in the inventory, Maveus will double back and tweak the order before approving it. Now, the energy in the club's nerve center, the golf shop, includes young golf professionals trying to out-service and outsell each other.

Meanwhile, there are vendors pouring energy and know-how into color groupings, size runs and the pieces-and-layers part of the job, anything they can do to make a shop's investment in their line work out. "We put a huge effort into those merchandising details," says Marshall Mancillas, veteran CEO of Carnoustie Sportswear. "When we really do it right, we like to think our customer could put the product out with their eyes closed and not screw up."

Perennially successful with a high-end, carefully tailored apparel prod-

Reading the Numbers

Numbers don't lie, which is why Tom Stine gets to spend all his time thinking about golf shop sales without the distraction of oak paneling and stylish displays. A co-founder and one of the market metrics experts at Golf Datatech, Stine has spent two decades tracking retail sales of all golf products—what's been sold, how much it's been sold for, and how much inventory remains in both the on-course and off-course retail channels. Asked about the state of hard-goods competition at retail, Stine says the appearance of hot new companies in golf is now a rarity.

"It just doesn't happen very often," he says. "You don't see startups come to market and do well the way you did years ago."

Pre-launch investment and a need to show staying power are the reasons for this trend. "The amount of R&D and marketing that's needed is daunting," Stine explains. "Even if you had that great new idea, you can't build the machinery of a full-fledged company to compete with established brands if there isn't that second great product waiting behind the first one, then the third, even the fourth. It's a high barrier to entry."

But still there are ripples of opportunity in a market with so much affluence and interest in new things. And they all show up on Golf Datatech's radar.

"One thing I notice lately is how distance-measuring devices continue to grow in popularity," Stine says. "Right now, there's more money spent on distance finders than on putters. Think about that. Golfers seem to be buying their third and fourth rangefinder, as the technology improves." —D.G.

uct, Mancillas has watched his beloved sport of golf trend in a direction that naturally increases the importance of beautiful clothing—that’s the fitness of the young tour pros. In general, he notes, young male pro athletes are quite fixated on sharp dressing. “Look at the three guys on an NBA team who aren’t in uniform due to injury,” Mancillas says. “Their end of the bench could represent \$10,000 worth of apparel.”

Clothing is personal expression, and the act of choosing it can carry quite a bit of meaning, if the environment is right. Caroline Basarab-Dennison, director of retail at Reynolds on Lake Oconee, is intent on writing a half-dozen different success stories at her resort golf community in central Georgia. When she talks about golf-shop retailing, the former Texas A&M golfer exhibits that classic back-and-forth pattern between lofty concepts and attention to fine detail. The gritty calibration of open-to-buy dollars and maintained



“We’re a destination, with half our play from out of state, so the Forest Dunes logo on high-end apparel really sells.”

margins is a daily concern—likewise, you have to bring some showmanship and a little drama to what you present.

“We have six different golf shops here at Reynolds, and each one needs to have its own personality because each one has a slightly different audience,” says Basarab-Dennison.

One might ask: Isn’t that tricky to execute? The first woman ever to win the PGA’s National Resort Merchandiser of the Year award believes that people who run golf shops are

always establishing a personality and giving off a certain vibe in that retail space, and if you don’t watch out, the environment you create will be low-energy and ho-hum. At that point you aren’t just hobbling your merchandise sales, you’re putting a damper on the entire golf operation.

“There are lots of daily-fee courses, even nice ones, where the \$75 golf shirt won’t move,” Basarab-Dennison says. “A good friend of mine who’s in that situation builds his softgoods selling around


closeouts, and has a lot of success. He finds product that’s closed out at 25 percent under original wholesale cost, and the vendor will even logo it. To his customer, it doesn’t seem like last season’s product, it hits their price point, and it works for them.”

That’s why it’s intriguing to look at the merchandise concept at Blue Sky Golf Club, the talked-about, “no-intimidation” daily-fee that opened this year as a relaunch in Jacksonville, Florida. There, you’ll find a strategy that seems

to depressurize the situation for golfers and managers alike.

“Blue Sky is unique,” says a prominent message on the website, “because we don’t have a traditional golf shop. That’s right—no golf shop at a golf course!” What the facility does instead is provide “a golf retail section in the restaurant” where items for use that day are offered, including golf balls, hats, gloves, socks and so forth. “We’ve got you covered,” the message says. “In one transaction, pay for your round, rent a bucket of balls, grab a smoothie, and catch up on a little SportsCenter on one of our 22 TVs, all in the restaurant!”

Obviously, this is not how to proceed if you’re planning to drive revenue and profits out of your golf shop. Instead, it’s interesting as a strategy for removing both the risk and the negativity from the retail facet of the business. Yes, we have basic items you might need, the golfer is told. No, we don’t have money and square footage and staff energy directed toward something you didn’t really come here for, thus you won’t hear “Can I help you?” the second you rest your eyes on a waterfall display of shirts. Good energy, at the nerve center of the operation.

Green-grass golf retailing has a strange backstory in which responsibility for this core function would fall to people whose interests lie elsewhere. The 20th-century golf pro would be all about swing technique, competition and camaraderie among members. The landowner or farmer who built himself a country golf course was interested in turf maintenance and local affairs. But retailing is something you can’t do well if you don’t enjoy the process and the challenge. Or again, if you feel it’s impossible to compete with big outlets that do retail only. For most facilities, there’s seemingly a strategy or concept that will make the retail facet a positive—on its own and for the operation as a whole. 

David Gould is a Massachusetts-based freelance writer and frequent contributor to Golf Business.

STOKING DEMAND

Retailing used to be about selling a piece of merchandise inside a store during business hours, with payment in cash. Today, in the ultra-competitive health-and-beauty chains, a retailer like Walgreens is intertwining straightforward product sales with rewards points, mobile behavioral tracking and social media promotions. “Balance Rewards for Healthy Choices,” the new Walgreens program, pays out points to customers who use handheld devices to log their walking, their bike riding, any periodic blood pressure readings, use of nicotine-replacement products, achievement of weight-loss goals and other pro-wellness activities.

If a chain drugstore can get that involved with people’s daily lives, can a golf facility operator use his or her retail platform to reward the golfer who plays a nine- or 18-hole round, attends a chipping clinic, tests clubs at a demo day, takes a yoga-for-golf class, or joins a league? Obviously, membership at a club is its own form of reward program, but it operates in reverse fashion to what non-golf retailers do: It captures the golfer’s dollars then invites him or her to play catch-up, as in playing enough golf that per-round costs turn out to be low.

Shifting from that idea to what Walgreens is doing changes the mindset. It sends a message that the entire lifestyle of golf—from clubs and clothes to the various physical activities of practice and play—are all part of the life you want to

be living. And it would serve as a double-boost to merchandise as well as food-and-beverage sales because spending more time on property and improving your fitness and your golf skills both have been shown to markedly increase spending in all categories, including golf shop purchases.

In fact, a study of regular lesson-taking and clinic attendance done by The Club at Carlton Woods outside Houston, Texas, generated some eye-catching results. It found that the average expenditure by these 70 golfers was a stunning 81 percent higher than the average expenditure by the other 480 members. When the outlays were calculated and aggregated as a raw number, the 70 who signed up for coaching were shown to have outspent their 480 brethren (on food, beverage and golf-related items) by a six-figure amount.

As one chain-retail expert noted, “Programs of the future will reward shoppers for their actions and engagement, rather than just purchases.” That’s a hearts-and-minds form of marketing, almost like having a personal trainer help you get in shape. Points, redeemable for all the clothes, shoes, golf balls, range tokens and other gear they’ll be needing also act as a little voice, telling the golfer they’re on the right track, pursuing what’s good for them. —K.D.



