

# GB

GOLF BUSINESS

SPECIAL REPORT  
**TURF WARS**

## Raising Capital

Owners, lenders get  
creative with finance

### Critters Gone Wild

Wildlife both bane and  
beauty for golf courses

### Looking Beyond Science

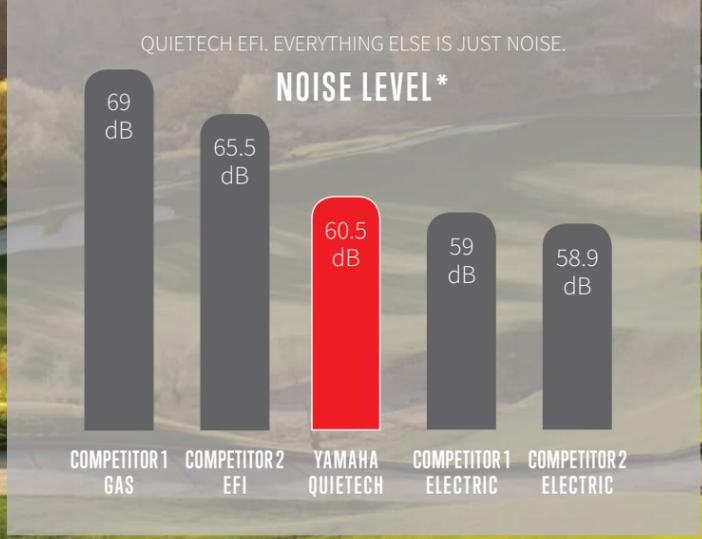
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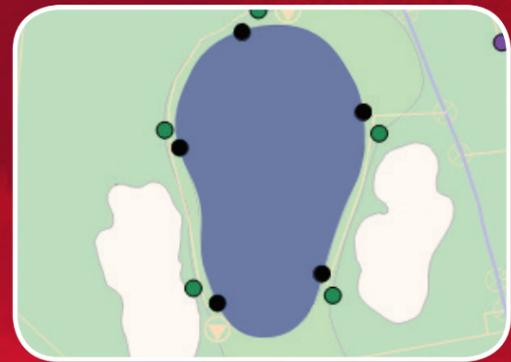
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“Rain Bird has been a **huge help** for dialing in our system. They made it a much easier transition **during the restoration.**”

Stephen Rabideau, CGCS | Director of Golf Courses, Winged Foot Golf Club

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See more renovation stories at [rainbird.com/RenovationPartner](http://rainbird.com/RenovationPartner).





## From the CEO Vantage Point

By Jay Karen  
CEO  
NGCOA

# Processing Payment Processing

With all due respect to Ferris Bueller, “The credit card processing world is changing pretty fast. If you don’t stop and look around once in a while, you could miss it.”

As operators of golf courses, you know merchant processing used to be a pretty predictable situation. Customers swiped their cards in that electronic brick on your counter. You reconciled the charges with your POS system. Your bank account received the funds in a few days. Monthly statements came in the mail that showed what you paid in fees. Rinse and repeat.

Reading those monthly merchant processing statements has always required a decoder, and it only got more challenging when PCI compliance came into the picture (fees for what?), different kinds of cards were being used (debit, rewards cards, etc.) and swiping took on a new meaning (at the counter? Online?). Each of these variables caused changes in rates (someone has to pay for all those cardholder rewards), but you trusted the system was treating you right. When it was revealed mysterious charges were levied on golf courses a few years back by one of the leading processors (who is now under FBI investigation), mistrust entered into the system. Eyes started opening.

It also used to be that every three days someone was knocking on your door to become your new processing partner, always promising lower rates. Now, it seems those visits have nearly disappeared, because courses find themselves limited to working with only the processors fully integrated into their golf management software (GMS) systems. The software companies have become the gatekeepers, and in some cases, you may not have a choice in who processes your payments. If you want to change processors, you may have

to change GMS partners. I fear the limited choice stifles competition among processors, therefore allowing a situation ripe for high rates. In addition, I believe the GMS providers – and maybe even the OTTAs – are looking to merchant processing as a rail on which to ride new pricing schemes. For example, you may find some software providers offer “free” software, as long as you’re agreeing to use their merchant system. Just goes to show how much money can be packed into those fees paid by course operators. Twenty five cents here. Fifty cents there. It all of a sudden added up to tens of thousands of dollars by the end of the year.

What I’m also seeing is a shift in who pays for merchant processing. Ever since a 2017 Supreme Court ruling that lifted the ban on surcharging (in most states), more and more merchants around the country are adding “surcharges” to their bills. The consumer may now pay 3 percent if he or she wants to use plastic. This will be interesting, because it’s been unpopular to be the merchant that charged fees for plastic-wielders, but why should all those loyalty rewards (airline tickets, gift cards, etc.) be paid for by merchants like golf courses? As a result, courses may have more consumers willing to pay cash. Many private clubs have shifted processing fees to members paying for dues with plastic instead of ACH. The movement is on, folks. I just want you to be prepared.

Amidst all this, I’m pleased to let our readers know First American has just come on board as a new Smart Buy supplier for merchant processing. One thing we’ve learned at NGCOA is we need to be closer to this transactional business, and we are encouraging golf software companies to integrate with First American for two reasons. One is to inject choice into the formula – a good thing for golf courses. Currently, Jonas clients are able to choose First American, and we understand more GMS integrations are coming. The second is using First American ultimately results in supporting NGCOA and our work to help you succeed.

NGCOA is looking out for you. If you’re not a member, there’s been no better time to join. Join at [ngcoa.org/join](http://ngcoa.org/join)

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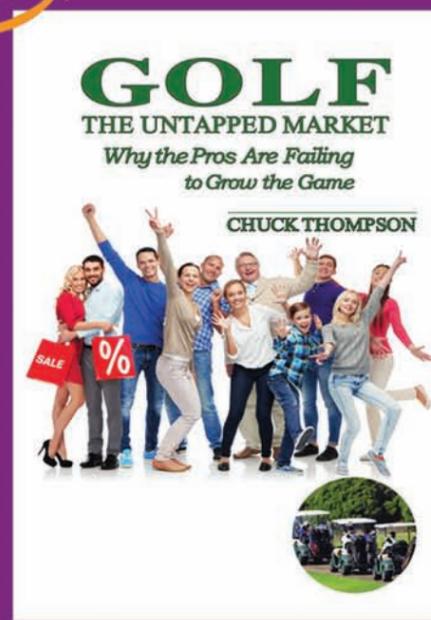
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I commend Chuck Thompson on his insight to the Golf industry. As a former PGA President, I learned more from Golf: The Untapped Market than I have in 43 years of operating and owning golf courses.

Ted Bishop  
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## A View From the Industry My Take

By Lane Tredway, Ph.D.  
Senior Technical Representative  
Turf, Syngenta

# Stewarding Chemistries for Long-Term Success

Despite the number of products available to control pests in golf course turf, it's rare to see new products that use a new mode of action (MOA), which is the mechanism that inhibits pest growth. In the turf market, there are approximately 40 fungicide active ingredients (AI) and 70 unique AI combinations, but there are only 16 unique MOAs.

In the past few years, there has been an influx of AIs into the market belonging to the SDHI (succinate dehydrogenase inhibitors) class of chemistry, including fungicides like Posterity and Xzemplar, and nematicides like Indemnify. These products use similar MOAs to attack pathogens and each took significant amounts of time and resources to develop. According to CropLife International, discovery and development of a new product with a new AI costs around \$286 million and takes approximately 11 years. Given this cadence of new innovation, it's essential for superintendents to properly steward these products.

If a pathogen becomes resistant to an AI after repeated exposure, it is likely to become resistant to all products employing that same MOA. To help protect against resistance, superintendents should take care to rotate and/or tank-mix products with different MOAs.

With so many products available, it can be challenging to develop a rotation schedule that effectively manages resistance long-term. So, developing a pre-season agronomic program is

critical for building a solid foundation. Planning ahead also allows for increased savings during fall early order programs. Many manufacturers offer free programs based on geography and turf type that help superintendents rotate products, identify key pests, and prepare turf to perform well during high-stress periods. Visit GreenCast Online.com/Programs to see sample programs.

For disease control, using products that attack fungal cells at multiple sites, like Daconil Action and Secure Action fungicides, are pivotal parts of a long-term strategy. Known as multi-site inhibitors, these products are significantly less likely to develop resistance than fungicides that only work at a single site. They can also be applied more frequently, which makes them foundational for agronomic programs.

Multi-site contact fungicides are particularly important for dollar spot control. Currently, six chemistries are primarily used to control this disease, including the popular SDHI chemistries, and four carry a medium to high risk for resistance. Knowing this, superintendents should not make more than two sequential applications of the same chemistry and rotate them with low- or medium-risk chemistries.

Lastly, superintendents should aim to make preventive rather than curative applications. Pests are easier to prevent and preventive strategies save valuable time and budget. Curative applications require higher rates, tighter intervals and can accelerate resistance as the pest population is exposed to the AI.

For a golf course, properly managing resistance is an important agronomic management practice and a critical business management strategy. If products aren't used correctly and resistance develops, there can be serious long-term consequences for a course and for the whole industry. Be sure your course is doing its part to steward chemistries for long-term success for your business and your customers.



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## Addressing The Issues

By Ronnie Miles  
Director of Advocacy  
NGCOA

# Service Animals, Need or Desire?

Golf course operators, like so many in the service industry, are facing another challenge: Customers wanting to bring loving pets with them wherever they go. In years past, it was commonly known that animals were not permitted inside businesses or on golf courses. The only exceptions were seeing-eye dogs.

Today, we are hearing about new groups of animals that owners feel are also protected and should be afforded the same privileges. The Americans with Disabilities Association (ADA) is the only federal organization that defines service animals protected by federal law.

Currently, in addition to Service Animals as defined by the ADA, there are Emotional Service Animals (ESA) and Therapeutic Animals (TA). For most of us over 50 years of age, seeing-eye dogs were the only protected animals. But today the ADA no longer attempts to define the type of animal that can be trained and serve as a service animal. This is also true of ESAs and TAs.

An emotional support animal is a companion animal that provides therapeutic benefit, such as alleviating or mitigating some symptoms, to an individual with a mental or psychiatric disability. Emotional support animals are typically dogs and cats, but may include other animals.

Therapeutic animals provide people with therapeutic contact, usually in a clinical setting, to improve their physical, social, emotional and/or cognitive functioning. Like ESAs, these animals provide their owner services that include relieving loneli-

ness, helping with depression, anxiety and certain phobias, but do not have special training to perform tasks that assist people with disabilities.

The challenge for golf course operators is how to limit access to animals protected by the ADA.

Regardless of what category the animal may serve, businesses are prohibited from asking the customer what disability they have which warrants permitting them to bring their animal onto the property. The law does, however, allow you to ask questions pertaining to the animal. Permitted questions are:

1. Is the animal required because of a disability?
2. What work or task has the animal been trained to perform?

In addition to these questions, service animals are required to be under the control of the owner. This requires they be on leash at all times unless the owner's disability prohibits the use of the leash. Animals must also be housebroken. If animals are found to lack the discipline of a trained service animal, business operators are permitted to request the animal be removed from the property. The guest can be denied service if they fail to keep their animal under control.

The National Restaurant Association has published a list of frequently asked questions, which can also be applied to golf course operations. Many states have created laws that may further define the level of protection to support animals not covered under the ADA.

The NGCOA supports all individuals with disabilities and encourages members to ensure their staff and facilities are prepared to meet their special needs.

Additional information and resources are available by contacting me at [rmiles@ngcoa.org](mailto:rmiles@ngcoa.org)

## GOLF INDUSTRY Calendar

2019

**July 23-24**  
**MCOR19**  
Monterey Plaza Hotel  
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[mcor-retreat.com](http://mcor-retreat.com)

**August 12-14**  
**PGA 2019 Fashion  
& Demo Experience**  
The Venetian Hotel/TopGolf  
Las Vegas, Nevada  
[pgalassvegas.com/Home/](http://pgalassvegas.com/Home/)

**November 17-19**  
**Golf Business Canada**  
Niagara Falls, Ontario  
[ngcoa.ca/conference](http://ngcoa.ca/conference)

2020

**January 20-22**  
**Golf Business Conference**  
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Convention Center  
Orlando, Florida  
[golfbusinessconference.com](http://golfbusinessconference.com)

**January 21-24**  
**PGA Merchandise Show**  
Orange County  
Convention Center  
Orlando, Florida  
[golfbusinessconference.com](http://golfbusinessconference.com)

**January 25-30**  
**Golf Industry Show**  
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## Coalition Concerns

By Jared Williams  
Managing Director  
GOLF USA TEE TIME COALITION

### STOP: Use Our Cease & Desist Templates

You may be reading that header wondering what exactly I am referencing. But if you listened to the June 7 Golf Business Podcast you may have an idea of what I mean when I say “cease & desist templates.”

As explained in that podcast episode (which I encourage you to check out – <https://accelerate.ngcoa.org/education/podcasts>), the Coalition is helping golf courses draft responses to vendors/competitors that have compromised their course brand.

