70 years of ASGCA



2017 marks the 70th anniversary of the American Society of Golf Course Architects. Toby Ingleton finds out about the journey from 1947, and what ASGCA represents today.

The New Yorker hotel in Midtown Manhattan, an icon of Art Deco architecture from the city's 1920's building boom, was a fitting location for the first seeds of a new society of architects to be sown.

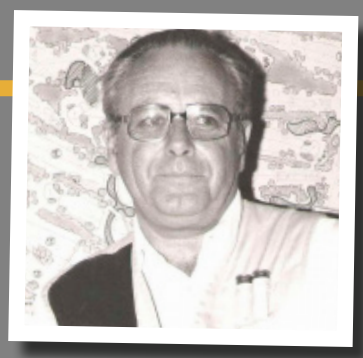
But the group in question, galvanized into action by two Roberts—Bruce Harris and Trent Jones—did not deal with bricks and mortar. Five were landscape architects and

ASCGA timeline



1947
First ASGCA Annual Meeting hosted by Donald Ross, ASGCA, at Pinehurst, North Carolina

1951
David Gordon, ASGCA, becomes a member (now the longest-serving in ASGCA history)





1970
Paul Fullmer hired as first ASGCA Executive Secretary



Photos: ASGCA

agronomists, four were contractors, three golf professionals, and two businessmen. Their building materials were earth and turf, shaping landscape to create golf courses.

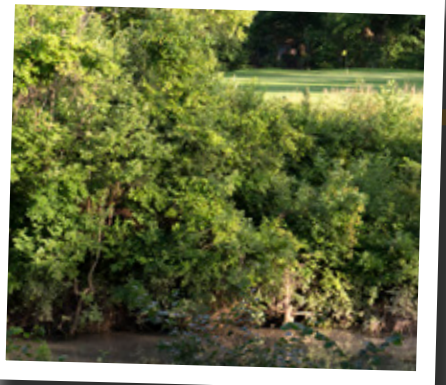
That first meeting took place in February 1947. World War II had ended and America continued its recovery from the depression of the previous decade. The group had been short of work for some time, but hoped to capitalize on a changing outlook.

ASGCA Founding Fathers



Pictured at the 1947 ASGCA Annual Meeting in Pinehurst, North Carolina, from left to right: William P. Bell, Robert White, W.B. Langford, Donald Ross, Robert Bruce Harris, Stanley Thompson, William F. Gordon, Robert Trent Jones, Sr., William Diddel, and J.B. McGovern. ASGCA founders not pictured were Jack Daray, Robert 'Red' Lawrence, Perry Maxwell and Wayne Stiles.

1970
ASGCA Environmental Committee established



ASGCA FOUNDATION

1973
Founding of ASGCA Foundation

1973
ASGCA adopts 'Ross Tartan' jackets in tribute to first ASGCA President Donald Ross



There was a sense of optimism, both among the general population, and these golf course designers. People had more time and money for recreation, and golf was a fashionable sport, growing in popularity and well positioned to take advantage of the economic upturn.

Among the group was Donald Ross, a native of Dornoch, Scotland, who had served his apprenticeship with Old Tom Morris at St Andrews before setting sail for the United States just before the turn of the century.

In those first four decades of the twentieth century Ross had effectively laid the foundations for golf in the United States, having designed more than 400 golf courses—at that time a significant proportion of the overall total. Ross has become a figurehead for the Golden Age of golf course architecture, using natural features of the land to create his golf course designs, in contrast to the geometric shapes imposed on the landscape by other early designers.

Because of his standing, the group implored Ross to become their first president. But by that time Ross was well into his 70s, and declined the invitation due to the feared strain it might put on his declining health. He was made Honorary President instead, and Robert Bruce Harris assumed the role of first acting president.

First Annual Meeting

It was at Pinehurst in North Carolina—where Ross lived and the home to one of his most revered creations, the No. 2 course—that the new group gathered for the second time, and its first annual meeting.

Harris, from Chicago, was well suited to the role of president, the efficient and practical nature of his golf designs a reflection of his own personality. A former landscape architect, his background with the American Society of Landscape Architects helped him form a model for the new group. Alongside Jones and William Langford, Harris prepared a constitution, by-laws and code of ethics. After much debate, all



Photo: Greg Martin

ASGCA Missions

Foster the game of golf, its growth and advancement

Foster professionalism of ASGCA members through education, promotion and fellowship of the world's leading golf course architects.

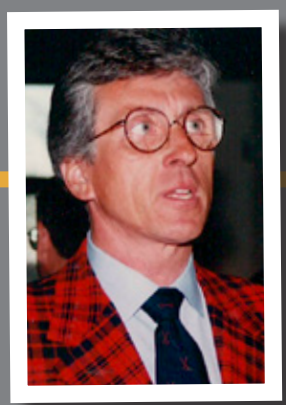
Support design excellence by creating golf courses that are technically, strategically and aesthetically excellent while meeting the economic, environmental and other needs of course owners, developers and communities.

Expand the opportunities of ASGCA members to better serve their clients and the game of golf.