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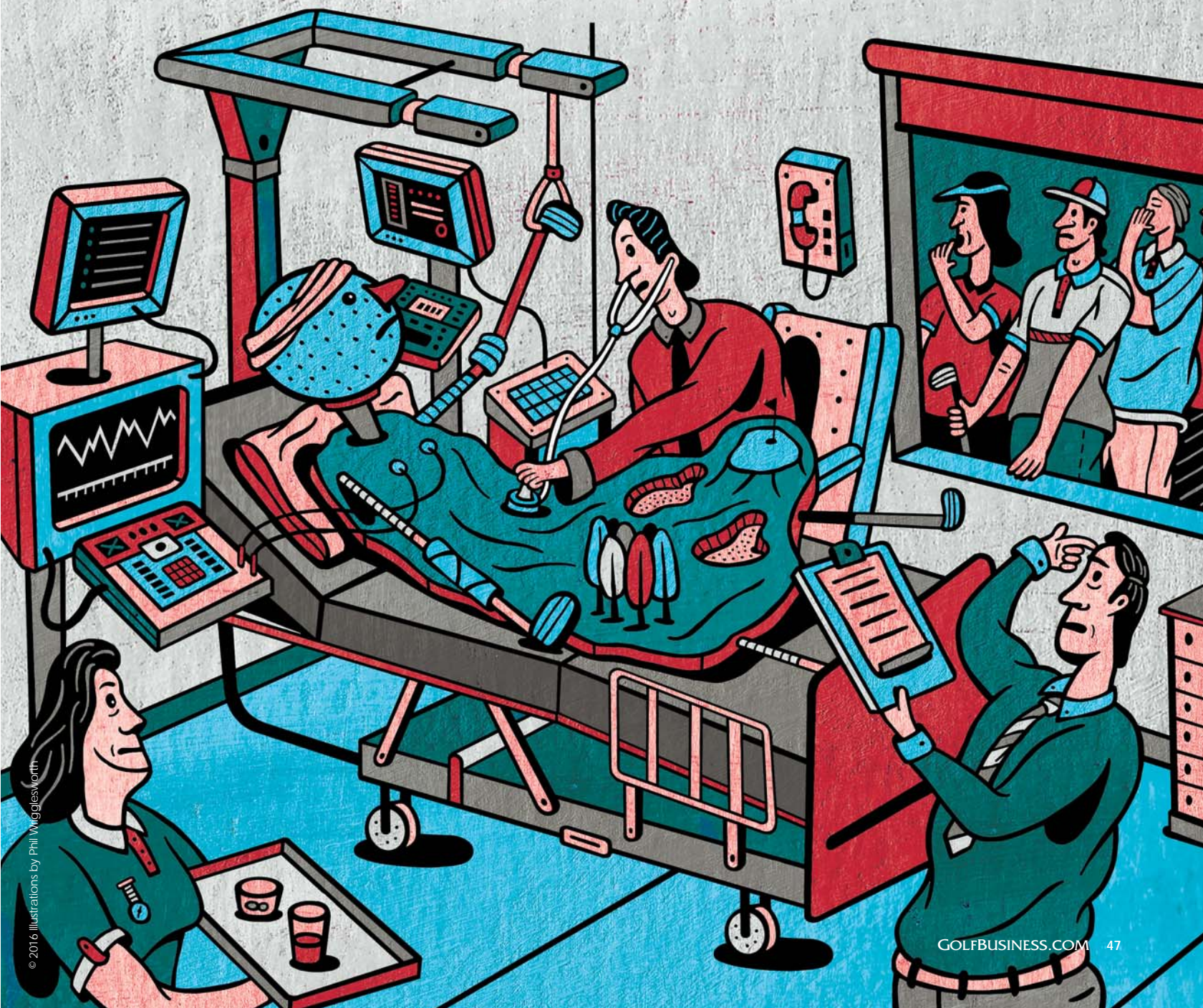
VITAL + SIGNS

As the industry prepares for a new season, experts measure and debate the health of the game

For close to a decade now, pundits of all stripes have prodded and probed the golf industry trying to diagnose its ailments and devise cures. Often, they have different

interpretations of the numbers on the chart at the end of the bed. None dispute that the game is ill. A clear point of contention, though, is whether it's getting better or not.

Last spring, *The Washington Post* carried the headline, "Why America Fell Out of Love With Golf." A few months later, *Men's Journal* went so far as to proclaim the "death of





golf?” But if Mark Twain owes the game something for his “good walk spoiled” line, there are plenty of observers ready to borrow from another of his quips and declare that death “greatly exaggerated.”

One of them is the ever-energetic and often-optimistic Henry DeLozier, now a principal with Global Golf Advisors. A past president of the National Golf Course Owners Association, DeLozier makes no apologies for his “glass-half-full” take on the industry’s lab results.

“I believe golf is going to have a period of prosperity,” he proclaims. “All the indicators—educational attainment, employment rates, consumer confidence—they are all indicative of a good period for golf.”

Pellucid’s Jim Koppenhaver reads the same vital signs, but doesn’t see golf bounding out of the hospital anytime soon. He’s far less sanguine about industry prospects for 2016, not because he disputes those “indicators” but because, increasingly, he questions their relevance to golf. Widespread expecta-

There’s been mass navel-gazing and handwringing for some time now, spawning initiatives such as Play Golf America, Get Golf Ready and Drive, Chip and Putt. But part of the problem with cures at an industry level is that every facility remains an independent patient. Those initiatives are akin to long-range diet and exercise plans when the ailments from facility to facility may be as immediate and as polar as, say, the flu and diabetes.

Even DeLozier agrees that broad-stroke remedies carry limited benefit unless they’re administered locally. “One of my favorite parts of playing the game is that sooner or later you have to post a score,” he says. “We can complain about bad bounces and lip-outs and so on, but sooner or later we have to post a score.”

Lest the metaphor is too oblique, DeLozier adds: “It’s time for a lot of parties in and around golf to kick in. We’ve seen a lot of great work from the PGA with grow-the-game initiatives, now it’s time for PGA pros to deliver.

tions of the industry warming in sync with the economic climate have fallen flat, he points out.

“Those numbers should have signaled a return to health for golf by now,” Koppenhaver says. “But we’ve become slightly untethered from the economic future of America. I don’t see it rebounding to any significant level. I just don’t see any catalyst ahead that’s likely to bring that about.”

There have been the ideas and visionary work of Golf 20/20, now it’s time to deliver. For those of us who enthusiastically make a living from the game, it’s time for all of us to deliver.”

Hard work and accountability never hurt anyone, regardless of their field. But Koppenhaver wonders if toil and diligence is enough. “The bigger issue is that we’re just not connecting with younger people,” he says. “The millennials don’t ‘get’ golf. Our product runs counter to what they want to do. It’s an ADD (attention deficit disorder) generation, constantly networked and connected. They don’t care about aspirational sports like golf.”

Still, DeLozier doesn’t buy it, at least not across the board. He argues that younger people are at the core of sustained improvement at private clubs across the country. DeLozier says more clubs are declaring financial security and cites National Golf Foundation data showing the number of clubs at risk is declining in similar proportion.

“Golf and country clubs are prospering by introducing children- and family-friendly programs,” he says. “They’re doing so on an improved platform of social engagement. We’re told millennials don’t like to belong. They just belong in different ways. Our responsibility is to make sure that golf becomes interesting, and we can’t begin by telling them the rules, imposing strictures, and telling them how we expect golf to be consumed.”

Generational challenges are one thing, but many golf course operators remain preoccupied with a day-to-day kind that is often far more regionalized. Chip Essig, senior vice president of Essig Golf Management in Indiana and a PGA Hall of Famer, offers one example. He’s been knocking on the doors of local weather forecasters and what might be termed “incentivized pessimism,” which he says is costing

him business even as a leveling out in supply gives cause for hope.

“Rain has hurt us, but technology related to the rain has hurt us even more,” Essig says. “Even if there’s only a 30 percent chance of rain at 9 p.m., the icons on the forecasts for that day show clouds and lightning.” Essig believes that picture should be reversed, that the icon should weigh in favor of the greater percentage and, thus, depict a 70 percent chance of sun.

“We’ve tried really hard to get to the weathermen,” he says. “I had one finally call back and be honest with me, and he basically admitted they don’t get paid for good forecasts. If they forecast rain and it turns out sunny, nobody’s mad at them. If they say it’s going to be sunny but it rains, then they’re in trouble.”

There remains no universal cure for cancer, although some treatments do help some individuals into remission or extend the lives of others. Therefore, it’s reasonable to wonder if industry-led efforts will have parallels in golf. Some programs may help to some degree, but any magic wand is, as the name suggests, a fantasy. The landscape may be just too varied.

Koppenhaver is encouraged by the traction of the PGA’s Junior League program, which, as its mission declares, is “designed to better socialize the game.” Sure, it’s competitive golf, but it’s a scramble with friends. Like most of the program’s proponents, Koppenhaver says that format makes it fun—the element he identifies as essential for any growth in the game. That’s a point both he and DeLozier agree on and, therefore, is probably worth underlining.

Despite its promising start, Junior

League is aimed at kids age 13 and under, which is why Koppenhaver doesn’t see the program producing the bread-and-butter green-fee golfer anytime soon. In the meantime, the most relevant recovery plan likely remains best devised and implemented at the facility level. That’s where golf will “post a score” that counts the most.

At Dove Canyon Golf Club in Trabuco Canyon, California, director of op-

Men’s Journal **went so far as** **to proclaim the** **“death of golf.”**

erations Russell Sylte agrees that platforms for fun and social interaction are coming to mean as much as good greens, particularly with millennials. Establishing the club as a lifestyle beyond a golf destination is important, he says, “because otherwise, millennials, if they’re not single-digit golfers in a season, they’re out of here.” With growth in the 25- to 40-year-old age group in his community, Sylte finds himself being required to “come up with camp-outs, haunted houses, Santa Claus in the snow, pasta and pizza nights, to say that denim is OK.”

As an acquisition of Chinese-owned Pacific Links International, Dove Canyon is in a position to capitalize on the much-touted “globalization of golf” in a way that Essig at Hickory Stick Golf Club might never be able to. Southern California, Sylte says, boasts a significant Asian population from countries such as Thailand, Japan, Korea, Vietnam and China.

“The Pacific Links model is a terrific model because it opens up the world to me as I’m selling memberships,” he explains. “I can sell a membership here in Irvine that members can use to play in those countries [where Pacific Links offers reciprocal relationships]. That’s made me a great competitor in this market.”

Beyond that, the global relationships such a network allows have facilitated other opportunities for Dove

Canyon. Early in 2016, 25 Korean juniors, age 13 to 17, and five teachers will arrive at Dove Canyon and use the club’s facilities for eight weeks at a cost of \$50,000. “How incredible is that?” Sylte says. “I can see that happening two or three times a year.”