These responses typically come in the form of cease & desist letters. A cease & desist letter is a document sent to an individual or business to stop purportedly illegal activity (“cease”) and not to restart it (“desist”). And the good news for golf courses is that you don’t have to have a registered trademark or a direct relationship with a vendor to enforce your rights via the cease & desist.

After identifying the most common types of infringements or issues that a golf course might fall victim to, we worked with a nationally recognized law firm to develop cease & desist templates for golf courses to use at no cost. That’s right a completely free service to golf courses. The entire process to have a cease & desist template drafted on behalf of your course requires a couple minutes of your time. All you need is the contact information of the infringing party. The process is about as simple as signing up for an email subscription.

The only things you need to do to are

visit [teetimecoalition.org/ceaseanddesist](http://teetimecoalition.org/ceaseanddesist) and select the appropriate infringement: trademark infringement, domain name infringement, keyword/sponsor ad infringement or multiple infringements.

You may recall back in 2017, we released a series of whitepapers that identified the differences between these types of infringements. These examples are also listed on the website at [teetimecoalition.org/resources](http://teetimecoalition.org/resources). These three important whitepapers on protecting your brand were developed by the same law firm that drafted the cease & desist templates. These whitepapers provide a better understanding of the benefits of owning a federal trademark registration, what keyword advertising is, and the many ways golf course names are being used as keywords.

The whitepapers serve as a primer to help you identify which template you should fill out. But as always, the Tee Time Coalition is here to help and is happy to listen to your concerns and suggest the appropriate template based on your specific situation. Additionally, you can use 1-2-1 Marketing’s free course report to diagnose whether or not your course brand is being compromised in any way – another free service that could be helpful in submitting the correct information for the template.

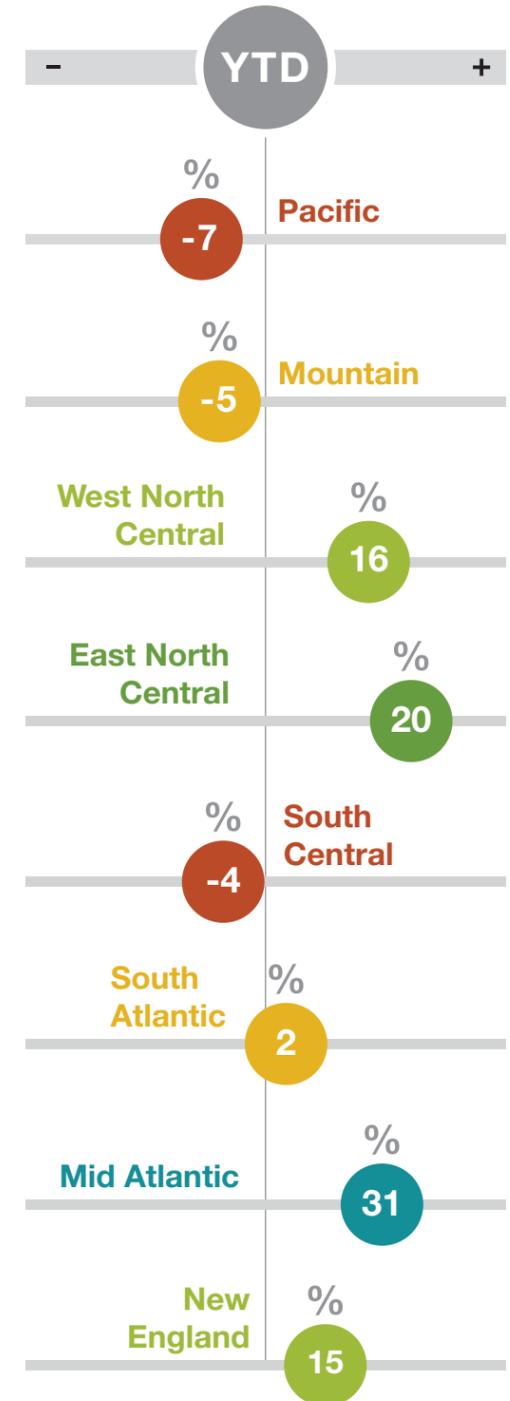
This is a full-service solution offered to golf courses, at no cost. Please take a moment to listen to the podcast, visit the website and review the template. After filling out the form, a completed cease & desist with all relevant information will be emailed to you directly, which you can then send to the infringing party.

If you have any questions on this, please do not hesitate to contact me, [jwilliams@teetimecoalition.org](mailto:jwilliams@teetimecoalition.org).

## Rounds Played

April 2019

Data percentage compared to same period last year.



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Jason Bangild, general manager at Gearhart Golf Links, faced problems with an elk herd.

## THE START

NEWS & VIEWS TO PROPEL YOUR BUSINESS

By Scott Kauffman

### Critters Gone Wild

Wildlife both bane and beauty for golf courses

Many golf courses pride themselves on being wildlife habitats and stewards of the environment. Some even belong to the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program, branding themselves as “certified sanctuaries.”

Golf courses around the country deal with all types of wildlife from deer to elk to wild boars to alligators and armadillos, to name a few.



And what golfer doesn't enjoy spotting rare bighorn sheep during a round in the desert or seeing monster alligators as part of Florida's fauna?

Once these close encounters with critters become a nuisance, however, it's no longer just a cool Instagram moment. Now it becomes an operational nightmare, what with courses being consumed with Canada geese fouling up fairways or Arizona elk messing with flagsticks and tearing up greens.

When these course critters become outright threatening to the consumer and surrounding public, it paints a much different picture for that "great walk spoiled." Indeed, just in the past couple of months, growing herds of threatening Oregon elk have put Gearhart Golf Links in the public spotlight and endangered peninsular bighorn sheep are becoming headline news in the Palm Springs-area enclaves of PGA West and The Quarry.

To be sure, from wild residential pigs seen on a recent tweet from superintendent Kevin Welker at Iberostar Golf México near Cancun to destructive armadillos tearing up a Texas course, solutions certainly vary in how best to manage and/or embrace Mother Nature's wandering wildlife. Some of the course remedies are unique, to say the least.

One course in Colorado was so tired of the local elk population chomping on its greens, the maintenance staff successfully deterred future elk grazing after using turkey manure from a local turkey processing plant. Others have gone shopping at The Pee Mart, considered America's first discount urine store where "100 percent real, undiluted predator pee and animal urine" can be purchased and used on the course as another deterrent.

When Jason Bangild became Gearhart's new general manager/director of golf eight years ago, he remembers buying jugs of coyote urine and spraying it on decoy coyotes to help ward off the dozen or so elk that lived nearby.

"For a couple weeks we didn't see as many, but after spending \$100 a jug, you start to ask yourself, 'Is this stuff really coyote urine and is it really working?'" Bangild says with a smile. "After a while it became a little goofy because we'd end up with these rubber coyotes out on the course. Eventually a couple of the coyotes went missing so that was the end of that."

In the case of PGA West and the Quarry, swanky gated golf communities in La Quinta, California, it's not as comical now that bighorn sheep are meandering along congested neighborhood thoroughfares and grazing



on their finely manicured private club greens. Several sheep have died from various accidents.

On April 27, the Coachella Valley Conservation Commission approved an environmental impact report that clears the path for building a \$3.5 million fence to contain the animals and keep them from further harm, according to a story in the Desert Sun.

Back at Gearhart Golf Links along the northern Oregon coast, Bangild is equally concerned now that his elk population is getting out of control at his course contiguous to several housing developments in the small town of Gearhart. The historic course, which dates back to 1888, always had the occasional elk sighting and tourists in particular marveled at the 1,500- to 2,500-pound animals.

## "Is this stuff really coyote urine and is it really working?"

But now that the herd has easily quadrupled in size over the last 20 years, what was once just a "bit annoying" when they would trample the course," Bangild says is now the talk of the town and several state agencies after one neighbor's prized bird dog was trampled and killed.

As course owner Tim Boyle put it in a letter to the local mayor, according to a local newspaper story: "The incident is just the most recent in a long series of interactions with these large animals whose populations have exploded and who have no natural predators. The elk population is now at the stage where injuries to humans are inevitable."

Another inevitability, at least for many courses along the eastern seaboard, is dealing with pesky Canada geese that flock to courses' open waters, "creating a disgusting mess for the maintenance crew and golfers," as Segregansett Country Club (Massachusetts) office manager Kate Brown describes it.

At Brown's previous club, Poquoy Brook Golf Club in nearby Lakeville, Massachusetts, the course hired Cape Cod-based Border Bay Junction Kennel and its "fowl play goose patrol" comprised of mostly very successful and entertaining border collies. The first year was fairly expensive, Brown



"We have a family of squirrels who steal golf balls," says Allison George of Toad Valley Golf Course in Iowa. "This is a real photo taken on our course."

says, but the estimated \$3,000-\$4,000 investment was worth it.

"After a month or so, the geese began to recognize the truck as it crested the hill and would take off immediately," Brown recalls. "It got to the point where the driver would have to stop at the entrance and let the dogs out because they were becoming increasingly frustrated by not being able to chase them. ... The dogs were relentless and extremely quick. And, when the geese would retreat to the water to get away from the dogs, the driver would get in a kayak and chase them back out."

"By the second year, there were only a handful of geese who hadn't got the word, and they were easy to send the message to. After that, it only required occasional visits to keep the situation under control. All in all, it was a very successful method for us. Not so much for a neighboring course who became the home of choice for the geese we had evicted." 🦁

Scott Kauffman is a golf business writer and the managing director of Aloha Media Group

*A couple of years ago we found an Arabian horse tied to a tree near the river adjacent to hole number 8 of our golf course. There was a bucket of water with a sign that said, "Please don't take, I will be back for my horse in a couple of hours." The horse was absolutely beautiful, but very stressed. Me nor my staff felt comfortable approaching the horse. But it was quite a show! Of course, everyone wanted to see what was going on, taking pictures, etc., which as you can imagine affected our pace of play for the day. We called the Division of Wildlife and they sent a horse expert to our location. She said this horse was extremely valuable and didn't believe anyone would leave this beautiful animal as they did. As it turned out, the horse was stolen and the perpetrator had left to find food for his new found valuable commodity. Well, as it turns out, he didn't keep the horse, nor did he return to his house. He went to jail. And the beautiful animal was returned to its rightful owner.*

**Robert Spada**  
BROKEN TEE GOLF COURSE  
ENGLEWOOD, COLORADO

By Steve Eubanks

## In an otherwise untamed area, how do you manage golf and wildlife when one is bound to encroach upon the other?

**Fowler:** We are not Audubon certified but we adhere to a great number of the Audubon Society's criteria regarding wildlife. We put out as many notifications as we can warning people to not feed the animals, especially the bears. We also provide plenty of green space and habitat for the wildlife and we use environmentally friendly chemicals on the golf course so as not to harm any species. But the main thing is to constantly reinforce to the golfers, and to our homeowners, that you can watch the wildlife from a safe distance, but do not interact. These are wild animals. This is not a Disney movie."

**Johnson:** We take a position that the animals were here first and it's their habitat too, so we do everything we can to protect them. We follow all federal, state and local guidelines. We have deer 365



**Tom Fowler**

GENERAL MANAGER, BENT TREE COUNTRY CLUB AND COMMUNITY  
JASPER, GEORGIA



**John Johnson**

GENERAL MANAGER, RED LEDGES  
HEBER CITY, UTAH



days a year and elk that move in and out throughout the winter. So, it follows that we also have bobcats and mountain lions who are predatory and feed on the deer and elk. We also have coyotes

**"She felt something cold. She had bumped noses with a black bear."**

and jackrabbits and bald eagles. We just do our best to coexist. Of course, we don't allow people to actively chase the wildlife. We have a local firearms ordinance so people can't hunt on the property. And we put out guidelines for people to give the animals plenty of room. But we especially tell people to mind their pets. Don't have your dogs off-leash because they will chase the wildlife. That can create problems.

**Was there an incident where golf and wildlife intermingled that stands out?**

**Fowler:** We had a lady on our eighth hole who had hit her ball into a bush well into the trees right of the fairway. She saw her ball and went to retrieve it. As she leaned over to pick it up, she felt something cold. She had bumped noses with a black bear. Of course, it scared the bear as much as it did her, so both ran in different directions. But that's a lesson for everyone: Be aware of your surroundings when you're in an area known for wildlife.

**Johnson:** Last winter we had a large herd of elk run through the golf course. One of our members captured it on video. It looks like something out of National Geographic. You have hundreds of elk charging through the snow on the golf course. It was quite impressive.

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

## Innovation Insights

BY SCOTT KAUFFMAN

### CBD Getting Big Name Support

Innovation comes in different forms, shapes and sizes. At the PGA Merchandise Show, innovative golf products are usually found each year in the equipment or balls section. Then, of course, there are always the various technology solutions touting themselves as the next great tool to help drive more course efficiency and business.

This year, however, there was a conspicuous new product category: cannabidiol, commonly known as CBD.

There was Canadian company IsoSport, showcasing its Mend CBD Pain Relief Crème across from Club Car. Another new exhibitor was Shop CBD Now, which featured a variety of "natural hemp" products, including Pure Scientifics branded mint tincture/CBD oils.

And these were just a couple of CBD products spotted for the first time. To say these hemp-inspired exhibitors seemed out of place in golf business is an understatement considering most people probably associate hemp with that other derivative of the cannabis plant: THC or "pot."