1976
First Donald Ross Award presented to Robert Trent Jones, ASGCA

1978
Bradford Benz becomes 100th ASGCA member





1980
ASGCA Annual Meeting held in Scotland (First Meeting/visit to Europe)

were approved and the purpose of the group defined.

By creating a new organization of professional architects, the group aspired to be the influential, collective voice in the industry, under the name proposed by Langford—the American Society of Golf Course Architects.

Among the key areas of concern for those founding fathers were issues that remain relevant today. Richard Tufts, the head of Pinehurst and ASGCA's first Complimentary Member, addressed the group: "We feel that a golf course is designed for a certain type of shot to the green, and that as you increase the length of the tee shot, you throw the golf course all out of scale. Therefore, it spoils the pleasure of the play to have this continual increase in the flight of the ball."

Growth in the game

Over the following years, the founding members' hopes for a surge in new golf courses were realized, and the group evolved and grew, recruiting influential new members like James G. Harrison of Pennsylvania and Howard Watson, a protégé of Stanley Thompson. In 1951, William Gordon's son David joined ASGCA. In 1959 he became president, six years after his father, and he remains a member today, the longest serving in ASGCA history.

During its early years, annual meetings were typically attended by 10-15 members, and involved education and discussion on issues of the day, new trends in design, and the advancement of the profession. Robert Trent Jones was known for his promotional skills, and encouraged the group to engage with influential publications of the time. In the early 1960s the ASGCA developed its first piece of literature—on the benefits of retaining a golf course architect.

A new era

By the late 1960s, ASGCA had grown to such an extent that it was no longer practical for its members to handle all aspects of administration. Membership had reached almost 50, with recent recruits including Pete Dye and Bill Amick. In 1970, incoming President Larry Packard strongly pushed for a central office to be established.

Those discussions led to the appointment of Paul Fullmer of Chicago PR firm Selz, Seabolt & Associates as ASGCA Executive Secretary. Association management would be a new venture for the firm, but Packard was confident that Fullmer was right for the job.

Fullmer's first annual meeting was in Palm Springs, California, in 1971. By that time, he had established the ASGCA Suppliers Directory so was already demonstrating the value he could add. But an extract from Fullmer's book about his time at the ASGCA, *Presidents I Have Known*, reveals the meeting to be something of a baptism by fire.

> "The contributions of ASGCA, and each individual member, have been instrumental to the enjoyment of the game by millions around the world
>
> Mike Davis, CEO,
> United States Golf Association

"The largest firestorm in ASGCA meeting history broke out over the relationship of members with touring pros. Many members at that time felt extremely threatened by the pros and believed no ASGCA member should have any relationship with a pro.

1992
An Environmental Approach to Golf Course Development published





1996
50th ASGCA Annual Meeting held in Pinehurst, North Carolina

1997
Alice Dye, ASGCA, is first female president



Some felt that anyone associating with a pro should be terminated.

"About this time, I wondered what type of organization I had gotten myself involved with, and whether it would blow up that night!"

Undeterred, Fullmer went on to accelerate the development of ASGCA, with many new and now long-standing initiatives launched soon after his appointment, including the ASGCA Foundation (see interview with Clyde Johnston on page 20), the adoption of 'Ross Tartan' jackets, and the introduction of the Donald Ross Award, given to a person who has made a significant contribution to the game of golf and the profession of golf course architecture.

Fullmer served for 34 years before passing the baton to current ASGCA Executive Director Chad Ritterbusch in 2004. And while the economic climate of the past 13 years has been more challenging, the Society has again seen a period of significant new initiatives—including the publication of important documents such as *Building a Practical Golf Facility* and *Golf & Water: Case Studies in Water Stewardship*, the introduction of the Design Excellence Recognition Program and the extension of the Society's activities into digital and social channels.

ASGCA today

So, what does ASGCA represent today, 70 years on from that first Annual Meeting at Pinehurst?

According to Mike Davis, executive director and CEO of the United States Golf Association: "The contributions of ASGCA, and each individual member, have been instrumental to the enjoyment of the game by millions around the world.

"Since the 1940s, golf facilities have benefited from the efforts of ASGCA members," he adds. "Their course design expertise has provided inspiring and enjoyable playing grounds for all of us to deepen our love for the game."

Steve Mona, CEO of the World Golf Foundation, says: "Because of the profile of its members, ASGCA has a broad platform from which to communicate on issues of importance to the game. Whether it's to design golf courses in ways that are more friendly to the average golfer or in ways that are more environmentally sustainable, or to use existing golf courses and retrofit them to accomplish another objective, such as what is going on at Longleaf (Golf & Family Club) right now, they're able to do that because of the nature of their members.

"They can have an impact and influence on course owners and other developers of golf courses that's unique to them and they can probably have an impact that's greater than any other people associated with a golf facility, at the time when critical decisions are being made on course design and layout."