That’s a wonderful prospect for Dove Canyon, but it’s a localized shot in the

arm. It doesn’t address the issue that Koppenhaver suggests could lead to golf shrinking to a “15 or 16 million player” industry. “It’s very possible we end up there,” he says. “Because baby boomers are dying off and we’re just not replacing them. It’s true, we can become that smaller franchise and still be OK.”

But that would require attrition, significantly more than the current population of golf course operators could stomach comfortably. DeLozier suggests the best way to counter that prospect in the year ahead is to make the game fun, one person at a time.

“Consumer confidence is one of the most important factors in an economy,” he says. “That’s the mood that none of us can control. What we can control is people’s perception of whether they’re in a good place or not. We can control that when we get them to our facility.” **FB**

Trent Bouts is a South Carolina-based freelance writer and editor of Palmetto Golfer magazine.



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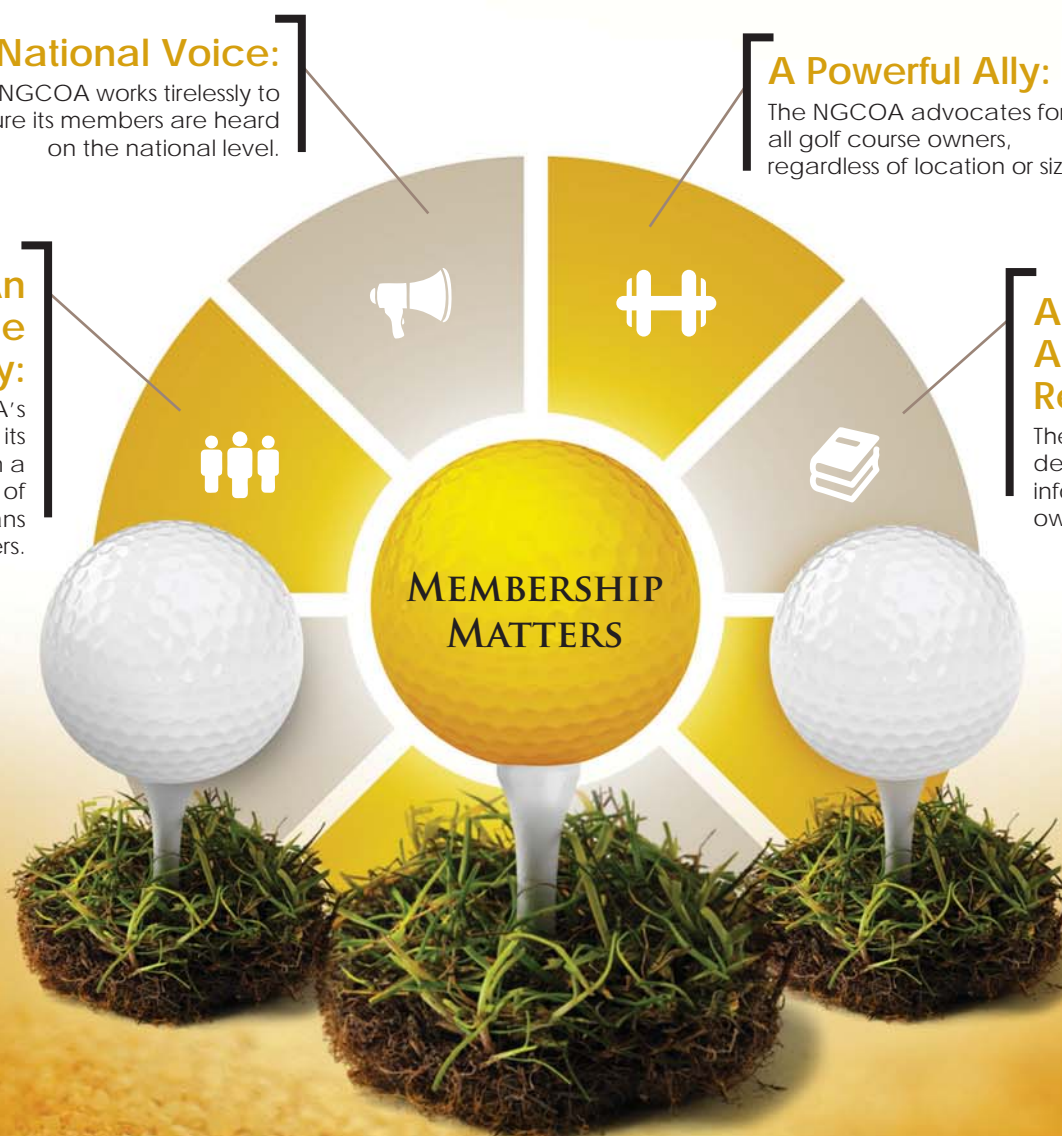
The NGCOA advocates for all golf course owners, regardless of location or size.

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The NGCOA's reach is wide, but its members remain a close-knit group of industry veterans and newcomers.

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The NGCOA is the definitive source of information for owner-operators.



Learn why membership matters and put the power of the NGCOA to work for your business.

www.ngcoa.org/membershipmatters



The True Costs of Training

Whether you realize it or not, every company pays for training. You can either pay for it up front or on the back end through poor results. Managers don't typically think about it this way, but maybe they should. To understand if you're paying for training without knowing it, consider the costs of:

- **LOST SALES.** Let's say that your staff should be closing 40 percent of sales, but currently they're only closing 30 percent. That means the company is losing 25 percent of potential sales.

With training, increasing a close rate from 30 percent to 40 percent is a reasonable expectation. It can entail training the staff how to be more polite, listen better, present products more effectively, and most importantly, ask for the sale. It's very doable. And if you aren't doing it, you're paying for training without even realizing it.

- **STAFF TURNOVER.** Losing employees is expensive. According to a study by the Center for American Progress, the cost of replacing a worker who earns between \$30,000 and \$50,000 a year is 20 percent of their annual salary, or about \$10,000. (If you're losing employees who earn more than \$50,000, replacing each of them will cost you even more.)

What if you did a better job of training employees and cut your turnover rate by 5 percent, from 30 percent to 25 percent? That's also very doable, and that 5 percent improvement will pay you back more than you expect.

Indeed, the link between training and retention is well-documented. Employees who receive quality training are happier and, therefore, are less likely to leave. And because they do their jobs better, you'll have to fire and replace fewer of them.

- **UNREALIZED UPSELL OPPORTUNITIES.** Let's assume that your average customer spends \$25 on each visit. If your employees are trained to refer customers to other products, upsell, and apply other simple strategies, they can realistically increase that average ticket to \$28.

Let's further assume that you have 40,000 customer transactions a year. If you can train your team to increase the average per-customer ticket from \$25 to \$28, you'll increase annual sales from \$1 million to \$1.12 million. Which is cheaper,

losing \$120,000 in sales or investing in training?

- **LOST CUSTOMERS.** If your company does that same \$1 million in annual sales and your customer retention rate

Training in the right areas has been shown to retain customers.

..... drops 5 percent, your company would lose \$50,000 in sales. Yet the right kind of training in areas like sales and customer service has been shown to retain many more customers.

Again, it's doable, and the result can be a big improvement in profitability. Which is cheaper, losing \$50,000 worth of customers a year or training?

Any way you look at it, you pay for training. However, investing in training up front can provide a 10-times or greater return on your dollar. What's more, training is the safest investment you can make. If you spend more money in advertising, it may or may not be effective in bringing customers to your business. Training is about improving results with the customers you already have.

So before you discount the notion of paying for employee training, ask yourself how much poor training—or the lack of any training—is costing your business. Chances are the answer will surprise you.

—Evan Hackel, CEO of Tortal Training (www.Tortal.net), an executive coach, speaker and author of "Engaging Leadership: A New Approach to Leading that Builds Excellence and Organizational Success"

A NEW WAY OF THINKING

San Geronimo Golf Course, like the rest of the roughly 900 golf courses in California, is dealing with a four-year drought, and—without question—it's taking a toll. In response, the SGGC grounds staff has drastically curtailed watering areas of the course that aren't in play, and has even reduced in-play areas, prompting the expression at the public facility "brown is the new green."

That pithy phrase isn't just an internal slogan, however; management turned it into a promotion that just recently ended. Players who walked in the door at San Geronimo Golf Course and announced, "Brown is the new green," received a discounted green fee of \$10 on the rate at that time of day.

"We know people are noticing that our course is brown in places that it used to be green," admits assistant general manager Chris Bright. "There's no getting around that. By popularizing the slogan and publicizing the reason behind it, we're not only letting them know why it's brown, we're allowing them to save some money in the process."

This past summer was the first time the course featured the promotion, and while he doesn't have exact revenue figures, Bright says the effort was "pretty popular" and gained momentum as more people heard about it.

"We're not in any way making light of the drought because we in the golf industry know better than anyone how serious a problem this is," says Bright. "But we're kind of trying to make a negative into a positive." —Jeff Barr





A new ownership group is trying to rebuild the flood-ravaged Minot Country Club.

Flooding the Market

When the members of Minot Country Club in Minot, North Dakota, voted to move their facility and rebuild the course that had been destroyed by a flood in 2011, most assumed it was the end of the story for the pretty piece of riverside property. Instead, Minot-born energy executive John Zimmerman and his partners purchased the parcel from Minot Country Club and are busy writing the next chapter.