Yet, if CBD companies have their way, these innovative health products might very well be the next must-have gimmick in every golf shop. To be sure, cannabidiol is the non-psychoactive compound found in cannabis and not considered a controlled substance at the federal level.

The production and use of CBD took off once President Donald Trump signed the 2018 Farm Bill and legalized hemp - defined as cannabis with less than 0.3 percent THC. Since then, CBD practitioners are popping up everywhere like weeds.

Perhaps Colorado-based Functional Remedies began the golf-related CBD "buzz" when it announced a partnership back in January with 10-time PGA Tour



Bubba Watson and his caddy, Ted Scott.

Champions winner Scott McCarron. By mid-May, McCarron won his second tour championship in three weeks, and more than 90 players on the PGA Tour and PGA Champions Tour were using the same EndoSport hemp oil as part of their daily routines, according to Functional Remedies.

McCarron said the oil "helps my mind stay focused and my body recover, so I can always play my best."

Now, PGA Tour star and two-time Masters champ Bubba Watson is the latest golfer to embrace cannabidiol after joining forces with cbdMD Inc. as a new brand ambassador and user. As part of the three-year partnership announced May 1 by the publicly traded company (NYSE YCBD), Watson was wearing the company's logo on his signature cap during the recent PGA Championship.

"Honestly, it's a thrill," says Martin Sumichrast, chairman and CEO for cbdMD. "Bubba is a legend and when he says that cbdMD products help him to feel his best, well, it makes us very proud to be his partner. He also talks about CBD extending his longevity in sports. That's something that will resonate with all athletes and all sports leagues."

Sumichrast says demand for high-quality CBD is growing exponentially, citing a study by the Brightfield Group that projects the CBD market will grow to \$22 billion by 2022, from only \$600 million last year.

"Our customers want to feel better but can't afford to risk failing a drug test," Sumichrast points out. "Unlike most brands on the market today, cbdMD has no THC ... we eliminate the risk of failing a drug test due to THC."

Watson, who just turned 40, is a true believer, saying, "I've personally felt the benefits of cbdMD's products."

*Scott Kauffman is the regular technology columnist for Golf Business. You can contact him with tech news at [iwritegolf@gmail.com](mailto:iwritegolf@gmail.com).*

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## ONLINE More golf industry news from the web



### DIY Video

NGCOA partnered with Momentum Video on a series showing golf course owners how to create quality video for their marketing without breaking the bank. You'll find the videos on the [golfbusiness.com](http://golfbusiness.com) homepage.



### MCOR19

The NGCOA's annual multi-course owners and resort operators gathering is slated for July 23-24 in Monterey, California. To learn more about this event, go to [mcor-retreat.com](http://mcor-retreat.com).



### Buying into the Game

If you missed this feature from the June issue of Golf Business magazine, check online at [golfbusiness.com](http://golfbusiness.com) to learn about how women are significant players in revenue generation.

## WHAT'S HOT In My Shop



Leigha Turner • Director of Retail  
Baltusrol Golf Club • Springfield, New Jersey



### Callaway Custom and Novelty Truvis

In 2018, we introduced novelty Callaway Truvis Balls, both the Stars and Stripe and Shamrock versions to a great response. This unique SKU was purchased by the casual and serious golfer alike, both for personal use as well as gifting for parties for Memorial Day, Fourth of July or simple celebrations of patriotism. We followed with a custom version of our own utilizing our logo.

### Levelwear Casual Cottons

We maintain a full assortment of Baltusrol logoed Levelwear short sleeve and long sleeve T-shirts, and custom hoodies are among our most popular items in the golf shop all year long. Great options for members to celebrate the logo in a more casual way off property and an amazing gift option for those buying for non-golfers and golfers alike. We have men's, women's and youth options.



### Sydney Elizabeth Skorts

We introduced Sydney's skorts in 2018 with amazing response. The skorts are a great combination of fit and fashion, suiting nearly all body types and a look that catches the eye of most. All the prints are built to easily go with a white shirt. This combination of versatility has made it a new member favorite.



What's Hot In My Shop is produced in cooperation with the Association of Golf Merchandisers ([agmgolf.org](http://agmgolf.org))

Accessory

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David Pursell, president, CEO and co-founder of Pursell Farms, says the resort started as a marketing strategy for the fertilizer business, but "morphed into a family resort with golf at the center."

"We had to figure out how we were going to survive with a gorgeous golf course out in the middle of nowhere."

DAVID PURSELL



© 2019 Photo by Tomiko



By Sally J. Sportsman

## Looking Beyond the Science

FarmLinks goes from Research Course to Resort Destination

**E**

environmental stewardship has become a watchword in the golf industry, affecting multiple facets of golf courses, including resort courses. From initial design to renovation, from conservation practices to policies during play, facilities are ever conscious of striking a balance between safeguarding natural surroundings and providing a memorable golf experience.

While every golf resort has distinguishing characteristics, FarmLinks at Pursell Farms in Sylacauga, Alabama, stands alone in its distinctive history and attributes with environmental stewardship one of its guiding principles.

"We never intended to be a resort," says David Pursell, president, CEO and co-founder of Pursell Farms, who is also an accomplished artist. "At first we used the golf course as a

FarmLinks Golf Club at Pursell Farms, nestled in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains, was built in 2002.



Photo courtesy of FarmLinks at Pursell Farms

marketing strategy for our fertilizer business, but we morphed into a family resort with golf at the center.”

Pursell Farms, nestled in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains, is a four-generation family endeavor. DeWitt Alexander Parker, Pursell’s great grandfather, was the first general manager of what then was known as the Sylacauga Fertilizer Co., founded in 1904. In 1959, the fertilizer business officially changed its name to Parker Fertilizer Co. James “Jimmy” Pursell, David Pursell’s father, helped market the company’s Sta-Green specialty fertilizer products to stores and nurseries all over the Southeast. A milestone setting the company apart from the competition was the development of slow-release and controlled-release fertilizers. The company, which had made a name for itself, became Pursell Industries.

In 1997, David Pursell assumed the role of president and CEO of Pursell Technologies. His visionary idea was to invite the fertilizer’s end users, golf course superintendents, to come see the product in action firsthand. To this end, FarmLinks Golf Club was built in 2002.

“It was the world’s only research and demonstration golf course,” Pursell says.

The course was designed by Hurdzan-Fry Environmental Golf Design Inc. (now Hurdzan Golf). Dr. Col. Michael Hurdzan (R-USAR Special Forces) is well known in golf course design for his expertise in environmentally sensitive course architecture. Today, FarmLinks consistently is ranked among the best public golf courses in Alabama.

“The golf course was to be routed through at least four distinct environmental zones: the open meadows, the ‘mountain,’ the woods and the wetland areas,” says Hurdzan. “We did lots of al-

ternate routings and would review them with the Pursell family and their team until it was felt that we were maximizing the potential of the land.

“David was the driving force, but Jimmy and Chris, his parents, were deeply involved because they loved the land so much and were willing to permit the golf course to allow guests to enjoy the farm as much as they did.”

Groups of golf course superintendents, no more than 15 at a time, were invited to Pursell Farms to view the efficacy of the fertilizer products and learn first-hand about their technology, application and environmental-protection features. The superintendents, who stayed free of charge at Pursell Farms for three days and two nights, were welcomed with Southern hospitality, including home cooking. Two groups a week arrived over 42 weeks each year.

“It was essentially relationship marketing,” says Pursell. “We had a high chance of getting the superintendents to understand our product and to trust us.

“We were nobody. We started our visitation strategy in a small way in the 1990s, then built Parker Lodge, where the superintendents stayed.

“They felt as if they had ‘arrived.’”

Steve Mona, executive director of WE ARE GOLF, has visited FarmLinks at Pursell Farms on several occasions, from its grand opening to other events through the years.

“It served as a living laboratory of sorts, in terms of turfgrass research and other innovations,” Mona says. “The natural beauty of the property, along with its seclusion, not to mention the steady hand of David Pursell and his team, have also contributed significantly to its success.”

Pursell Industries, which grew ro-

bustly over the years, was sold in 2006, including the patents and machinery.

“As everyone knows, golf took a hit not long afterwards,” says Pursell. “We had to decide what to do with the assets we didn’t sell: the farm, the golf course, the lodges and the capital projects on the farm.

“We had to figure out how we were going to survive with a gorgeous golf course out in the middle of nowhere.”

The family decided to create a resort offering a unique and memorable experience. Today, Pursell Farms, a private business, has evolved into a premier regional family farm resort available for corporate retreats and leisure getaways. The unwavering goal is to provide guests with a superior experience.

Golf, although now just one of a myriad of activities at Pursell Farms, remains at its center. Over the past four years, both overall golf revenue, as well as golf revenue per player, has risen 25 percent, according to Pursell, even though rounds have been flat at 19,000 rounds per year. About 25 tournaments a year are hosted at the golf course. About 25 percent of the resort’s annual revenue is from golf.

“Our top-line revenue more than doubled the first year we were open,” Pursell says, “and we expect it to triple by two years from now. That’s resort-wide.”

FarmLinks at Pursell Farms, which focuses on exceptional customer service and course conditions, provides premium tee times for golfers staying on property. Each guest room has its own golf cart. Public golf is allowed once resort guests have secured their desired tee times. 🏌️

*Sally J. Sportsman is an Orlando, Florida-based freelance golf writer.*



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Photo courtesy of Izatys Resort

## Golf and Pickleball: A Perfect Combo

By Sally J. Sportsman

Pickleball, until recently played mostly at private clubs, increasingly is finding its way into golf resorts. With an eye toward attracting new visitors, resorts are realizing that pickleball adds a certain sparkle to their offerings.

"There is no doubt pickleball is one of the fastest-growing sports in the country, especially in the southern states, played by lots of snowbirds," says Tim Murphy, the golf professional at Izatys Resort in Onamia, Minnesota. "Here at Izatys we want to get in on the ground level introducing it to people up north."

The six pickleball courts at Izatys were constructed in 2015 by taking out two of the resort's four tennis courts and converting them for pickleball. By setting the new courts right over the tennis surfaces, the resort was able to keep the construction cost at \$70,000. Lights are being considered for future installation, but the desire not to disturb the nearby homes will be a factor in the decision.

"Pickleball is not a revenue producer for us," Murphy says. "Rather, it's a service to our guests and a very successful marketing tool."

"The game is in great demand and is much appreciated."

David Meade, pickleball coordinator at Pinehurst Resort in Pinehurst, North Carolina, notes that the game, available on eight courts at the resort since 2012, is popular with family members who don't play golf. Six to eight more pickleball courts with lights are being discussed for possible opening in 2021 for potential major tournament play as well as use by resort guests.

Revenue from the game has climbed 60 percent in the last 18 months at the resort, according to Meade, and is expected to grow 60 percent more in the coming year. Lessons and clinics produce a significant portion of the revenue. About 20 percent of resort guests request intense-level pickleball clinics. And many golfers head to the pickleball courts at the end of their rounds.

"Pinehurst Resort spends a lot in capital improvements all the time," says Matt Downing, director of tennis for Pinehurst Resort, who oversees pickleball.

## DESTINATIONS

"We are looking at enhancing our pickleball program, as it's such a popular sport. "Pickleball may not be the highest priority among capital-improvement submissions, but we believe the expense of adding more courts would be justified by revenue in a few years' time."

At Palmetto Dunes Oceanfront Resort on Hilton Head Island, South Carolina, the 16 pickleball courts, all lighted for night play, were built in 2015 and have been a revenue producer ever since.

"I thought our pickleball program would grow quickly, but it is happening much faster than I envisioned," says John Kerr, director of tennis and pickleball at Palmetto Dunes. "Our business model is built on the cross-over success we have had from tennis."

Daily round-robin tournaments are held, with a professional on site to match players with others of their skill levels. There often is a wait list, with as many as 100 guests signing up for court time. Players are 65 percent resort guests and 35 percent local residents, Kerr says, and they intermingle for play. Clinics also are a reliable source of revenue. The resort is looking into adding more courts to meet the rising demand.

In the first quarter of 2017, pickleball revenue at Palmetto Dunes grew 35 percent over the previous year. In the first quarter of 2018, the increase was 45 percent, driven by the growing number of players.

"Sales of pickleball merchandise in our pro shop, including equipment and apparel, are a highly successful source of revenue for us," says Kerr. "Every time I come up with a figure predicting revenue growth for our resort from pickleball, the actual number turns out to be three or four times higher than I anticipated."

"The sky seems to be the limit."

Sally J. Sportsman is an Orlando, Florida-based freelance golf writer.



Treetops Resort in Gaylord, Michigan offers a short-course alternative with Threetops, a 9-hole par-3 course.

## DESTINATIONS



Photos courtesy of Treetops Resort

By Sally J. Sportsman

# Resort Guests Flock to Alternative Courses

**G**olf is evolving in ways few could have imagined. As part of this evolution, short courses, including 9-hole and par-3 layouts, are growing in popularity throughout the U.S., representing an exceptional opportunity for golf resorts.

“You don’t have to have your best game to enjoy playing a short course,” says Patrick Dill, PGA, director of golf at the Omni Orlando Resort at Championsgate in Championsgate, Florida.

