

## **Sustainable Golf**

It's no secret...the golf industry is suffering along with most mainstream businesses in the U.S. today. Daily fee courses need players, private clubs need members and the NGF reports more courses have closed than opened over the last two years. How is the game we love ever going to be healthy again? Most agree we will never see growth of the game like we did in the late 90's / early 2000's but there are steps to be taken industry-wide to insure golf's health and prosperity. Golf courses must be designed, maintained and operated to be "sustainable" in our communities and this must happen on three different fronts. Golf courses must be Ecologically sensitive, Economically stable and Enjoyable. For the most part architects have done a good job building ecologically sensitive courses over the last 15 years but there is always room for improvement. Most new course designs are regulated to reduce water consumption and respect natural ecosystems and we are happy to oblige. As new course construction comes to a screeching halt we must focus on renovating existing courses with these same principles and be "easy on the land". In addition to ecological sensitivity golf courses must continue to be beneficial in the community by accepting surrounding storm water, recycling effluent, filtering nutrients and rehabilitating degraded sites.

Too many courses were built during the real estate boom and with no real "stand alone" business plan. Costs to maintain and operate the courses were not considered and therefore many are "upside-down". Financially these courses must be reevaluated to determine the target player, market fees and operating/maintenance costs must be creatively reduced to allow the course to "stand alone" economically. One huge factor in this formula is maintenance costs. Americans have come to expect perfect conditions better known as the "Augusta Syndrome". You know, greens stimping at 12, immaculate bunkers, fairways - green and lush. In most cases this is not realistic. Remember when the game was just as fun when greens rolled 8, bunkers were real hazards and fairways were firm and fast? In fact, some would agree the game was more enjoyable under those conditions.

Just as important to the sustainability of the game....golf must be ENJOYABLE!! As architects we must remember the average golfer shoots around 100 and only 2% of the golfers play the Championship tees. It's time to stop building courses with hopes of attracting the next new tour event and start producing courses that all players can enjoy. Speaking of "enjoyable", golf courses can be enjoyed by those outside the game itself. Another American mindset is that golf courses are exclusive to golfers. Is this good for the community? Doesn't the most well-known course on the planet open it's boundaries to picnickers, joggers, dog walkers, and horseback riders on Sundays? What is wrong with this concept? Let's not restrict our beautiful park-like settings to one lone activity. Let's be better neighbors and invite the community to share our sacred grounds every once in a while. It might go a long way to improve the perception of our presumed "elitist" sport and bring some players back into this great game.