Zimmerman, who jokingly calls his partnership group "the Four Fools," wants to run the club as a business and make a return, but he admits the undertaking "is more of an investment in the community." His partners had grown up on the course and knew what it meant to the city. So in 2012, the band of brothers purchased the property and began the arduous—and, no doubt, expensive—rebuilding process. The irrigation system had to be replaced, hundreds of dead trees had to be removed, the entire course had to

be reseeded, and the clubhouse had to be rebuilt. "I'd say the cost was comparable to building a new course from the ground up," Zimmerman notes.

They opened their doors in 2013 as the Vardon Golf Club. "Harry's brother Tom actually designed

the nine holes at the original Minot Country Club," explains Zimmerman.

Mark Hildahl, president of Minot Country Club, says he doesn't really view the Vardon Club as a direct competitor. "They don't have any of the amenities we offer, like the pool, so they're targeting different people." The two courses actually enjoy a positive relationship. So much so, members at Minot enjoyed reciprocal play at Vardon as the new course was being built.

Vardon's ownership group did a lot of due diligence, but there's obviously always a risk with any new business venture. "We asked ourselves if the community needed another course like this?" Zimmerman says. The town of close to 45,000 is booming with energy jobs, but already boasted several courses. "We really don't know the demographic makeup of all the new people coming in. Are they hardcore golfers? Casual players? We'll have to wait and see."

In the meantime, Zimmerman says the focus is on getting the club fully open and operational. "Then we can look at a longer-term strategic plan." —*Kyle Darbyson*

Golf Industry Calendar

JANUARY 19-21

BIGGA TURF MANAGEMENT EXHIBITION
Harrogate International Centre
North Yorkshire, United Kingdom
www.btme.org.uk

JANUARY 26-29

PGA MERCHANDISE SHOW
Orange County Convention Center
Orlando, Florida
www.pgashow.com

FEBRUARY 8-11

GOLF BUSINESS CONFERENCE AND
GOLF INDUSTRY SHOW
San Diego, California
www.golfbusinessconference.com

FEBRUARY 21-25

CMAA WORLD CONFERENCE ON CLUB
MANAGEMENT AND CLUB BUSINESS EXPO
San Diego, California
www.cmaa.org/conf

MAY 18, 2016

NATIONAL GOLF DAY
Washington, DC
www.wearegolf.org

JULY 25-26

GOLF BUSINESS FORUM 2016
Melbourne, Australia
www.golfbusinessforum.com.au

FOR MORE EVENTS, INCLUDING NGCOA
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A Range of Possibilities

When it came time to renovate the bunkers at Ak-Chin Southern Dunes Golf Club in Maricopa, Arizona, in early 2014, general manager Brady Wilson seized the moment to improve other aspects of the facility, too. "The practice range wasn't draining well,

"People don't want to leave when it's over."

and we had the earth-moving equipment coming here anyway," he notes. "So we made it a larger-scale construction project to increase the quality of the practice experience and ramp up utilization of that area."

A few months later, Southern Dunes reopened its hitting range with six new USGA-spec greens plus new bunkers around them. However, Wilson had also mapped out spots down both edges of the range to build small tee boxes so that the whole area

wasn't just for practice anymore—it was now also a six-hole pitch-and-putt course called Mini Dunes.

Noting that the practice facility was "completely underutilized after 1 p.m., almost every day," Wilson now closes the range at that time for cleanup and mowing, and the Mini Dunes course (where holes range from 60 to 100 yards long) is ready for play at 2:30. At \$12 for adults and free to players under age 18, Wilson believes his club has "taken away all the hurdles people cite for not playing golf: cost, difficulty and time commitment. We've built a 'bunny slope' that takes less than 45 minutes to play."

To drive usage, Wilson promotes themed days. Tuesdays is juniors, Thursdays is ladies, and Fridays offer happy-hour competitions. A teaching pro monitors the flow of play, leads free mini-clinics before players tee off, and provides advice once they finish. He also posts photos and upcoming activities to the course's social media accounts. "We're seeing a lot of family play, too," Wilson notes.

Interestingly, many more experienced players are using the short course than was expected. "The buddy groups will play the big course in the morning, eat lunch, and play the short course after that," Wilson says. "We even see people coming to hit balls before we close the range, have lunch while we prep the short course, and then play afterwards."

Meanwhile, the nearby Harrah's Ak-Chin Casino also uses Mini Dunes to entertain frequent guests and high-rollers (the Ak-Chin tribe owns both the course and the casino). "They run a 90-minute event and give out awards," Wilson notes. "People don't want to leave when it's over."

Though present revenue from the redesigned practice range isn't what it would be if there was a fee for juniors, Wilson believes it will bring long-term benefit to the overall operation. "Mini Dunes was aimed at grow-the-game efforts," he says. "That often gets pegged as junior play—but it doesn't have to be. There's really no wrong way for us to use this amenity to get more people to play golf." —Rob Carey

Did You Know?

GOLF COURSE OPERATORS USED 21.8 PERCENT LESS WATER TO MAINTAIN THEIR COURSES IN 2013 COMPARED WITH USAGE IN 2005. A RECENT STUDY BY THE GOLF COURSE SUPERINTENDENTS ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA ALSO FOUND THAT IN ADDITION TO REDUCING OVERALL WATER USAGE BY 500,000 ACRE-FEET, GOLF COURSES INCREASED THEIR USE OF RECYCLED WATER BY 33 PERCENT DURING THE SAME PERIOD. THESE TRENDS ARE POSITIVE FOR THE INDUSTRY, SINCE GOLF COURSES ARE ABLE TO FILTER RECYCLED WATER BEFORE IT RE-ENTERS THE ECOSYSTEM.

SCARING UP MORE BUSINESS

Some promotions are competitive, others are difficult, and some are just downright fun. Management of The Ranches Golf Club in Eagle Mountain, Utah, recently staged one of the fun variety, but they added another element: a little fright.

This past October, The Ranches hosted the fifth annual Monster Mash, a Halloween-themed golf outing that has become so popular that it had to be expanded to two days (October 17 and October 31). “Out of all the events we run throughout the year, it’s



Golfers weren’t the only ones who got into the Monster Mash spirit, mind you; the maintenance crew made its mark on the event by placing pins in “other worldly” locations. Some holes were

“IF YOU DO IT RIGHT, IT REALLY CAN BE SUCCESSFUL.”

really become one of our most talked about,” notes head professional Tele Wightman.

Cooler-than-normal temperatures didn’t deter thrill-seeking golfers, who paid \$45 to participate in the event for a chance to win conventional tournament booty like drivers and putters, as well as turkeys, an illuminating skeleton, jack-o-lanterns and other autumn-related items. Participants also enjoyed traditional outing fare, with a little pumpkin pie, apple cider and Halloween candy tossed in for seasonal flair.

positioned on the green abutting bunkers, while others were marked by rickety wooden fences. Pumpkins were used as obstacles near some of the holes, and skeletons encircled others.

Wightman’s advice for anyone who might be considering a similar event at their facility: “Don’t go overboard so people can’t play the course, but have fun with it,” he says. “If you do it right, it really can be successful. We’ve expanded to two days, so I think we have proven that.” —Jeff Barr

RINGING UP More Sales

The staff at Riverwalk Golf Club in San Diego doesn’t view the end of the year the way many clubs do.



Rather than accepting the last few days of the season as a time for sales to slow in the shop, they use it as a period to run promotions that generate incremental revenue.

For the past two years, throughout the month of December, Riverwalk has featured a daily special on select merchandise in the pro shop. For instance, on December 6, all men’s apparel was 30 percent off. On December 12, customers could receive a free round of golf if they bought a driver. A week later, on December 18, all putters were discounted 30 percent.

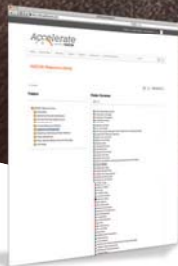
“Last year [2014], we sold five pairs of shoes on the day we had them marked 30 percent off, and that just doesn’t happen in December,” says general manager Monica Davis. “And we also did particularly well on men’s apparel on the day that was 30 percent off. We had a couple other days that worked real well, too, but those were the two best.”

Riverwalk’s end-of-season event was the brainchild of tournament facilitator Sean McDade, who reasoned that if the pro shop could come up with a special—a meaningful promotion with a little meat on it—for every day of the month and then post it on the calendar, it would encourage shoppers to pinpoint that day to buy a certain gift for the holidays.

“We wanted to take advantage of the holidays if we could,” Davis adds. “Merchandise just doesn’t sell itself, and we want not only to help ourselves, but to help the cause of encouraging people to shop at green-grass locations. By being creative and aggressive, we think we accomplish that.” —J.B.

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MEMBER MATTERS

CONNECTING WITH THE NGCOA

MAKING THINGS POSSIBLE

Country music superstar Darius Rucker to receive NGCOA Award of Merit at Golf Business Conference

Many people have used golf to make a living, but Darius Rucker uses golf to make a difference. In recognition of his efforts, the National Golf Course Owners Association is awarding the country music superstar and founding member of Hootie & the Blowfish with the 2016 NGCOA Award of Merit during the association's Golf Business Conference (formerly the NGCOA Annual Conference) in San Diego, California (February 8-11, 2016). The Award of Merit is the NGCOA's longest-running award and is designated for long-term and significant contributions to the game of golf.