The Omni Orlando Resort at Championsgate has a lighted, 9-hole par-3 golf course called Champions 9, built in 2004 in conjunction with the hotel. As the world headquarters for the David Leadbetter Golf Academy, the resort attracts golfers from all over the world. Champions 9 is popular with guests of all ages and skill levels. Its significance has been evident since its inception. According to Dill, Champions 9 accounts for 30 percent of play at the resort, which also features two 18-hole courses.

“It’s a great amenity and a standout addition to the Academy,” Dill says.

Nighttime play is popular, often

with cocktail receptions and heavy hors d’oeuvres. Champions 9, which takes about an hour to an hour-and-a-half to play, is located near one of the resort’s outdoor banquet facilities, so the resort often coordinates the two functions.

“We use our short course as a highly effective way to help sell golf packages at the resort,” says Dill.

One of the first golf resorts to build a short course was Treetops Resort in Gaylord, Michigan, which has four 18-hole golf courses in addition to Threetops, a 9-hole par-3 course that was designed by Rick Smith and opened for play in 1992. With multiple elevation changes throughout, Threetops has been popular since opening day. From 1999-2006, Threetops hosted the Par-3 Shootout, a four-person skins game aired on ESPN featuring some of golf’s

most highly recognized PGA Tour players.

“Originally Threetops was planned as an extra amenity, but it soon became evident that some money could be made with it,” says Kevin McKinley, PGA, director of golf and ski operations at Treetops Resort.

Threetops takes 90 to 100 minutes to play. Doubles, foursomes, even eightsomes enjoy the course, day or night. While the layout isn’t lit, daylight lasts until nearly 10 p.m. in Gaylord during June and July. Threetops is promoted to groups booking the resort in advance as well as to guests upon arrival. As a result, the course is busy every day.

Threetops has hosted a four-day Patriot Golf Day event for 11 years, raising money for the Folds of Honor Foundation. It also hosts many other charity events, corporate outings and junior golf tournaments. Threetops accounts for 15 percent of the resort’s total golf revenue, a figure that remains fairly steady each year, says Dill.

“We are close to having too much play to be able to properly maintain the course,” Dill says. “We may increase the tee sizes or add tee boxes to accommodate more play.

“It would be worth the expense.”

*Sally J. Sportsman is an Orlando, Florida-based freelance golf writer.*



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Mike, his brothers Brian and Mark, and their parents, Michael and Roswitha, plus spouses and children are now all working to get the two courses ready for the golf season.



© 2019 Photo by Laura Peterson



“I told him he couldn’t destroy the golf course. We had to keep it.”

MIKE WIECK

By Steve Eubanks

# Leap of Faith

A Family Brings A Nebraska Course Back From The Dead

**he new owner of Fonner View Golf Course had to throw the greens mower out of gear to answer his phone.**

“Yeah, I’m between greens, so now’s a good time,” said Mike Wieck, whose enthusiasm pops with every sentence, even as he’s speaking over the rattle of a mower’s engine.

Wieck purchased his first golf course in his hometown of Grand Island, Nebraska, a year ago. Since then, he’s been in the midst of a crash course on how to resurrect a property that had already gone back to nature.

“I need to be out here to get these greens back in decent shape,” he said. “It’s taken a



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lot of work but we're getting there."

He's not much of a golfer, even though he has an associate degree in golf course management from a local community college. "Golfing is not my specialty," he said with a chuckle. "I've been in the land leveling business before this."

The "this" is the Wieck family's adventure that started when the Fonner View Golf Course, a 50-year-old, 9-hole facility that was once a social centerpiece in a town of 51,000 people, closed down and the property was about to be sold for a real estate development. The old owner, who, according to Wieck, had closed the course for health reasons, hired the Wiecks to grade and level the golf course for houses.

"I talked him out of it. I told him he couldn't destroy the golf course. We had to keep it," Wieck said. "I got a little bit of backing, not a lot. But it was enough and we decided to make a go of it."

Wieck had a little horticulture experience and he had run a small family business. A few family meetings later, the entire Wieck clan became course owners. "We're a close-knit family so that wasn't a real problem," Wieck said of convincing his brothers and parents to join him.

"It was out of the blue," he said. "We were either going to save it or it would have become a housing development. Usually if something becomes a housing development, it never goes back.

"It's a big undertaking. Fonner View actually closed in 2015, so we had our work cut out for us in getting it back. All the greens were dead. Our first week we hauled away 21 truckloads of (debris) off of 38 acres. Essentially, we had to replace all the greens. The fairways and the tee boxes were in fairly good shape. We had to mow everything and fertilize and the sprinkler system needed a lot of work."

The family - Mike's brothers, Brian and Mark, and their parents, Michael and Roswitha - do everything from cooking hotdogs to edging to bunkers. Call Fonner View on any given day and you either get an answering machine with Mike's voice telling you to leave your name if you want to sign up for league play, or someone named Wieck will answer the phone. Mark mows the fairways, Mike the greens.

Folks in the community have noticed. Even before the golf course reopened, the family reconfigured the bar, making it a year-round establishment (in the old days, the clubhouse closed in the winter). And they added a number of dartboards so they could run dart leagues in non-golf months.

"Everybody is glad that we brought it back," Wieck said. "The whole community has been supportive."

Sometimes a course succeeds on its design, sometimes on its location, sometimes a course makes it because the greens are perfect and lightning quick.

But sometimes - not always, but on occasion - a place succeeds because of the earnest enthusiasm and elbow grease of the owners.

In the case of Fonner View Golf Course, the Wieck family has given it their all. The public has noticed. League play is filling up, despite the fact that, as Mike Wieck said, "The greens are puttable, but we still need about a month before they're perfect."

Soon, the family will become a multiple-course owner. The Wood River Golf Course, which in the old days was the nearest competition to Fonner View, also closed due to mismanagement and neglect. The Wiecks bought it in the hopes of resurrecting both courses to create a vibrant one-two punch.

"My brothers and I are at Fonner View and our parents are, for right now, at Wood River," Wieck said. "After we got this (Fonner View), we thought they could accent each other, rather than be in a competition.

"We'll see. This is new for all of us."

With that, the greens mower revved out of idle, the squeal of hydraulic reels hitting turf drowning out all other noise. A man at work in his family's new business went back to work, doing whatever it takes to succeed. **FB**

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

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By Steve Eubanks

Lions Municipal Golf Course in Austin, Texas, dates back to 1923.



Photo provided by Lions Municipal

## SINGLES

# The Lasting Legacy of a Lone Star Lion

A lot of people try to organize their communities to save a local course. Sometimes it's out of self-interest – home values invariably plummet when golf goes to seed – and other times it's out of a sense of nostalgia or wanting the bond of the game to be passed on.

But rarely has golf royalty come out of the woodwork like it has on behalf of Lions Municipal Golf Course in Austin, Texas, the 140-acre golf course dating back to 1923.

Lions, or "the munny" as the regulars call it, is not a course that has fallen on hard times. Last year the city counted just north of 60,000 rounds on its 18 well-worn holes. All told through the years, the total number of rounds played at Lions stretches into the millions, hundreds of which were played by a couple of kids named Ben Crenshaw and Tom Kite, two of the game's superstars who are trying to save Lions now.

The reason it needs saving is the owner, the University of Texas, leased the land to the city for an extra year while a review board looks at other potential uses for the site. With housing a major issue in Austin, 140 prime acres near the University are ripe for development. There aren't enough cart fees, at any price, to counteract the highest-and-best-use argument in a city starved for condos.

"It's been a place people just revere," Crenshaw said. "It has a lot of strong feelings to it. Really sentimental. It makes you think about different places around the country that are losing their public golf courses. You think something is being taken away from the public. Of course I'm a golfer and I'm a big proponent of knowing it's made differences in people's lives. It's given people a reason to live in a lot of respects, a chance to be with your friends, to know the game. It's hard to believe that it would be gone."

Crenshaw grew up just three blocks from Lions. He made his first hole in one there as a 10-year-old. The two-time Masters champion has offered to redesign the course, restoring many of the original design elements from the 1920s. But the university has been noncommittal.

According to Scott Sayers, Crenshaw's longtime agent and a leader in the effort to save Lions Municipal, "The university says (the land) is worth \$100 million. Is it? That's debatable, but it could well be. So the city of Austin has a little bond money for the purchase of the land, maybe \$5-\$7 million, and the university does need some things from the city for their new medical school, some streets straightened and some additional land. We were hoping to be able to work at least a partial trade and get a lot of credit toward a possible purchase."

Once politicians are involved, anything can happen. But Lions has one thing going for it: A history that transcends the game.

One afternoon in 1950, two African-Americans who caddied at Austin Country Club showed up at Lions and teed off. Public golf, while not officially segregated, was understood to be a Caucasian game. The PGA of America even had a Caucasian-only clause in its bylaws. So, someone called

Austin Mayor Taylor Glass and asked what should be done.

Whether or not Glass understood the question or was too busy to give the matter much thought, to his credit he said, "Let them play."

Just like that, Lions became the first integrated golf course in Texas. Boxing champion Joe Louis gave an exhibition there not long afterward. Word spread and African-Americans from as far away as Louisiana and Arkansas came to Lions to play.

Actor Matthew McConaughey has played there and wants the place to be saved. So has former Texas football coach Mack Brown. They don't visit often. And they certainly don't visit City Hall.

The only nod to a campaign (other than the behind-the-scenes efforts of Sayers, Crenshaw and others) is a small sign in a yard nearby. It reads, "Save The Munny – The Heart of Austin Since 1924."

Maybe it will work. Maybe Lions Municipal will be the exception to progress. But as many a resident in many a city will tell you, planners, developers and politicians can cut out a heart without batting an eye.



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Pleasant Valley Golf Club in Connellsville, Pennsylvania, southeast of Pittsburgh, became a public course last year.



Photo provided by Pleasant Valley

## Private-To-Public Conversions A Salvation For Some

BY STEVE EUBANKS

**T**hose mature enough to have lived through the 1980s remember an old American Express ad campaign with the tagline, “Membership Has Its Privileges.”

That kind of ad seems silly now. It would definitely be counter productive, no matter what product you were trying to sell. The generation born after Reagan’s first inauguration views exclusivity – once a key selling point for golf clubs throughout America – not as an asset, but as a character flaw. Most Americans under 40 recoil at the notion of being in an exclusive club. Friday night formals at the country club were for their parents and grandparents – not for them.

Every town of any size once had “the country club,” an aspirational place with layered social implications, exactly the kinds of things about which millennials make ironic jokes. So, with the concept of small-town “private” teetering on the edge, it should come as no surprise that more and more traditional private courses are opening their doors or full-on converting to public facilities.

The conversion isn’t occurring just at those figure-8 courses built in the go-go ’90s and squeezed into low-lying flood plains of 1,000-home residential developments. Some of the stateliest and most exclusive clubs in any given market are finding the old membership model to be outmoded.

Case in point is Pleasant Valley Golf Club in Connellsville, Pennsylvania, southeast of Pittsburgh. For 90 years, Pleasant Valley Country Club was one of the most exclusive in the area, where the captains of industry – steel titans, mining tycoons, medical professionals and on and on – dined, mingled and played golf.

A year ago the club sold to a local businessman named Tully Shallenberger, who immediately took “country club” out of the name and opened what is now Pleasant Valley Golf Club to the public.

According to Ken Ivory, the club’s director of operations, “Thirty years ago, Pleasant Valley was the premier country club in the area.” Now, the sale

and conversion to a public facility was, according to Ivory, “Done out of necessity, like most courses. It was either give it to the bank or take a very fair offer to buy the place.”

Connellsville lags the rest of the U.S. in economic growth and development. The unemployment rate is two points higher than the national average and household incomes trail the rest of the country by almost 38 percent. As had happened from Michigan to Ohio to Missouri and beyond, once the social panache of belonging to a country club vanishes, the model for old-line clubs like Pleasant Valley becomes unsustainable.

But golf is still in demand. In fact, under the new public model, Pleasant Valley is flourishing. A new restaurant and bar called The Locker Room has opened in the area of the clubhouse where the old member locker rooms sat and another restaurant has opened on the second floor.

Banquet rooms that sat mostly empty for the last two decades are filled with golf simulators which keep the place hopping, even in the off season.

The golf course is also undergoing extensive renovations, including the addition of a couple of island and peninsula greens, and a complete bunker project.

Kim Robson, who was hired as director of club operations last fall, said, “This (change) has really taken off and flourished, and not just as a bar but as an eatery in the area.”

Ivory agreed. “This place is more of a country club now today than it was five years ago,” he said.

From an amenity and activities standpoint, Ivory is right. Pleasant Valley is a vibrant part of the suburban Pittsburgh community. But now it’s there for the entire community, not just a select few.

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

Kevin Osgood and Jay Miller are with Newton, Massachusetts-based Sterling Golf Management Inc., which operates nine facilities throughout New England.