Rucker has, through the Hootie & the Blowfish Foundation and with the help of his fellow bandmates, donated more than \$1.8 million since 2000 to hundreds of charities worldwide. The support ranges from building community learning centers to outfitting school marching bands to simply providing educators with the tools they need to nurture children's talents and help them succeed. The

Darius Rucker, a country music superstar, avid golfer and philanthropist, will receive the 2016 NGCOA Award of Merit.



majority of funding comes from Hootie & the Blowfish's Monday After the Masters golf tournament, an annual celebrity pro-am golf tournament affectionately referred to as "MAM" that attracts celebrities, pro golfers and friends to Myrtle Beach each April for a long weekend of fun and philanthropy.

In addition to the Hootie Foundation, MAM also benefits the South Carolina Junior Golf Association, an organization dedicated to enlightening the state's youth about the honor, sportsmanship and character of the game of golf, and therefore preparing them to better face future challenges in their lives. Thanks to MAM, the SC Junior Golf Association is one of the top-rated programs in the country.

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Industry Pulse

October 2015 Monthly Average Rounds Played / Days Open Comparison

Facility Type	Average Rounds Played 2015	Average Rounds Played 2014	% Change	Average Days Open 2015	Average Days Open 2014	% Change
All Facility Types	1,942	1,914	1.5%	27.5	27.7	-0.7%
Private	1,527	1,518	.6%	27.0	27.2	-.7%
Daily Fee	2,039	1,984	2.8%	27.7	27.8	-.4%
Muni/Mil/Univ	2,412	2,415	-.1%	28.1	28.2	-.4%
Resort	1,868	1,885	-.9%	26.3	27.0	-2.6%

2015 Year-to-Date Average Rounds Played / Days Open Comparison

Facility Type	YTD 2015 Rounds Played	YTD 2014 Rounds Played	% Change	YTD 2015 Days Open	YTD 2014 Days Open	% Change
All Facility Types	21,851	21,438	1.9%	234.8	231.7	1.3%
Private	16,597	16,440	1.0%	230.5	229.1	0.6%
Daily Fee	23,338	22,711	2.8%	235.4	231.2	1.8%
Muni/Mil/Univ	27,168	26,855	1.2%	239.4	235.9	1.5%
Resort	20,329	20,205	0.6%	239.7	238.7	0.4%

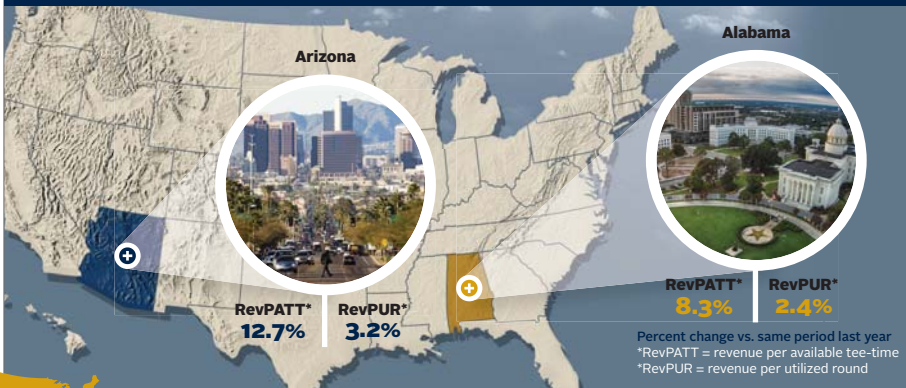
October 2015 Median Golf Fee Revenue Per Facility

Facility Type	Median 2015	Median 2014	% Change	Sample Size
All Facility Types	\$59,686	\$58,087	2.8%	1,205
Private	\$41,283	\$39,518	4.5%	279
Daily Fee	\$60,557	\$58,426	3.6%	422
Muni/Mil/Univ	\$69,491	\$69,549	-0.1%	407
Resort	\$160,711	\$160,058	0.4%	97

October 2015 Median Gross Revenue Per Rounds Played

Facility Type	Median Golf Fee Revenue	Median Merchandise Fee Revenue	Median F&B Revenue	Median Total Revenue
All Facility Types	\$25.69	\$6.37	\$25.19	\$90.81
Private	\$24.80	\$12.13	\$63.07	\$198.52
Daily Fee	\$24.92	\$3.66	\$9.21	\$44.74
Muni/Mil/Univ	\$22.87	\$2.79	\$5.07	\$32.58
Resort	\$58.75	\$12.53	\$22.49	\$97.88

October 2015 Spotlight: NGCOA Competitive Golf Marketplaces



What about my state? See more details on your market by registering at www.pgaperformancectrak.com

All Rounds Played averages are starts per 18 holes. Detailed data provided based on sufficient response. Responses are from all participating facilities with 9 holes or more. Data presented was submitted by the 24th of each month for the prior month's data. Rounds Played are weighted by facility type.



Some rounds played data included in this report have been collected and supplied by NGF and Golf Datatech. Learn more at www.ngcoa.org/benchmark. For more report details, visit www.pgaperformancectrak.com.

continued from page 57

Since 2005, Rucker and the band have also hosted the Hootie at Bulls Bay Collegiate Invitational in Charleston, an annual event that attracts 15 of the nation's top men's collegiate teams. In 2010, Rucker started the Darius Rucker Intercollegiate at Long Cove Club on Hilton Head. This annual tournament draws some of the top women's teams from around the country.

Perhaps not surprisingly, Rucker has used his musical talents to further benefit the game. In late 2010, the PGA Tour approached him to gauge his interest in penning a song that captured the spirit of the Tour's "Together, Anything's Possible" initiative, which funds a variety of charities nationwide. Rucker agreed, and then offered to waive his writing and royalty fees, promising that 100 percent of the proceeds from downloads of the song would go to PGA Tour Charities. The song—appropriately named "Together, Anything Is Possible"—generated more than \$63,000 from iTunes downloads in 2011. Rucker, who serves on The First Tee of Charleston's board of advisors and is a frequent participant in PGA Tour pro-am events, also attended and performed the song at select PGA Tour tournaments throughout 2011 to promote the song's charity message and fundraising platform.

In addition to his charitable giving through golf, Rucker is both a fan and student of the game, an avid golfer who carries a single-digit handicap. 🏌️

For more details, including a full list of planned education, about the Golf Business Conference and Golf Industry Show, visit www.golfbusinessconference.com.

At-a-Glance

WHAT: Golf Business Conference

WHEN: February 8-11, 2016

WHERE: San Diego, California

ACT NOW: Reserve your spot today. Register online at GolfBusinessConference.com



GOLF INDUSTRY SHOW RETURNS TO SAN ANTONIO

For the third time in the past seven years, the annual Golf Industry Show will be held in San Diego, California (February 8-11 at the San Diego Convention Center).

This year's event, which is staged in conjunction with the Golf Business Conference (formerly the NGCOA Annual Conference) and presented jointly by the National Golf Course Owners Association (NGCOA) and Golf Course Superintendents Association (GCSAA), is expected to attract more than 500 exhibitors and thousands of golf facility owners and managers. As a nod to the venue's temperate climate, the 2016 Golf Industry Show (GIS) will carry the theme "Everything Under the Sun."

"San Diego is one of our most popular destinations for the Golf Industry Show, and our industry partners and members look forward to going back time and time again," says Jay Karen, CEO of the NGCOA. "This is truly the place to be if you're in the golf management field, as a golf facility owner or an industry partner."

The Golf Business Conference will kick off the week's events, offering the industry's largest gathering of course owners and operators an array of educational and networking opportunities. Every educational session at the Golf Business Conference is designed not only to provide attendees with the tools they need

to grow rounds, increase revenue and operate more efficiently, but also challenge the way they think about the business—including their own. From panel discussions with everyday golfers (and non-golfers, too) offering their thoughts on what they truly want in an experience to hands-on training in revenue management to interactive sessions that engage the audience while delivering real-world, actionable ideas that are guaranteed to boost the bottom line, the Golf Business Conference isn't the same ol' type of business meeting you've come to expect.

Picking up where the Golf Business Conference leaves off, the GIS will showcase numerous educational opportunities, including the always-popular Answers On the Hour and Tech Tips, in addition to an innovative trade show designed for the owners and operators of golf facilities, and the professional members of the golf course and club management industries. Meanwhile, exhibitors from every sector of the industry will fill the San Diego Convention Center, offering attendees the chance to see and test some of the newest and most innovative products available for course management.

To learn more about the Golf Industry Show or Golf Business Conference, visit www.golfbusinessconference.com.

Golf Business Conference UNIQUE OPPORTUNITIES

The 2016 Golf Business Conference (formerly the NGCOA Annual Conference), in conjunction with the Golf Industry Show, is chock-full of unique educational and networking options. Here are a few of the unique offerings:

1 THE BUSINESS OF BOOZE

These days, craft beers, post-prohibition cocktails and boutique wines are big business, with even loftier margins. Learn firsthand how "getting in the drink" can be a good thing. Hear from experts on the latest trends in alcoholic beverages. Increase F&B sales through pairing drinks with everything from bar bites to finer plates. Taste a collection representative of today's hottest offerings.

2 FROM THE HORSE'S MOUTH

Part of the day's worth of education for attendees not participating in the golf outing, this two-part panel discussion will offer insights from everyday golfers as well as non-golfers about what they enjoy in a golf experience—and what keeps them off the course.

3 THE CYCLE: A 3-STEP APPROACH TO SERVICE EXCELLENCE

There is no one-size-fits-all solution to attracting customers, but there is "the cycle," Gregg Patterson's tried-and-true method of engaging members and guests, enticing them to spend (more) time and money, and, most importantly, developing a relationship that keeps them coming back for more.

4 QUICK & EASY WAYS TO GROW YOUR BUSINESS

Who doesn't want to grow their business and spend less money doing it? Cary Cavitt, author of "The Enjoyable Golf Club Experience," will show attendees how to better understand customers and then share inexpensive, easy-to-implement marketing tips that are guaranteed to boost your bottom line.

Visit www.golfbusinessconference.com for a complete listing of educational offerings and additional updates.

Industry Pulse



October 2015 Average Rounds Played by State

State	Average Rounds Played 2015	Average Rounds Played 2014	% Change	State	Average Rounds Played 2015	Average Rounds Played 2014	% Change
Alabama	1,890	1,840	2.7%	Nebraska	1,589	1,516	4.8%
Arizona	1,946	1,985	-2.0%	Nevada	2,961	2,980	-0.6%
Arkansas	1,194	1,206	-1.0%	New Hampshire	1,676	1,676	0.0%
California	3,197	3,124	2.3%	New Jersey	1,988	1,977	0.6%
Colorado	2,013	2,154	-6.5%	New Mexico	1,444	1,475	-2.1%
Connecticut	1,747	1,783	-2.0%	New York	1,561	1,508	3.5%
Delaware	2,113	2,123	-0.5%	North Carolina	2,017	2,291	-12.0%
Florida	2,634	2,594	1.5%	North Dakota	1,315	1,106	18.9%
Georgia	1,946	2,093	-7.0%	Ohio	1,823	1,514	20.4%
Hawaii	2,067	2,129	-2.9%	Oklahoma	1,966	2,134	-7.9%
Idaho	1,704	1,779	-4.2%	Oregon	1,882	1,691	11.3%
Illinois	1,746	1,658	5.3%	Pennsylvania	1,746	1,774	-1.6%
Indiana	1,373	1,123	22.3%	Rhode Island	1,776	1,890	-6.0%
Iowa	1,447	1,409	2.7%	South Carolina	2,386	2,904	-17.8%
Kansas	2,223	2,048	8.5%	South Dakota	1,417	1,437	-1.4%
Kentucky	1,640	1,424	15.2%	Tennessee	1,974	1,888	4.6%
Louisiana	1,809	1,886	-4.1%	Texas	2,243	2,493	-10.0%
Maine	1,497	1,235	21.2%	Utah	3,313	3,410	-2.8%
Maryland	2,305	2,351	-2.0%	Vermont	780	796	-2.0%
Massachusetts	1,761	1,701	3.5%	Virginia	1,917	2,019	-5.1%
Michigan	1,371	1,136	20.7%	Washington	2,156	2,004	7.6%
Minnesota	1,816	1,720	5.6%	West Virginia	1,314	1,237	6.2%
Mississippi	1,632	1,627	0.3%	Wisconsin	1,554	1,447	7.4%
Missouri	1,846	1,672	10.4%	Wyoming	987	992	-0.5%
Montana	1,084	1,137	-4.7%				

October 2015 Year-to-Date Average Rounds Played by State

State	Average Rounds Played 2015	Average Rounds Played 2014	% Change	State	Average Rounds Played 2015	Average Rounds Played 2014	% Change
Alabama	16,489	16,741	-1.5%	Nebraska	20,067	19,401	3.4%
Arizona	28,908	29,044	-0.5%	Nevada	26,006	25,934	0.3%
Arkansas	12,678	13,875	-8.6%	New Hampshire	19,958	20,840	-4.2%
California	35,281	34,807	1.4%	New Jersey	20,718	20,104	3.1%
Colorado	23,304	22,986	1.4%	New Mexico	17,930	17,397	3.1%
Connecticut	21,388	21,284	0.5%	New York	18,675	17,888	4.4%
Delaware	19,676	19,621	0.3%	North Carolina	19,737	19,940	-1.0%
Florida	28,255	27,453	2.9%	North Dakota	16,196	13,987	15.8%
Georgia	18,835	19,057	-1.2%	Ohio	20,621	19,939	3.4%
Hawaii	25,704	26,130	-1.6%	Oklahoma	19,859	21,137	-6.0%
Idaho	22,123	20,586	7.5%	Oregon	23,302	21,980	6.0%
Illinois	19,735	19,343	2.0%	Pennsylvania	19,112	19,054	0.3%
Indiana	16,721	16,860	-0.8%	Rhode Island	20,228	20,169	0.3%
Iowa	20,309	19,527	4.0%	South Carolina	23,555	23,221	1.4%
Kansas	21,415	20,717	3.4%	South Dakota	22,086	19,069	15.8%
Kentucky	17,392	17,224	1.0%	Tennessee	18,810	19,101	-1.5%
Louisiana	16,402	17,184	-4.6%	Texas	22,906	24,845	-7.8%
Maine	17,878	16,400	9.0%	Utah	34,849	33,955	2.6%
Maryland	22,523	22,816	-1.3%	Vermont	12,491	12,500	-0.1%
Massachusetts	20,225	19,940	1.4%	Virginia	19,512	19,769	-1.3%
Michigan	19,994	18,370	8.8%	Washington	28,056	25,990	7.9%
Minnesota	23,420	21,450	9.2%	West Virginia	14,275	13,474	5.9%
Mississippi	14,169	14,134	0.2%	Wisconsin	20,936	18,841	11.1%
Missouri	19,033	19,472	-2.3%	Wyoming	12,235	11,969	2.2%
Montana	17,078	15,919	7.3%				

All Rounds Played averages are starts per 18 holes. Detailed data provided based on sufficient response. Responses are from all participating facilities with 9 holes or more. Data presented was submitted by the 24th of each month for the prior month's data. Rounds Played are weighted by facility type.



Some rounds played data included in this report have been collected and supplied by NGF and Golf Datatech. Learn more at www.ngcoa.org/benchmark. For more report details, visit www.pgaperformancetrak.

OPERATING SOLUTIONS

The staff at the Whispering Pines Golf Club in Trinity, Texas, located less than 100 miles north of Houston, has successfully implemented a free sample approach to private lessons that has helped the instructor's date book go from empty to full in just a few months.

When golf professional Chris Rowe arrived at Whispering Pines, he was accustomed to giving more than 600 lessons a year when he worked at historic Colonial Country Club in Fort Worth, Texas. After learning he wouldn't be as busy at his new job, Rowe began to consider new ways to get customers on the range. His idea was to offer a free lesson.

Rowe began by conducting an email campaign to the members that offered a free, no-obligation lesson. The approach caught the attention of the membership and enticed many men and women to give it a try. Suddenly, Rowe found himself to be quite busy, as nearly half the members took him up on the offer (and most have continued to book lessons). "In doing so," says Rowe, "much like a free food sample at the local grocery store, members began to love the product and come back for more."

The free lesson plan has enabled Rowe to enhance his brand among the members at Whispering Pines. Meanwhile, members are spending as much as \$1,000 more per year on lessons and around the club. "It showed that my value as an instructor will lead to continued business, even at a new club," he notes.

A similar approach can be tried at any private or public facility that has a golf professional. If a club is afraid of being overbooked with lessons, it may opt to limit the number of free lessons to a first-come, first-served basis.

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OPERATING SOLUTIONS IS A MONTHLY FORUM PRESENTED BY NGCOA PREMIER PARTNER CLUB CAR TO PROVIDE INNOVATIVE IDEAS THAT HAVE INCREASED REVENUES AND/OR REDUCED OPERATING EXPENSES.

Simply the Best

Given annually since 2003, the NGCOA's Course of the Year award recognizes member-owned facilities that excel in four categories: course quality, quality of ownership and management, contributions to the community and contributions to the game. The Course of the Year winner, which will be



announced on February 10 at the Golf Business Conference (formerly the NGCOA Annual Conference) in San Diego, California, will come from a group of courses that are distinguished in each area.

Forest Dunes in Roscommon, Michigan, marries breathtaking natural beauty and great fun to create a rewarding experience that all the golfing public can enjoy. Forest Dunes Golf Course opened in 2002 and features a number of intriguing challenges, including wide-open meadows, hardwoods, century-old red and jack pines, rugged native dunes, scruffy sand areas and water features.

Ak-Chin Southern Dunes Golf Club in Maricopa, Arizona, is locally owned by the Ak-Chin Indian Community. The Ak-Chin community purchased the club when they annexed property that was originally Ak-Chin land back into the Ak-Chin community fold. Ak-Chin Southern Dunes Golf Club features 18 holes of stunning golf that was designed by Brian Curley, Lee Schmidt and Fred Couples. Troon Golf oversees club operations and maintains the golf course at tournament conditions year round.

TPC Boston is situated on nearly 400 acres in Norton, Massachusetts. Arnold Palmer Golf Design originally designed the course, with construction beginning in August 2000 and initial completion in October 2001. The course opened for play in June 2002 and hosted its first PGA Tour event in September 2003. A redesign in 2006 by Hanse Golf Course Design was key in elevating the course's competitive interests. As a testament to its excellence, TPC Boston has held a Tour event each year since.