# Raising Capital

Owners, lenders get creative with finance

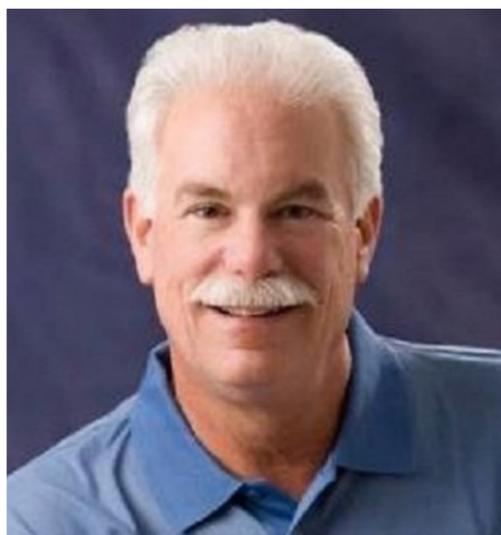
Photo by Stephen Sherman

**B**y the time this article is published, the U.S. economy should be starting a record 11th consecutive year of economic expansion with no immediate signs of a downturn in growth any time soon. Indeed, after surpassing in June the 10-year mark since the last U.S. recession – matching America’s longest period of positive economic growth from March 1991 to March 2001 – the country was coming off a remarkable May labor statistics report with 263,000 new jobs added and an unemployment rate that dropped to its lowest level since December 1969 (3.6 percent).

Undoubtedly, the decades-long economic growth cycle has improved the well being of many Americans and certainly shored up financial conditions at golf courses reeling from years of systemic industry issues (read: course oversupply and static participation).

Nonetheless, have these positive macro-economic conditions really made it easier for course owners in general to forge stronger financial footings for the future?

Courses are consistently pitched with revenue-generating recommendations, solutions and capital improvement projects. And arguably there is no better time to invest in golf’s future than now, what with a number of attractive



“It’s seriously no different today than it was in 2008.”

- Jerry Sager  
First National of America

or the cash-flow nature of high-end private clubs and resorts, how does one actually come up with money to purchase fleets of new Club Car or Yamaha vehicles, re-imagine driving ranges into sexy, new Toptracer ranges or undergo major irrigation renovations?

In other words, is access to capital and the flow of financing finally turning in golf’s favor? Not quite, depending on whom you ask and what you want.

Especially since the overall golf industry still occupies somewhat fragile turf in the economic eyes of mainstream underwriters.

technology innovations, entertainment solutions or new amenities that seem to be drawing a new generation into the industry.

Yet, that old adage, “It takes money

to make money,” echoes through the halls of maintenance facilities, clubhouses and pro shops. And for those courses that might not have the capital clout of large management companies

### Who is Funding Projects?

From the financial perspective of senior managing director Jerry Sager of First National of America, however, nothing’s really changed in the 30 years his firm has specialized in golf and hospitality-related business loans. It just comes down to really understanding the nuances of the many golf sub-markets within every major market, Sager points out, and doing your fundamental due diligence.

“It’s seriously no different today than it was in 2008,” says Sager, whose New York-based firm has underwritten \$2.7 billion of specialized asset class real estate financing since 1989. “If it’s a good loan and a good project and there’s debt service coverage in a logical market, the loan’s going to get done. ... Ten years ago, if you had a decent FICO score and you needed a new automobile you could go out and buy it. And if you wanted to finance it or lease it you

could finance it or lease it because you were a good credit risk. Right?”

“So, here we are today, in what is theoretically a better economic environment, according to Washington. Maybe it is; maybe it isn’t. Guess what? If you go out to buy an automobile today, and you’re the same credit (profile) you were 10 years ago, you’re going to get the same loan. It’s no different in the golf industry.”

For instance, when member-owned Boca Lago Country Club in Boca Raton, Florida, was looking for a lifeline two years ago prior to being sold, First National was there to “get them over the hump” with a \$1.5 million loan, according to Sager, enabling the membership to keep the club open during its transition.

To be sure, when it comes to purchasing an outright course, there remain no national lenders and very few local or regional financial insti-

tutions – if any – willing to dip their capital back into the business. Lack of large-scale institutional financing notwithstanding, longtime course owner Kevin Osgood, whose Newton, Massachusetts-based Sterling Golf Management Inc. operates nine facilities throughout New England, does acknowledge the rest of the business is in a better place when it comes to adding equipment, technology or new amenities.

“You’re in much better position now than you were 10 years ago and 15 years ago, without a question,” says Osgood, past president and 17-year board member of the New England GCOA. “At least here in New England, we are past the bottom of the golf market crashing. That 2011-2012 time frame.

“Prior to that we could not flat-line budget. We had to budget that we were going to potentially do less greens fees or less membership sales



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“You’re in much better position now than you were 10 years ago and 15 years ago, without a question.”

- Kevin Osgood  
Sterling Golf Management



the next year. And then 2011-12 hit. We stabilized the market and then by 2014-16, we’ve been able to actually project that we might do a percent or couple percent higher in greens fees.”

### Turn on the Waterworks

What that means for Sterling Golf and other owner/operators is being able to upgrade aging course infrastructure or technology sooner rather than later. And one area of the golf business where capital is flowing like never before is irrigation systems.

Case in point is Rain Bird Corp., a privately held company that can act as its own bank and irrigation company, strategically offering a host of creative and customizable “turn-key” solutions based on the course’s cash-flow needs, for example. Toro Co., meanwhile, continues to leverage its turf equipment finance partners as a way to incentivize owners to purchase new control systems or pump stations.

According to Toro Senior Marketing Manager Mike Read, one of the long-standing challenges in financing irrigation-only projects is the reluctance of many banks to take on these deals because it’s not easy to repossess pipes and parts stuck underneath the ground. Rain Bird, on the other hand, has a competitive edge with its “non-traditional” banking tactics.

“Rain Bird’s financing program is unique in the industry to finance complete irrigation systems – including labor, materials, pump stations and infrastructure,” says Stuart Hackwell, national sales manager for Rain Bird’s



golf division. “This program enables courses to pay over an extended period of time. Sales through Rain Bird financing are increasing exponentially in recent years, and I would encourage any golf course to evaluate whether financing is a possible solution to help with their irrigation needs.”

Irrigation specialist Tony Abshire of longtime Rain Bird distributor Sanford, Florida-based FIS Outdoor is busier than ever helping finance those “smaller courses” where 30- to 40-year-old irrigation systems are nowhere near as energy- and water-efficient compared with today’s newest Rain Bird systems.

“What a lot of these older courses find is they save enough money to almost make their payment for the brand-new

irrigation system off the efficiencies of the new systems,” says Abshire.

Cypresswood Golf and Country Club in Winter Haven, Florida, is a perfect example. The 18-hole course ownership recently replaced its 38-year-old system with brand-new parts and technology and the entire irrigation project – labor and materials included – was \$495,000, according to Abshire.

Abshire said the course financed it over a period of 84 months with monthly payments being “less than \$2,000.”

“With the new system, I’m saving them more than \$2,000 a month in electricity and water,” Abshire adds. “If it was just me in the irrigation business, I’d sell every one of them (courses). But the problem is our competitors manu-



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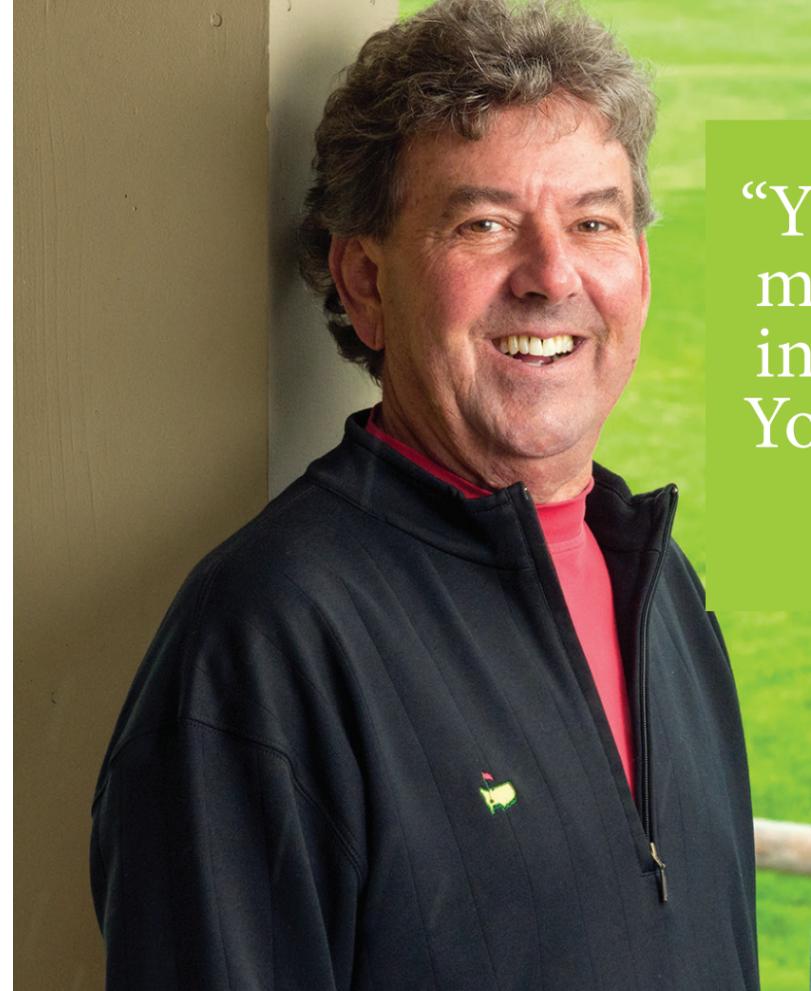
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“You know how you make a million dollars in the golf business? You start with \$10 million.”

- Jay Miller  
Past president of the California GCOA

for the company's portfolio. One small example was switching out some of the course merchandise, namely the FootJoy golf shoes at Sterling Golf's nine courses.

“At the end of the season to

facture (turf) equipment.

“So what Toro will do is come and give you a really good deal on the irrigation system if you ‘buy our equipment from us.’ Our sales strategy is completely different. We have to be the best of the best of the best (in irrigation technology) because I can't come in and offer them \$4 million worth of equipment over the next 20 years.”

### Small Changes Can Add Up

Favorable financing notwithstanding, Jay Miller, Sterling Golf's new director of operations and a former California course owner himself, reminds everybody having some humor can help relieve some of the financial stress.

“You know how you make a million dollars in the golf business?” asks Miller, past president of the California GCOA. “You start with \$10 million.”

All kidding aside, Miller has discovered some creative ways to finance new merchandise, partner with vendors and successfully drive new top-line revenue

restock those courses with FootJoys it costs me \$5 a pair of shoes plus shipping and they give me credit for next year,” Miller says. “I just went from carrying 100 percent FootJoy to 50 percent FootJoy because I signed a deal with all nine of our golf shops to start carrying Puma shoes. So now, with an order of 24 pairs of shoes, I can get 12 free golf shirts – \$65 retail shirts for free – belts at a discount and the No. 1 selling ‘P’ hat at a discount.

“Plus, at the end of the season with all of these shoe orders, if I have 20 pairs left at every one of my golf courses, that's 180 pairs of shoes Puma will take back. Pay for the shipping and charge me nothing to restock them.”

Miller also is comfortable bartering his way to new revenue streams, partnering with scorecard maker Bench Craft Co. out of Portland, Oregon, in allowing them to sell and put ads on Sterling Golf's scorecards.

“I wasn't for this back in my course owner days,” says Miller, a former

All-America high-school golfer who played for Purdue University. “But I found out that the golfer doesn't give a (expletive). So now, all of my scorecards got advertisements on them. We saved another \$70,000 and I didn't have to pay for a scorecard.”

### Wells Fargo Steps In

Another positive sign for the future financing hopes of golf course owners is the recent announcement by Wells Fargo.

In April, Waterloo, Iowa-based VGM Insurance & Financial Solutions announced an equipment-financing program partnership with Wells Fargo.

Having another major lender like Wells Fargo now taking a more committed approach to the golf business is yet another reason Osgood remains optimistic about the financial underpinnings of golf's short and medium-term outlook.

“As long as the economy and the interest rates stay somewhat reasonable for the next 10 years, and with golf courses continuing to go out of business for development and other things, our business is going to continue to get a little bit stronger,” Osgood says. “It's not going to rocket up, but it's going to get a little bit stronger.”

With a little bit of creative financing or partnering along the way, that golf business just might do even better than that. **FB**

Scott Kauffman is a golf business writer and the managing director of Aloha Media Group.



# New York Golf Tax Fails For Now

By Steve Eubanks

**T**he industry dodged a potentially deadly bullet when a proposed tax bill for golf courses died in the New York state assembly in late May.

[“New York Proposes Costly Tax Bill for Golf Courses,” Golf Business, May 2019] But proponents of the bill vowed to continue to push for legislation that, if passed, could deal a hammer-blow to golf courses in the empire state and set a treacherous precedent for the rest of the country.

Of course, the proposed legislation, which landed in Albany with all the fanfare of a soggy newspaper, was inspired, not because of any business practice or governmental need, but because of politics. In this case, presidential politics.

The debate about golf course taxation is as old as the game. Private clubs have lobbied for agricultural zoning and non-profit tax status for decades,

much to the chagrin of urban-centered politicians who rail about golf courses being exclusive for the ultra-rich. What made this New York legislation so hot was one course – Trump National Golf Club Westchester.

The Trump organization appealed its tax bill. That prompted Assemblywoman Sandy Galef, a Democrat whose district includes Trump National Westchester, to propose the bill that, if passed, would tax golf courses at their “highest and best use” instead of based on their business value.