Heron Point at Sea Pines Resort on Hilton Head Island, South Carolina, features a superb layout that showcases the unlimited imagination of Pete Dye's architectural genius. Resplendent with knotted hardwoods, lagoons and salt marshes teeming with wildlife, Heron Point plays to 7,000 yards from the back tees, offering a wonderful fusion of short and long holes.

In addition to the Course of the Year, the NGCOA will also recognize winners of the Award of Merit for long-term contributions to the game, the Jemsek Award for Golf Course Excellence, the Don Rossi Award for significant contributions to the NGCOA, the Paul Porter Award for leaving an enduring mark on a chapter, the Champion Award for service to course owners at the regional level, and the Player Development Award for success in attracting new players to the game. 🏆

For more details, including a full list of planned education, about the Golf Business Conference and Golf Industry Show, visit www.golfbusinessconference.com.

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NGCOA Makes Key Staffing Changes

As part of the NGCOA's continuing efforts to execute on its enhanced strategic plan, the association recently made a number of key staffing additions and changes. These moves will ensure the NGCOA is positioned to meet the needs of members by delivering unparalleled service and value.

In early November, G. Sheffield (Sheff) Webb was named the organization's new director of corporate partnerships. Webb, who brings 27 years of sales and sports industry experience to the association, will be responsible for leading the NGCOA's engagement with industry suppliers.

Before joining the NGCOA, Webb was with CBS Sports, and prior to that with Major League Baseball, where he was tasked with building corporate partnerships. While at CBS Sports, Webb pieced together integrated solutions and branding campaigns that were consistent with each partner's needs and objectives.

In early December, Bill Northrop assumed the role of director of membership, replacing Joe Rice, who transitioned into the newly created role of chief strategy officer. Northrop is charged with growing the NGCOA's membership while helping to enhance the organization's value proposition.

A seasoned professional with a history of championing recruitment and retention efforts, Northrop brings a diverse skill set to his position, having served in various leadership capacities in a variety of industries. Most recently, he served as president of InCommunity Magazines, where he was responsible for all facets of the business, including leadership development, marketing, operations, content and profitability.

Following the path of Rice and several other NGCOA employees who recently made internal moves, Sherea Malcolm has assumed the role of office manager and executive assistant. Malcolm, who joined the NGCOA staff in 2013, previously served as membership coordinator.

Welcome Members

THE NGCOA WOULD LIKE TO WELCOME THE FOLLOWING MEMBERS, WHO HAVE RECENTLY JOINED OR RETURNED TO OUR COMMUNITY

Mountain View Golf Club David Jarrett Boring, OR	Christman's Windham House Brian Christman Windham, NY	Pebblebrook Golf Course Patrick O'Hara Sun City West, AZ
Desert Canyon Golf Club Jason Looman Fountain Hills, AZ	East Lake Golf Club Chad Parker Atlanta, GA	River Pointe Golf Club Albany, GA 31701-4765
Baltimore County Revenue Authority Kenneth Mills Towson, MD	Berkeley Country Club Raymond Chester Moncks Corner, SC	Rockingham Country Club Bob Greene Newmarket, NH
Cove Cay Golf Club Pat Shriver Clearwater, FL	Black River Coun- try Club Jim Albright Port Huron, MI	Sun City Country Club Tom Loegering Sun City, AZ
Etowah Valley Golf & Country Club Dewey Andrew Etowah, NC	Boulder Pointe Golf Club Russ Zampich Oxford, MI	The Captains Club At Woodfield Denny Dowdall Grand Blanc, MI
Kapolei Golf Club Akira Kihara Kapolei, HI	Fruitport Country Club Thomas Ham Muskegon, MI	Vermilion Oaks Roslyn White Abbeville, LA
Polo Fields Country Club John Kuenzil Ypsilanti, MI	Glen Eagle Golf Course Ronnie Miles Millington, TN	
Sunset Ridge Golf Course Michael Smith Westbrook, ME	Heritage Hills Golf Course Matt DeRose York, PA	

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Spotlight



RealiTee is the world's first authentically majestic indoor golfing experience integrating simulation play with live play for the short game within a real golf environment.

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MEMBERS IN MOTION



GETTING "THE BUZZ"

Keynote speaker Gregg Patterson (l) gives "the buzz" to member Chris White of Fenton Farms Golf Club at the Michigan Golf Course Owners Association's recent annual meeting.



A PLATFORM FOR THEIR VIEWS

Attendees of the recent European Golf Course Owners Association annual meeting shared their thoughts on the game and industry.



RECEIVING HIS PROPER DUE

Ted Horton (l) presents Steve Plummer, president of Championship Golf Services, with the Ted Horton Distinguished Service Award during the recent California Golf Course Owners Association annual meeting. The award recognizes an individual who has made exemplary contributions to the association and its members.



MAKING THE ROUNDS

New NGCOA CEO Jay Karen (l) pauses to strike a pose with NGCOA board member Frank Romano at the recent Golf Course Owners of Wisconsin annual meeting.

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Achasta Golf Club and Real Estate—Dahlonega, GA - SEALED BID OFFERING. Bids due: February 17, 2016. PROPERTY PREVIEW DATES: January 20, February 3 & 10. Other times by appointment only. Premier residential golf community featuring an 18-hole Jack Nicklaus Signature course. Includes amenities. Also offering single family lots, duplex lots, 21 acres develop-able land and more. Contact Hilda Allen at Hilda W. Allen Real Estate Inc., (888) 324-5020, hildahwa@gmail.com.

Amelia River Golf & Country Club—Fernandina Beach, FL - One of the most prestigious courses in all of North Florida. 6,808 yards from the back tees; wide and rolling fairways; large greens. Clubhouse, pro shop and grill. A must see to appreciate!. Contact Hilda Allen at Hilda W. Allen Real Estate Inc., (888) 324-5020, hildahwa@gmail.com.

Beacon Ridge CC—West End (near Pinehurst), NC - PUBLIC AUCTION: SELLING ON-LINE ONLY. Bid deadline: FEBRUARY 4, 2016. Contact Hilda Allen at Hilda W. Allen Real Estate Inc., (888) 324-5020, hildahwa@gmail.com.

Brookstone Meadows GC—Anderson, SC - New Tennessee basketball coach Rick Barnes says sell his course in SC. Great Tom Jackson design with Interstate 85 frontage in red hot Upstate SC, between Greenville and Atlanta. Nice upscale neighborhood, driving range putting green, functional clubhouse with bar-dining area, pro shop and offices. PRICE REDUCED \$1,500,000. Miller Management Associates, Inc. brett@mmagolf.com, (828) 775-7765.

Cherokee Ridge CC—Union Grove, AL - 18-hole championship course located just 20 minutes from Huntsville. Full restaurant and bar. 30 tee driving range with additional practice facilities. 17 acre lake on front nine and 40 foot waterfall on back nine. Bentgrass greens and Bermuda fairways. Contact Hilda Allen at Hilda W. Allen Real Estate Inc., (888) 324-5020, hildahwa@gmail.com.

Confidential—Florida - Semi-private 18-hole championship layout. 40,000 plus annual rounds and plays over 6,700 yards. Near the Tampa area. Owner financing may be available. Contact Hilda Allen at Hilda W. Allen Real Estate Inc., (888) 324-5020, hildahwa@gmail.com.

Confidential—Mid NC - 18 hole championship course, nice metro area, Miller Management Associates, Inc. (828) 775-7765, brett@mmagolf.com.

Confidential—NC Mountains - Championship 18 hole course only 20 years old, modern stylish clubhouse with bar, grill, dining, meeting rooms and upstairs could be living quarters. Rolling terrain, bermuda fairways, excellent bent greens. Additional developable property available. \$1,350,000. Call us. Miller Management Associates, Inc. (828) 775-7765, brett@mmagolf.com.

Confidential—Tennessee - 18 hole Championship layout in pristine condition. Elegant dining in an immaculate clubhouse with panoramic views. Aquatic center with a resort style pool and two lighted tennis courts. Confidentiality Agreement required. Contact Hilda Allen at Hilda W. Allen Real Estate Inc., (888) 324-5020, hildahwa@gmail.com.

Confidential—NC - 18-hole public course with practice facilities and clubhouse including grill and lounge. 6,963 yards from championship tees, par 72. The design includes greens complexes built to USGA specifications with bent grass putting surfaces. Contact Hilda Allen at Hilda W. Allen Real Estate Inc., (888) 324-5020, hildahwa@gmail.com.

Country Club of Sebring—Sebring, FL - This central Florida gem has been considered to have the best layout in the county. 6,700 yards from the back tee for a par 71; Clubhouse, pro shop and grill. Contact Hilda Allen at Hilda W. Allen Real Estate Inc., (888) 324-5020, hildahwa@gmail.com.

Country Club of South Carolina—Florence, SC - An 18 hole semi-private championship course with a host of amenities. Convenient to Interstate 95. Professionally managed by Mosaic. Contact Hilda Allen at Hilda W. Allen Real Estate Inc., (888) 324-5020, hildahwa@gmail.com.

Creekside Golf & Country Club—Hiram, GA - Called "A HIDDEN JEWEL" by Golf Digest. Only 20 minutes from Atlanta! 18 holes with manicured Crenshaw Bentgrass Greens and Bermuda Fairways. Back tees play to 6,700 yards. Practice facilities with a lighted driving range. Contact Hilda Allen at Hilda W. Allen Real Estate Inc., (888) 324-5020, hildahwa@gmail.com.