The day after the legislation was proposed, protesters picketed outside the Trump course. Golf was suddenly in the news, for all the wrong reasons.

None of the politicians seemed to realize (or wanted to admit) the magnitude of the proposal. Winged Foot, the 36-hole facility, also in Westchester County, would have a highest-and-best-use value in excess of \$300 million. National Golf Links of America, on the toniest piece of beachfront property on Long Island, would

likely value at twice that. Westchester Country Club in Rye, Quaker Ridge, across the street from Winged Foot, Siwanoy Country Club in Bronxville: The legislation would have likely taxed those stately clubs out of existence.

The Trump organization wanted Trump National Westchester valued at \$1.4 million. Tax assessors came back with a value of \$7.5 million. Under the proposed legislation, the value would have been closer to \$100 million.

“You just scratch your head,” said David Carlucci, a Democrat who sponsored the bill in New York’s upper chamber and whose district is also in Westchester and Rockland counties. “I think any taxpayer in that area is saying, ‘Wait, I’m paying more in property taxes so that Donald Trump can pay less?’”

Trey Walewski, owner of the struggling Meadowbrook Golf Club in upstate Weedsport, said, “The day (the bill) passes is the day I walk to the bank and hand them the keys.”

And Charles Dorn, president of the New York State Club Association, estimated that one in three New York golf courses would close if the legislation passed.

Thankfully for the golf business, it did not. But the battle isn’t over. State legislators in cash-strapped states like Illinois, California and New Jersey will be keeping an eye on these kinds of bills. And according to Galef, “It’s a difficult issue, partly because the members of golf courses are very prominent in their communities. But we’re not letting it drop.”

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



Special Report

# Turf Management

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By  
David  
Gould

# TURF WARS

## CAN GOLF (SOMEDAY) WIN ITS BATTLES AGAINST DISEASE AND OTHER DISASTERS?

**W**hen disease brings misery to humans, well-funded researchers roll up their sleeves to find a solution. We've seen this process end triumphantly in the case of smallpox – eradicated four decades ago. Behind it is an impressive list of other dread diseases scientists expect to dispense with – malaria, mumps, measles and rubella among them.

If you're busy running a golf operation, you may have begun to feel something similar going on with turf disease. One reason for harboring those positive thoughts would be the USGA Green

Section and its pivotal role in marshaling turf-protection efforts. As the organization has gone about distributing \$40 million in research grant money, it has spoken highly of the scientists and universities where the various blights and infestations have been studied and battled.

Likewise, the agro products companies continually develop new formulations and tout their improved results. We also hear about new hybrid grasses, bred to resist the classic problems superintendents lose sleep over. It's been a multi-decade period of progress and much more enlightened practices, so is a utopian future for fairways and greens at hand?

"We've made a lot of progress through the years," says Dean Miller, vice president of agronomy at Arcis Golf, with its 60-plus courses in 14 states from coast to coast. "Definitely the grasses have improved – they're more drought-tolerant now, and they're

better able to fight off diseases."

Miller actually speaks in the past tense about dollar spot, considered the most pressing problem faced by course superintendents in much of North America. His point wasn't that the fungal pathogen that causes the condition was now extinct; more that prevention of outbreaks had come a long way.

A recent Minnesota case study reported by BASF described use of its Group 7 fungicide Xzemplar to virtually eliminate dollar spot from fairways on StoneRidge Golf Club that had been ridden with it. As nearly always happens in these cases, the value of the chemical application was abetted by other maintenance practices. Increased core aeration and decreased nitrogen fertilization – measures taken to reduce thatch levels – contributed to the happy outcome.

Eliminating dollar spot, brown patch or pythium blight from golf playing surfaces isn't properly analogous to wiping out measles and malaria, observes Dr. John Kaminski of Penn State University. Kaminski, who directs Penn State's prestigious Golf Course Turfgrass Management Program, points out that homo sapiens are the only ones that need to be saved from those mortal threats, meanwhile the varieties of turfgrass on golf courses are multiple and still proliferating. And human health is pretty straightforward – the health of grass on a fairway or green is subject to a moving-goalposts scenario.

"The superintendents of today are pretty amazing at what they do," says Kaminski, "and they're backed up by their vendors and by researchers at universities. As a result, golfers expect them to produce healthy turf at a lower and lower mowing height. They expect the same great conditions during a long summer heat wave that they get during cool, sunny days in the fall"

The superintendents know when to back off, according to Kaminski, they just don't know if their decisions will be understood and accepted.

As for those new hybrid strains of grass that Miller mentioned, Kaminski

calls them a key ingredient in the overall fight against turf disease – when the experiment works and no major surprises come along.

"When breeding works, it can take you from a 50 percent chance of damage caused by a certain disease down to maybe 20 percent," says Kaminski. "Then you implement your cultivation practices – mowing, fertilizing, irrigation, etc. Chemicals are part three of the process."

Unfortunately, breeding is a slow process, involving trial and error. While you're at it, nature isn't standing still. Kaminski himself has been involved in the discovery of four new turfgrass diseases. Furthermore, new turf cultivars that are bred in the lab will continue to alter themselves genetically in the field, mutating in such a way that their properties of hardiness may diminish. Mysteries of this sort were likely part of the multi-year saga in which turf conditions at Quail Hollow Club in Charlotte, North Carolina, went from world-class to miserable to fine-but-worrisome back to world-class – thanks to a couple of full-scale resurfacing projects in which one bentgrass strain and two different Bermuda strains had to be deployed.

We think of technology as critical to the battle against turfgrass blights and scourges, a viewpoint certainly shared by Mark LaFleur, communications lead for turf at the U.S. operation of Syngenta, the Swiss agricultural products giant. But the form of technology that LaFleur sees impacting golf course turf goes far beyond "product in a jug" to include communications and microclimatic monitoring.

One example would be the "dollar spot alerts" any course can sign up to receive, based on a data tool called the Smith-Kerns Dollar Spot Prediction Model. It was developed in a fairly basic form by Damon Smith and Jim Kerns, two Ph.Ds who wanted to add a new level of

"We've made a lot of progress through the years," says Dean Miller, vice president of agronomy at Arcis Golf.

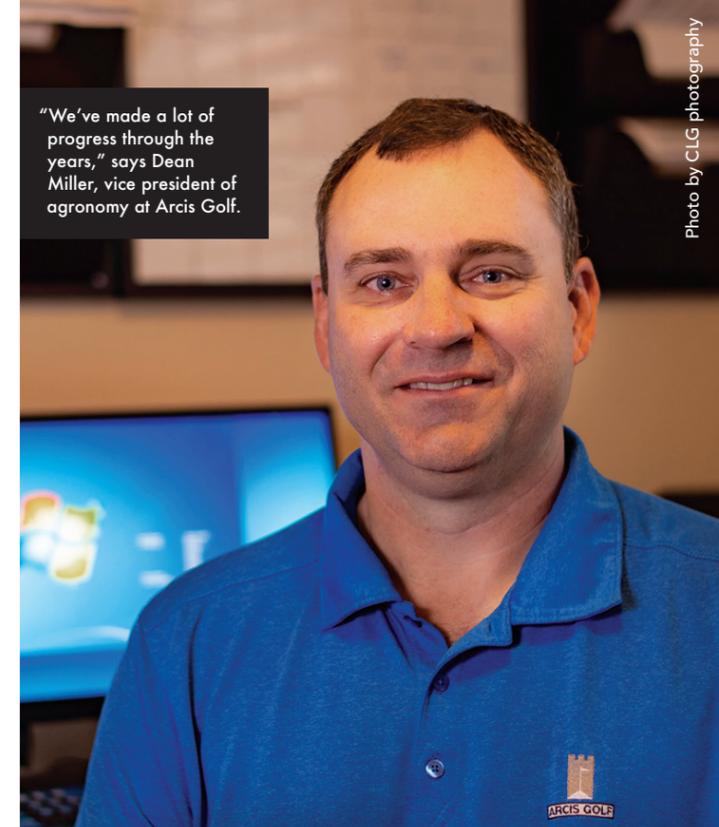


Photo by CLG photography

science to the turf-protection practices that counter dollar spot.

"We took what Smith and Kerns built and decided to develop a model that plugs in weather forecasting data and goes a week or so to project risk levels," says LaFleur. "Superintendents can see the data then fine-tune their decision-making. The result is that they get enhanced control of dollar spot using the same amount of product they used to use."

The enthusiastic response to this initiative didn't surprise LaFleur and his team, given that Syngenta had already scored a similar hit with a pest-counteracting mission known as Weevil Track. That's a web-based program that gathers highly extensive, granular field data from university scientists and crunches it to guide decisions about spraying to fight the annual bluegrass weevil, a devilish form of beetle that can brutalize golf courses.

"The heritage of a company like ours is scientific research to produce the most effective products," says LaFleur. "That fact that we can also leverage technology to make the timing of applications much more precise is very satisfying – it motivates us to keep improving on all fronts."

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

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## Automation and Smart Devices Change the Landscape

BY DAVID GOULD

**N**ew technology aimed at turfgrass perfection keeps getting invented, some of it game-changing, some likely not. Relatively new on the scene is a device with a science-fiction sound to it — the “time-domain reflectometer.” It won't transport you 50 years into the future, but it does let you measure and monitor soil moisture with new levels of precision.

TDR moisture meters, either handheld or mounted on a two-wheeled stand, reveal the inherent moisture-retention capacity of all the soils in a golf property's microclimates. It's a matter of riding the course during a normal weather spell, selecting sites — two or three on a tee box, six on a large green and a dozen-plus high and low spots along your fairway — and inserting the device's twin tines down into root zones.

Some units have Bluetooth sending capability, delivering the data straight to your office computer. Readings will range from about 10 to 20 percent, and you'll often be surprised at the degree of variation in the values. With these numbers recorded, you then run sprinklers as normal, and repeat the measurements until they tell you what adjustments are called for. Water savings, consistency across playing surfaces and perhaps some added disease resistance are the upsides of a \$1,000 to \$2,000 TDR investment.

Payroll savings (or redeployment of the man-hours currently on the budget) are the principal benefit envisioned for autonomous fairway mowers. A Salt Lake City manufacturer, FireFly Automatrix, recently showed its GPS-based



SubAir has done some iterative innovating of late introducing the TurfWatch technology.

system and explained the benefits at a turf producers trade show.

“To date, we've autonomously mowed 100 acres of sod field,” says Eric Aston, the company's lead mechanical engineer. “We're pretty close to fully commercializing what we've developed for the turf-nursery setting — where the business case for mowing without a human operator is obvious. Actual fairways are another degree of complexity.”

The immediate takeaway: If you're buying pallets of sod, you may be paying less because the nursery has passed on lower production costs to you.

Meanwhile greens-mowing through automated units is a real thing at Presidio Golf Club in San Francisco — described in recent press reports as the first U.S. course to rely completely on robots to cut all its greens.

Cub Cadet Turf, marketed by Ohio-based MTD Products, is the brand name of this disruptive entry into turf care — including at the famed Wimbledon tennis center. Interestingly, it uses sonar rather than GPS for its guidance system, though the next generation will rely on GPS. According to the manufacturer, the human-error factor that has long caused greens to lose their original perimeter dimensions is addressed by this robot, which adds precision to its coverage area through repetition of the task.

A spirit of innovation was certainly at work in the development of the vibratory greens roller, in use for a decade-plus but mainly found in the very high end of the market. Attachable to a triplex greens mower in place of the cutting

blades, this piece of machinery is able to smooth and firm the soil beneath the grass and even “shake” floating sand particles down to the root base before rolling pressure gets exerted.

Missouri-based Turfline Inc. is the force behind this gadget, one that superintendents and course architects have seen as a good answer to the green-speed-versus-plant-stress question. In other words, Stimpmeter readings can hit desired targets even with a higher mowing height, thus greater plant leaf area, which Mother Nature generally prefers.

Not visible to the naked eye, but still a big disrupter in turf-care technology, SubAir has done some iterative innovating of late. The add-on is called TurfWatch, which Jeremy Reese, the company's director of sales and service, describes as a management and monitoring platform far beyond what was previously available.

“This is a technology based on touch screens and smartphone access, with big projectors in the maintenance center picking up data sent wirelessly from each hole based on 20-minute updates,” says Reese. “So, picture information on soil moisture, temperature, oxygen levels and salinity, delivered in different languages depending on your part of the world, all geared toward the optimal aerobic growing conditions.”

Come to think of it, maybe we have been transported 50 years into the future.

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

# 21st-Century Stewardship: Evolving Place for Golf in Sustainability Discussions

BY DAVID GOULD

Public opinion about the environment has always evolved, but worldwide attention to climate change seems to have accelerated that process. According to a leading British think tank, citizens in the UK have been steadily dropping their opposition to nuclear energy, even in the wake of the 2011 Fukushima disaster. The stated reason is that nuke plants don't produce greenhouse gases.

Golf has not been scolded by environmentalists the way nuclear power has, but in both cases a change in the larger discussion of sustainability is pertinent. When golf first became a target for criticism, global warming was a minor issue. Now the public mind is fixated on news of bigger, more violent, more frequent storms. Rising storm waters and sea levels generate an almost Biblical level of dread, prompting new urgency around natural buffer zones and large expanses of permeable ground.

Last year the prestigious online magazine Slate published a 3,000-word report on flood-plagued Houston that put a hero's mantle on an otherwise modest golf course called Pine Crest. Even two years after ceasing operations



as a course, Pine Crest was depicted by professors from Rice University and Texas A&M as a precious island of permeability whose capacity to absorb and retain water probably had saved an adjoining neighborhood from complete destruction by Hurricane Harvey.

One of those experts studied the most recent 40 years and found rainfall in the area up by 26 percent but storm runoff up by a troubling 204 percent. "From 1996 to 2011, impervious surface in Harris County [where Houston is located] increased by a quarter," the article explained.

Houston is perhaps the extreme case of a flood-threatened U.S. metropolis, but extreme cases often dominate public awareness and frame public debate on environmental issues. Meanwhile, Superstorm Sandy in New York and New Jersey has left its own indelible memory. A report in the May issue of *Golf Business* described a New Jersey municipality that invested heavily in the green-space value of a golf property — quoted comments in the article hit on the fear that when acreage gets paved over it never goes back to a permeable state.

Reusable shopping bags at the supermarket and hotel hangtags that tell housekeeping not to change your linens are well and good, but they

don't keep five feet of water out of everyone's basement. That being said, golf's rising sense of stewardship over recent decades has produced a long list of initiatives and measures that belong in the category of smaller, more incremental "right actions."

Dr. Eric Ervin, who chairs the Plant and Soil Sciences department at the University of Delaware, received USGA grants to study methods of controlling poa annua grass. That led indirectly to a request from a group of course superintendents seeking to develop pollinator habitat in their out-of-play areas.

"Best practices for beekeeping only work if you've got the wildflowers for them to pollinate," says Ervin. He acknowledges the budgetary advantage of reducing mowing and the need for spray treatments, but the hot-button nature of pollinator decline is what really gets his attention. Measures like this one, he points out, "allows all the folks that are part of that golf course and the neighborhoods surrounding it to say, 'Wow, this is a really beautiful park area that has all these ecosystem services.'"

Done right, efforts like this can help to foster a flood of goodwill toward the game and the industry.

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



## Forging an Ideal Collaboration

BY DAVID GOULD

### WITH THE SUPERINTENDENT

At one point in his distinguished career, Larry Snyder spoke to his general manager about a green on their course that was stressed and thinning out. With a busy stretch of play coming up, the GM nixed the suggestion to pencil-tine aerify that green. On his own, Snyder located the green's most oxygen-deprived section and performed the aerification. It was a risk, but no golfers came into the shop talking about holes or bumpiness. In short order that area became the healthiest part of the green. The GM was shown what happened and recognized both the correctness of Snyder's judgment and his awareness that golfer perceptions did need to be taken into account.

"Relationships between superintendents and the people they report to only work when there's trust," says Snyder. "What happened with that green became a source of trust between the GM and me."

These days, Snyder is a co-principal in Central Florida Golf, which owns and manages three courses. He and his partner, golf professional Kenny Nairn, go back a long way. They interact in a manner quite opposite to the fiefdom-versus-fiefdom pattern so often found at golf facilities.

"No golfer ever hunted down the superintendent to complain about some problem on the golf course," says Snyder. "They go into the clubhouse. Which is why the superintendent needs to go in the clubhouse, too — every day if possible — and communicate. We have to speak to golfers with one voice."

If you're expecting Nairn to echo this call for a true part-

nership between inside and outside managers, you're close. He actually goes a step further, believing excellent teamwork has to extend beyond just those parties and include basically everyone who comes on property.

"To me it's about creating a culture," says Nairn, a native Scot from St Andrews. "The golf course is a living, breathing entity that changes day to day. To the greenskeeper, it's their pride and joy, but everyone should play a part in keeping it healthy and beautiful."

Nairn is also a renowned golf instructor, whose students learn about course care along with proper swing technique.

"I taught the juniors to fill in divots," says Nairn. "I taught them to fix pitch marks — especially the ones they didn't make, themselves. This afternoon I've got the kids on the high school team spreading divot mix on four fairways. The superintendent will be coming by to thank them — there's nothing better in the world for them than hearing that."

The opposite of a course-mending culture is a complaining culture, according to Nairn. Like all golf instructors, he shoots a lot of video — he'll even film a dues-paying member out on the course failing to behave properly.

"At a private club we once owned," recalls Nairn, "the green committee meetings would turn into gripe sessions about course conditions. Mr. Jones would rattle off a list of complaints, then I'd take out my phone and show a little movie. Here's Mr. Jones on No. 3 fairway, where he doesn't fix his divot. Here he is up on the green, where he doesn't repair his ball mark."

Perhaps the Scottish accent Nairn still speaks with makes it easier to be so confrontational, but the obvious point is that you don't have a culture of shared responsibility if you don't do the work of enforcing that culture's beliefs and values.

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



## Don't Get Blinded by Pedigree

by John Carrozza

### 5 Reasons to Hire for Skill Over Experience

**W**hen hiring a new person for your organization, it's very likely that you will review their resume, CV or professional profile and assess how their experience might apply to what your team needs.

This is a very logical approach to assessing talent, however, when you look at how quickly the skills to perform each role are changing, only looking at past experience could leave you with a big skill gap. Hiring someone for their skills is a much safer, and longer-term bet, but it's hard to change how you may have been looking at talent.

There are many news headlines that share the warnings; we have enough bodies to fill the roles, but skills development is not keeping up with the demands of today's businesses and tomorrow's innovation. Even if unemployment rates are high, it does not mean you will have more available talent that your business needs. Hiring for skills means that your workforce is better prepared for changes your business may need to make in the future and are likely more adaptable to the future organization you are starting to envision.

To make sure you are not only attracting the best candidates, but know who they are when they're right in front of you, here are five ways to approach hiring for skill:

**1 Don't get too caught up with "fit."** Hiring for culture is extremely important, there is no debating that. However, hiring for what "fits" today is extremely limiting. Think about where your business will be in 3 to 5 years and look at fit at that point. Every area of your business is likely evolving; make sure your talent acquisition activities are too.

**2 Avoid the shiny pedigree appeal.** Many organizations today focus too heavily on sourcing efforts that target candidates with "pedigree appeal"—impressive or prestigious

credentials or educational or employment backgrounds. In fact, these days it takes precedence over the thorough investigation your team should be doing to understand if candidates have the skills needed to do their job today and tomorrow. Make sure you are still using some good old-fashioned interviewing and assessment skills to learn what these candidates gained from their prestigious experience.

**3 Leverage technology, don't fully rely on it.** There are amazing tools today to search resumes for key words that can help you create a shortlist of candidates. Where the technology cannot take you any further is uncovering why/when/how do people entertain new career opportunities, and what they need or want before you start selling the job and the organization. Be sure to learn a person's aspirations for growing their career and constantly enhancing their skill set.

**4 Sharpen your assessment skills.** Building on No. 2, know how to effectively assess candidates for desired skill sets based on prior accomplishments and results, and to coach hiring managers to do the same. Think about the skills the candidate has demonstrated and get an understanding of what they learned from their experience.

**5 Learn the story behind the skills.** Know where the value lies in the story of their experience and with at least two skill-based questions (with follow-ups) for each attractive experiential accomplishment in their background, you can get to the story of the skills. Coaching your team members who participate in the interview process can help them put the skills in the proper context. An example of a skill-based question could be, "How did you build

the skills you needed after a setback?"

Previous approaches may have had you looking for top commercial or consumer brands, or top international schools on a resume. Many have assumed that if they survived a period at that school, or at that employer, they would automatically be able to deliver what is needed in a particular role.

Skill-based hiring has you looking for stories with keywords like: ability to communicate, learning new systems, managing relationships, interpreting situations, forming new ideas, strategic thinking and respecting others' input.

Many of these things are much harder to teach, change or develop in candidates regardless of the industry they come from. These are the solid skills that can make an immediate impact and fit in with your culture, today and in the future.

For consistency across all your interviews, a scoring tool to identify where the greatest added value would be, where the growth opportunity for each candidate lies and what your recommendations are can be a helpful way to review the talent available to you.

Having a strong understanding of what you need each role to bring to your team today – and how their role may quickly evolve – will help you find strong candidates. These will turn into fantastic employees who are adaptable and will help bring your organization into the future.

It may be tough at first to evaluate experience and then go beyond that to focus on skills. Know that getting a start on this will give you a competitive edge as the battle to attract, develop and retain your talent heats up.

*John Carrozza is a principal consultant with Riviera Advisors Inc., a boutique recruitment/talent acquisition management and consulting firm based in southern California. For more information, visit [RivieraAdvisors.com](http://RivieraAdvisors.com).*

Many organizations today focus too heavily on sourcing efforts that target candidates with "pedigree appeal" – impressive or prestigious credentials or educational or employment backgrounds.

# Final THOUGHTS

**Elaine Gebhardt**  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR  
New England Golf Course  
Owners Association  
Norton, Massachusetts



## What makes owning a golf course in New England unique?

The golf season can be very different depending on where you are in New England. Courses along Cape Cod, Rhode Island and the Connecticut shoreline can be open for 12 months of the year – some years. Other years they can be closed from December to March. Meanwhile, head to northern Maine or ski country and we are talking about a much shorter season – maybe as short as three months. The unknowns of what the weather will bring us can play heavily on staffing, programming and course conditions. Hearty New Englanders need to be flexible, thrifty and try to keep their sense of humor. Mother Nature is always looking for the last laugh.

## What do you see as the biggest benefit of NEGCOA membership?

Members of the NEGCOA are as varied as their reasons for being a part of the chapter. Some seek cost savings opportunities, while some want to support our legislative efforts. Those who are new owners or next generation operators seek the networking and educational opportunities. The biggest benefits come to those who are active – attend our events, head to national conferences, seek out ways to save on the SmartBuy offers, watch the Accelerate threads, and use our office as a resource.

## What's been the biggest change in the golf industry over the past 10 years?

Technology. We are competing against it at the same time as we try to find ways to use it successfully. Getting kids off of their devices and onto the golf course has been a challenge. So finding ways to integrate with technology will help us to win them over. Courses need to welcome tech onto the course and embrace the use of social media to expand their facility community. Notice that I did not say golf community. Our facilities need to be more than just golf and those that evolve in that end will thrive.

## Looking ahead, what do you think will be the next change in golf's evolution?

I still think there is an opportunity for FlingGolf to gain better traction. In my mind, it's been slow to grow because they don't have evangelists promoting it at the facilities. So it really has to grow from the consumers asking for it. I'm often surprised when I visit properties and owners/operators haven't heard of it. ... So this isn't really golf's evolution, but rather facility usage evolution. Skiing and snowboarding are thriving together – so should golf and FlingGolf!

## What is the most difficult hurdle course owners/operators face today?

Labor and wages. With unemployment so low, finding good qualified workers for seasonal positions is getting tougher and tougher. Add to this the ever rising minimum wages and courses are feeling the pinch. So many seasonal employees in this industry, especially from the golf shop and ranger side of the operation, are simply working to gain golf benefits. Many are retirees and kids in high school. These jobs are going to go away as clubs try to do more with less. Sharing this dilemma with our legislative officials is so important and I encourage our operators to do so.

## What is the concern you hear most?

Lately, legislative issues are a big concern to many – primarily at the state level. With six states in New England, we have a lot to keep track of and currently, we are facing potential negative legislation in several states. Rhode Island wants to add two new taxes to memberships and on services. Connecticut wants to add additional taxes as well. In Maine, local municipalities and towns are looking to restrict the use of pesticides despite the fact it is regulated at the state level and that our superintendents are certified in their applications and are stewards of the environment. We know that it is just a matter of time for an issue in one state to migrate to a neighboring state, so we need to remain vigilant.

Photo by Bert McIendon

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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/Country
- 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  o 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)

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**NGCOA In Action**

## ADVOCACY



### The Small Business Administration Still Lends to Golf Courses... But Is It the Best Loan for You?

You may have heard that the Small Business Association (SBA) was no longer funding loans to golf courses. We reached out to the SBA for clarification and received this from Supervisory Economic Development Specialist Susan Mazza:

*"For-profit, standalone, public golf courses that meet the SBA size standards as small are considered an eligible business type and can apply to any lenders that participate in the SBA program for a guaranteed loan under the standard loan programs, 7a, 504, and Microloan programs... SBA's Disaster Loan Program does have different eligibility issues and criteria, and it is managed by a different part of our agency. Their policies do not appear to restrict Physical Disaster Business loans or Economic Injury Disaster Loans for a golf course as well."*

SBA loans are provided through commercial lenders and the rates may not be as competitive as you may find with your local financial institution.

NGCOA feels strongly the SBA program should not exclude the golf industry, so we'll continue engaging with the SBA on the disaster relief program, provide updates and continue working with legislators to ensure future disaster relief bills include the golf industry. For more information on this issue, please contact NGCOA's Director of Advocacy, Ronnie Miles, at [rmiles@ngcoa.org](mailto:rmiles@ngcoa.org) or 843-471-2714.

### How Will the New World Handicap System Affect You?

Mike Zisman, CEO of Golf Genius Software, is working with the USGA to implement a World Handicap System (WHS) for launch Jan 1, 2020. This new system will have a big impact on golf courses, and owners and operators should start familiarizing themselves with the new system.