Fall Branch Parcel—Murphy Township, NC - 675+/- acres next to the newly opened (2015) Cherokee Valley Casino. Zoned for single family, townhomes and/or condos. Nine miles of roads. Water and sewer available. PRICE REDUCED. Contact Hilda Allen at Hilda W. Allen Real Estate Inc., (888) 324-5020, hildahwa@gmail.com.

Lions Den—Dardanelle, AR - 18 hole championship course currently owned by tour star John Daly, 6400 yard layout designed by Jerry O'Neill with bermuda grass fairways and champion bermuda greens, clubhouse, maintenance building and home included. Pos-

sible John Daly affiliation. Funding verification required, serious inquiries only. Contact Brett Miller, PGA, agent at Miller Management Associates, Inc. brett@mmagolf.com, (828) 775-7765.

Maple Ridge GC—Columbus, GA - This 18-hole championship semi-private course is meticulously maintained and professionally managed by Mosaic Clubs & Resorts. Beautiful clubhouse with restaurant and lounge. Located in one of the fastest growing residential areas in metro Columbus. Contact Hilda Allen at Hilda W. Allen Real Estate Inc., (888) 324-5020, hildahwa@gmail.com.

Rose Island—Port Royal, SC - Coastal Low Country, private island, secluded yet convenient! 100+/- acre upland island with an additional 300+/- acres of Kings Grant marsh land. Existing features: One 4BR, 4BA elevated home, pool, horse barn and stables, dock, deep well, 20 sub-divided lots, permit for more docks, barge permit and landing in place and more. Contact Hilda Allen at Hilda W. Allen Real Estate Inc., (888) 324-5020, hildahwa@gmail.com.

Saddle Creek Golf Club—Lewisburg, TN - NEW LISTING: SADDLE CREEK GOLF CLUB, LEWISBURG TN in the booming area of south Nashville is this 18 hole championship design with bermuda fairways and bent greens. Nice modern and functional clubhouse overlooks the course and 18 green, great event venue. Nice practice area, former mini tour site, putting green. New 600 home Pulte development coming 20 minutes away. Great reputation, turn key includes equipment, Great price at \$995,000. Call Brett at Miller Management Associates, (828) 775-7765, brett@mmagolf.com.

Spring Lake Golf Resort—Sebring, FL - Two 18-hole golf courses and one 9-hole executive course, Clubhouse with amenities and newly built fitness center. 60 miles south of Disney World, 70 miles from the Gulf and Atlantic beaches and 10 minutes from the Sebring International Speedway! Developed and undeveloped lots selling with the courses as a whole. Price Reduced - Below \$2M. Contact Hilda Allen at Hilda W. Allen Real Estate Inc., (888) 324-5020, hildahwa@gmail.com.

Taberna Country Club—New Bern, NC - This 18-hole championship layout was crafted by Senior Nicklaus Designer Jim Lipe and plays to 6,917 yards. Amenities include an elegant clubhouse, junior-Olympic sized pool and lighted championship tennis courts. Contact Hilda Allen at Hilda W. Allen Real Estate Inc., (888) 324-5020, hildahwa@gmail.com.

The Club at North Creek—Southaven, MS - An 18-hole par 72 Championship links-style layout with a rating of 71.2 and a slope of 125. The course features the finest of Champion Bermuda greens and Mississippi Choice Bermuda fairways. Fully stocked pro shop and grill. Champion Hall banquet room can accommodate up to 190 guests and the Augusta Room banquet hall can accommodate up to 75. Four miles west of I-55. Contact Hilda Allen at Hilda W. Allen Real Estate Inc., (888) 324-5020, hildahwa@gmail.com.

The Players Course at Wyboo Plantation—Manning, SC - 18-hole semi-private Earnest Wallace design nestled along the shores of Lake Marion and situated on 198+/- acres. Measures 6,969 yards from the championship tees; 25 station driving range; clubhouse includes pro shop and grill. PRICE REDUCED TO \$750,000. Contact Hilda Allen at Hilda W. Allen Real Estate Inc., (888) 324-5020, hildahwa@gmail.com.

Recent Transactions

Hilton Head Island, SC—Bear Creek GC sold by Hilda Allen, Hilda W. Allen Real Estate, Inc., (888) 324-5020.

Warner Robbins, GA—The Landings GC sold by Hilda Allen, Hilda W. Allen Real Estate, Inc., (888) 324-5020.

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2) Which one option best characterizes your organization? (check one only)

- 01 ☐ Golf Course Facility/Group of Facilities
 02 ☐ Off-Course Golf Retailer
 03 ☐ Golf Industry Manufacturer/Vendor/Distributor
 04 ☐ Golf Course Consultant

3) What one option most closely matches your job function/title? (select one only)

- 01 ☐ President/CEO
 02 ☐ Owner/Operator
 03 ☐ Chairman of the Board
 04 ☐ CFO/Financial Manager
 05 ☐ General Manager
 06 ☐ Club Manager
 07 ☐ Director of Golf
 08 ☐ Executive/National/Regional Director/Manager
 09 ☐ Purchasing Manager/Buyer
 10 ☐ Golf Professional
 11 ☐ Golf Superintendent
 12 ☐ Member, Board of Directors
 13 ☐ Marketing/Sales Manager/Director
 15 ☐ Other (please specify) _____

4) Which one best describes the nature of your organization? (select one only)

- 10 ☐ Private
 11 ☐ Privately-Owned Daily Fee
 12 ☐ Semi-Private
 13 ☐ Resort
 14 ☐ Municipal/State/County
 16 ☐ Military
 17 ☐ University/College
 18 ☐ Driving Range/Practice Facility
 20 ☐ Development Company
 28 ☐ Golf Course Builder
 21 ☐ Other (please specify) _____
 21 ☐ Not Applicable

5) Are you affiliated with a golf course management company?

01 ☐ yes 02 ☐ no

6) How many facilities, in total, are you personally responsible for?

80 ☐ less than 2 83 ☐ 10 or more
 81 ☐ 2 - 4 99 ☐ Not applicable
 82 ☐ 5 - 9

7) What is the average greens fee for a typical round of golf at your facility? If you work at multiple facilities, please indicate the average greens fee across all facilities.

01 ☐ nothing/private 05 ☐ \$75 - \$99
 02 ☐ less than \$25 06 ☐ \$100 - \$149
 03 ☐ \$25 - \$49 07 ☐ \$150 or more
 04 ☐ \$50 - \$74 08 ☐ not applicable

8) What is the total annual budget or expenditures for which you are responsible?

50 ☐ less than \$99,000 53 ☐ \$500,000 - \$999,000
 51 ☐ \$100,000 - \$249,000 54 ☐ \$1,000,000 - \$2,499,000
 52 ☐ \$250,000 - \$499,000 55 ☐ \$2,500,000 or more

9) In which ways are you personally involved in your organization's purchasing decisions?

- 60 ☐ Determine annual budget expenditures
 61 ☐ Authorize final purchases
 62 ☐ Determine needs of the operation
 63 ☐ Specify/recommend vendors or suppliers
 64 ☐ Specify/recommend specific brands
 65 ☐ Evaluate brands for purchase

10) Which products/services listed below do you specify, recommend, buy or approve the purchase? (select all that apply)

- A ☐ Golf Cars
 B ☐ Turf Equipment
 C ☐ Course Design/Construction/Renovation
 D ☐ Irrigation & Drainage
 E ☐ Chemicals, Fertilizer & Seed
 G ☐ Clubhouse Design/Construction/Renovation
 H ☐ Financial Services
 T ☐ Legal Services
 F ☐ Course Accessories
 J ☐ Insurance
 U ☐ Marketing Services
 L ☐ Pro Shop Apparel
 M ☐ Pro Shop Equipment
 P ☐ Food & Beverage
 R ☐ Computers/Technology
 V ☐ Furniture/Fixtures
 W ☐ Human Resources/Staffing
 K ☐ Consulting

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3 FINAL THOUGHTS

Aurora Kirchner-McClain
Director
Kingwood Golf Advantage School
Kingwood, Texas

ELEMENTS THAT ARE ESSENTIAL TO CREATING AN APPEALING JUNIOR PROGRAM

Having a fun, family-friendly atmosphere with options for the beginner to the competitive player recruits juniors to your program. We offer a wide range of classes at the Clubs of Kingwood, from 4- to 5-year-olds to a high school drills and skills class. Families are welcome to assist their junior in our monthly play days so all are learning together. Diversity is key.

HOW YOU'VE ADJUSTED YOUR APPROACH TO INTRODUCING AND TEACHING THE GAME TO JUNIORS

I was quite reluctant to start a team when introduced to the PGA Junior Golf League in 2012. The team concept with jerseys and a fun format with friends has pleasantly fueled fun and community within our area. We grew from 12 players in 2012 to 121 juniors in 2015. I went from being a golf teacher to a golf coach, and I absolutely love it!

ONE PIECE OF ADVICE TO SOMEONE TRYING TO CREATE A JUNIOR PROGRAM

Make learning fun. Fun for you, the kids and the parents. Setting up different visual teaching aids (pool noodles, hula hoops, circles, etc.) in each class will keep the kids wondering what games we'll be playing next. Don't be afraid to evolve each year, adding, deleting or changing classes depending on the needs of juniors.



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