Golf Genius has developed a white paper to provide a perspective on the history of golf handicapping, including the development of WHS, the implications for associations charged with administering WHS, and the golfers who will ultimately benefit. Contact Mike Zisman directly at [mike@golfgenius.com](mailto:mike@golfgenius.com) for a copy of the white paper.

## INDUSTRY EVENTS



### NGCOA Hosts Technology Forum at 2019 PGA Fashion & Demo Experience

Panel sessions presented by the NGCOA take place directly on the PGA Fashion & Demo Experience show floor. The Technology Forum will consist of complimentary panel sessions highlighting innovation and technology best practices to enhance your golf business.

**Tuesday, August 13, 1:00pm – 2:00pm**

PANEL 1: New Technology = New Revenue

One way to boost significant revenues at a legacy golf course business is to expand your business with technology. NGCOA CEO Jay Karen will lead a panel discussion about some unique ways to incorporate the latest technology to boost your top and bottom lines. A panel of golf course owners and operators will share their stories about how they brought different forms of gamification and "golf entertainment technology" to their courses and what it's meant for their business.

**Tuesday, August 13, 4:00pm – 5:00pm**

PANEL 2: Legacy Technology = New Revenue

New technology isn't always the answer. Tech that's been at golf courses for years and years can also unlock new revenues. NGCOA CEO Jay Karen will lead a panel of golf course owners and operators in a discussion about using best practices with current technology to boost spending and engagement. The panelists will share ways they're getting the most out of their management software, digital marketing programs, efficiency practices and more.

\*\*\*\*\*

The annual PGA Fashion & Demo Experience is a trade-only event for PGA and golf industry professionals, which takes place each summer in Las Vegas. The three-day event features an annual Pro-Pro Tournament (for PGA & LPGA Professionals) at TPC Las Vegas, a Demo Experience at Topgolf, a live fashion show, two days of exhibit hall access, and educational programming at the upscale Venetian Hotel. Visit [pgalasvegas.com](http://pgalasvegas.com) for more information.



## PARTNERSHIPS



### Feeling Imprisoned by Your Back Office?

Cumbersome administrative duties often mean you spend too much time in the office—and maybe, spend too much money. Struggling with timesheets, benefits, insurance and more leaves you less time to interact with customers and grow your business. NGCOA now partners with industry-leading companies who can not only save you lots of money, but reduce the administrative time, effort and errors—so you can spend more time building your golf business.



[ngcoainsuranceservices.com](http://ngcoainsuranceservices.com)

#### Insurance Offerings from Holmes Murphy

- Health, Dental & Vision, Life & Disability, and/or Property & Casualty
- Quotes available in all 50 states
- Transparent monthly claims reporting
- 50% of premium surplus is returned if claims are lower than projected
- Paperless, mobile-friendly online portal for both employers and employees

#### Flood Risk Protection Solutions from Flood Risk America

- Flood study to determine your risk
- Expert analysis from FRA (it verifies the zone(s) and works with FEMA to update/correct the classification)
- Personalized golf course protection program
- Customized products to mitigate the damage from flood



**Payroll and Human Resource Services**  
Contact Brian Pfeifer at [Brian.Pfeifer@deluxe.com](mailto:Brian.Pfeifer@deluxe.com) or 443-279-9000

- Effective and competitive human resource and payroll services at a significant savings
- Payroll processing and tax deposits
- "Hire-to-Retire" solutions and "Pay-As-You-Go" workers comp payment plan
- Integrated time and attendance platform
- One point of contact to work with at Deluxe Payroll



**401(k) Retirement Plans**  
Contact Todd Turner at [Todd.Turner@commonwealthfg.com](mailto:Todd.Turner@commonwealthfg.com) or 843-884-4545 ext. 33

- Competitive and comprehensive 401(k) plans
- Offers you competitive/reduced administrative costs based on economy of scale
- Enhances your employment package
- Gives you peace of mind, with reduced liability
- Provides your employees a quality benefit that can help them prepare for retirement
- One point of contact to work with at Commonwealth Financial Group

### SAVE THE DATE for Golf Business Conference 2020!

Located at the PGA Merchandise Show, Orange County Convention Center

Expert speakers, relevant education, the annual Yamaha Golf Outing and Celebration & Awards Dinner, full access to the PGA Merchandise Show exhibition hall, and abundant opportunities to connect with hundreds of your peers, industry suppliers and PGA professionals—all in one exciting place! Bookmark [GolfBusinessConference.com](http://GolfBusinessConference.com); registration opens in early September 2019!

Sponsorship and exhibition opportunities are now available for golf industry suppliers; please contact Mike Ketterman at [mketterman@ngcoa.org](mailto:mketterman@ngcoa.org) for packages and pricing.



## COMMUNITY



### What are Other NGCOA Members Talking About on Accelerate?

Did you know there are Accelerate Members-Only Communities you can join, based on your interests, needs and engagement with NGCOA? **Visit [accelerate.ngcoa.org](http://accelerate.ngcoa.org) to read more about and add to the discussion of critical issues in golf business.**

- Accelerate (General) Community for all NGCOA members
- Supplier Community for NGCOA's Corporate Members
- Advocacy Issues & Alerts
- Golf Business TechCon and Golf Business Conference for event attendees
- Trading Post where members can buy and sell used equipment

Here is a sample of recent discussions; reply to these, or post your own for member feedback!

#### Flooding from Creeks

Parts of our course and some of the adjacent homes experience flooding from a creek that runs through our area. It has gotten increasingly worse over the last few years. To the best of my knowledge, we cannot touch the creek because it is "federal waters". Has anyone had any experience with this?

#### Dogs on Course

We are getting more requests for dogs on the course and on the driving range. Any advice? Of course we allow all service animals.

#### Assistant Golf Course Superintendent

Any ideas on how to attract and retain a young energetic individual looking to enter the industry would be appreciated.

## SAVINGS WITH SMART BUY



### You Could Be Paying Less for Products and Services You Already Use!

You might already be using products and services found in the NGCOA Smart Buy Marketplace—shouldn't you be paying less for them? NGCOA's relationships with industry-leading golf operations suppliers give you **discounted rates, rebates and value-added packages not available anywhere else.** Visit [ngcoa.org/smartbuy](http://ngcoa.org/smartbuy) to discover which products and services you're already using, and hundreds of companies you may not have considered yet. Don't you want to **get the very best price** from a **supplier that supports your industry?**



### NEW! NGCOA Video Series



#### Part 1: How to Capture Your Own Video

NGCOA and Momentum Video developed a three-part series to help you produce in-house videos that will increase customer excitement and engagement!

In the first episode, plan your video. Get advice on equipment, dialogue, locations and more. In no time at all, you'll be ready to record your own videos—and provide engaging content for your website, digital newsletters and social media. In future episodes, we'll discuss the kinds of cameras you can use, the best types of videos to make, best distribution practices, and other tips on creating your own content.

View the series at <http://bit.ly/10tipsforvideo>.

## AFFILIATE NEWS



#### Ohio Golf Course Owners Association



##### Buckeye Golf Association Field Day

July 15  
Tannenhaut Golf Club Alliance, OH  
Contact Ken Guenther at [keng@buckeyegolf.com](mailto:keng@buckeyegolf.com) or 614-563-5551

#### Ohio Golf Course Owners Association



##### Buckeye Golf Association Field Day

July 16  
Locust Hills Golf Club Springfield, OH  
Contact Ken Guenther at [keng@buckeyegolf.com](mailto:keng@buckeyegolf.com) or 614-563-5551

#### Michigan Golf Course Association



##### MGCA Annual Golf Outing

July 17  
Bedford Valley Golf Course; Battle Creek, MI  
Contact Jada Paisley at [jpaisley@michigangca.org](mailto:jpaisley@michigangca.org) or 800-860-8575

#### Michigan Golf Course Association



##### Ladies Day Away 9 Hole Event and Clinic

July 21  
Fox Hills Golf and Banquet Center Plymouth, MI  
Contact [info@michigangca.org](mailto:info@michigangca.org)

#### Michigan Golf Course Association



##### Ladies Day Away 9 Hole Event and Clinic

August 4  
The Lynx Golf Course Otsego, MI  
Contact [info@michigangca.org](mailto:info@michigangca.org)

#### NGCOA Mid-Atlantic



##### NGCOA MA VIP Reception

September 24  
Woodmont Country Club, Rockville, MD  
Contact David Norman at [dnorman008@gmail.com](mailto:dnorman008@gmail.com) or 804-708-9760

#### NGCOA Mid-Atlantic



##### NGCOA MA Annual Meeting

September 25  
Woodmont Country Club, Rockville, MD  
Contact David Norman at [dnorman008@gmail.com](mailto:dnorman008@gmail.com) or 804-708-9760

#### Michigan Golf Course Association



##### Michigan Golf League Championship

September 29  
Eagle Eye Golf Course Bath, MI  
Contact [info@michigangca.org](mailto:info@michigangca.org)

#### North Carolina Golf Course Owners Association (NCGCOA)



##### Annual Meeting

October 8-9, 2019  
Pine Needles Lodge and Golf Club Southern Pines, NC  
Contact David Norman at [Dnorman008@gmail.com](mailto:Dnorman008@gmail.com) or 804-708-9760

#### Ohio Golf Course Owners Association



##### Buckeye Golf Association Annual Conference

November 4-5  
Embassy Suites/Muirfield Golf Club Dublin, OH  
Contact Ken Guenther at [keng@buckeyegolf.com](mailto:keng@buckeyegolf.com) or 614-563-5551

#### Golf Course Owners of Wisconsin



##### GCOW Fall Meeting & Awards Luncheon

November 13  
Grand Geneva Resort Lake Geneva, WI  
Contact [jeffs@gcow.org](mailto:jeffs@gcow.org)

#### Midwest Golf Course Owners Association



##### 23rd Annual Conference and Trade Show

November 19  
Brackett's Crossing Golf Club Lakeville, MN  
Contact Curt Walker, [mwgcoa@aol.com](mailto:mwgcoa@aol.com) or 952-854-7272

#### Michigan Golf Course Association



##### MI Golf Business and Conference and Vendor Fair

December 2-4  
Soaring Eagle Resort Mount Pleasant, MI  
Contact [info@michigangca.org](mailto:info@michigangca.org)

# NGCOA In Action

START  
\$AVING  
NOW

## NGCOA Smart Buy Marketplace

NGCOA members get significant **discounts, rebates and value-added packages** from hundreds of the most recognized names and reputable, industry-leading companies. Many of these companies offer exclusive deals not available anywhere else.



**Golf Cars & Utility Vehicles**  
Members converting from a competitor receive \$50 per-car for purchase or lease. Members renewing their fleet receive a free registration for Golf Business Conference or TechCon.



**Golf Simulators**  
5% discount off MSRP.



**401(k) Program**  
Effective and competitive 401(k) plan benefit for NGCOA member courses' employees.



**Business Credit Card**  
No annual fee with unlimited 2% cash back.



**Insurance**  
Comprehensive employee benefits (health, dental, vision, life and disability), property casualty insurance, and flood risk assessment services at competitive rates.



**Human Resources & Payroll**  
Up to 50% on HR and payroll costs.



**Performance Reporting & Benchmarking**  
30%-50% discount on all reporting packages.



**Television Programming**  
Up to 60% savings on programming.



**Food and Beverage**  
Typical savings is 7% to 15% on more than 800 vendors, including Sysco, Gordon Food Service, Performance Food Group, and many others.



**Beverage Supplier**  
Rebates on various Pepsi and Gatorade fountain, bottle and can products; includes equipment and service programs.



**Alternative Golf**  
15% discount on lowest pricing available at FlingGolf.com.



**Customer Experience Solution**  
Free survey tool and 55% off Players 1st's top-tier Combined Package.



**Pre-Owned Turf Equipment**  
Discounts on tiered pricing plus 120-day extended warranty (normally 90-day).



**Irrigation Solutions**  
1.5% rebate on Rain Bird Golf irrigation products.



**Automotive Vehicle Manufacturer**  
Significant factory direct fleet discounts on 2019 GM products.



**New and Used Turf Maintenance Equipment**  
1% rebate on new and/or 0.5% rebate on used Toro branded turf maintenance equipment.

FIND DETAILS AND TERMS ON SAVINGS

FROM THESE BRANDS AND MORE AT [NGCOA.ORG/SMARTBUY](http://NGCOA.ORG/SMARTBUY)

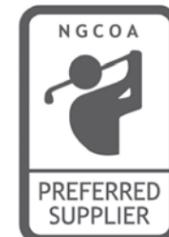


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- **Procurement solutions** for all your club's needs including F&B, course maintenance, operational equipment, uniforms, branded products and more



Entegra is proud to support the NGCOA as a Preferred Supplier in the NGCOA Purchasing Network.

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## Keeping superintendents on top of their game.

Syngenta Business Institute<sup>SM</sup> helps golf course superintendents grow their careers as well as turf. Encourage your superintendent to apply for the three-day management curriculum, designed in conjunction with the **Wake Forest University School of Business**, by **August 13** at [GreenCastOnline.com/SBI](https://www.greencastonline.com/SBI).



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