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> CEO, World Golf Foundation

"Over the decades, I've spoken to many in the profession of golf design who've asked my advice on whether they should apply for ASGCA membership," says Ron Whitten, senior editor of architecture at *Golf Digest*. "My answer has always been to do so. I've long thought it was essential for



1999
Bruce Borland, ASGCA, dies in plane crash with golfer Payne Stewart

2000
Forrest Richardson, ASGCA, becomes 200th ASGCA member





2004
Paul Fullmer retires after 34 years, Chad Ritterbusch named Executive Director

2005
Building a Practical Golf Facility published



"Golf is a shared experience that provides value to our culture and communities"



GREG MARTIN, ASGCA PRESIDENT

As he approaches the end of his year as ASGCA President, Greg Martin, ASGCA, outlines what the Society means to him.

The past year has demonstrated to me a number of things: The ASGCA is valued for our leadership, as well as our fellowship; we are trusted and simultaneously misunderstood; we are more important than the public or golf industry realizes; we have vastly differing talents and perspectives; and collectively and individually, we make the game better.

We have created championship venues, and parks for the masses, restored ruined landscapes and made scars from industry beautiful. We have done marvelous and beautiful things. Yet, our goal is simple: to provide a better game for those who enjoy this magnificent sport and create resounding benefit for the communities in which they reside.

The ASGCA after my name means I have been vetted and approved by my peers; my accomplishments to the game have been meaningful and relevant; my practice is considered professional and ethical; and the fellowship I share is both inspirational and cherished.

Golf is changing. Those who embrace it will adapt and see new opportunities. Those who don't will grip tighter to days gone by. I don't wish for change, but I do face it, expect it and hopefully recognize the opportunities when they present themselves.

As a professional organization, we are in the midst of adapting. You can see it in our annual meetings, our education, our website, our leadership and social media. We must adapt.

As practitioners, we instinctively react to the marketplace; we adapt to new golfer expectations and client needs; we reformulate our design because of golfer ability and golf ball length, environmental demands or water availability; and we adjust our specifications to meet construction needs and provide more lasting products. We change and adapt every day. Golfers are changing too. In the past 30 years, expectations have changed. Golfers demand more, but want to pay less.

The golf industry has reacted, sometimes positively and sometimes not. I applaud the USGA for their research and full analysis of some of the more challenging issues facing the game. It is not coincidence that the most visible tournament, our national championship, has been played on more unique venues featuring firm and fast conditions. Those decisions are difficult to understand for the golfing public. Yet, the USGA has seen the future and are willing to make tough decisions about our industry. The USGA is changing.

What will not change is that golfers want to play golf, whether at Pebble Beach or the local muni, in authentic places with friends and family. Golf is a shared experience that provides value to our culture and communities: that desire will never go away.

What is needed now, more than ever, is thoughtful and proactive adaptation of our work. Making the game better with community golf courses, better environmental stewardship, efficient operations and management, habitat enhancement, water quality—provided to wider markets in more diverse neighborhoods—is what golf needs. Our relevance and value—individually and collectively—will be tied directly to how golf course architecture can provide value to lives and communities beyond the greatness of the game.

Good golf design shouldn't be confined to the privileged. Nor should it be confined to golfers or the properties on which they reside. Good golf design should inspire our clients, golfers and benefit the surrounding community. If we commit to bettering the game by providing and engaging an authentic experience for golfers while improving the environment and our communities, our organization and this profession will be on the right side of history.

So how will the ASGCA adapt in the coming years? The ASGCA membership will become more diverse and more representative of how golf course architecture is practiced; The ASGCA will be more collaborative and active with Allied Associations; and The ASGCA membership will create more unique opportunities for golfer engagement.

What will not change is that the ASGCA will continue as thought leaders, proactive custodians of the game and stewards of the environment.

the profession of golf design to speak with one voice on important issues, whether it's licensing or environmental regulations or technology. I've also witnessed first-hand the networking that occurs at ASGCA annual meetings; these are rivals who can still be friends. Amazing. It's an example that Washington politicians could do well to observe and copy."

Great friendships

Such friendship among competitors has become a distinguishing feature of the Society, notes ASGCA Past President Dr. Michael Hudzan, ASGCA. "When I think of what ASGCA means to me," says ASGCA Past President Dr. Michael Hurdzan, ASGCA, "I think of the Dr. Seuss book titled *Oh, the Places I've Been!* and to that I would like to add 'the friends that I've made.' Not because of fantasy worlds or weird-looking characters—although ASGCA has taken me to fabulous courses and allowed me to meet some real characters—but rather it is because of history.

"Being a part of ASGCA is being part of history of the profession. Actually, it means 'living' the profession that I care so much about. I was born too late to have spent time with Ross, Tillinghast, MacKenzie and other past masters of our craft, but through ASGCA I made friends with the Jones's, Dyes, Nicklaus, Palmer, Cornish and a host of others. My life is richer because of these and so many, many more priceless friends that I was able to make because of ASGCA. My professional life would be dull without my ASGCA network of friends, and experiences, that has expanded my world and made me proud of my accomplishments."

> "That jacket is a reminder that there is a world of difference between having an opinion about where a bunker should go and knowing how to create a bunker that will endure
>
> Brad S. Klein
> *Golfweek* architecture editor

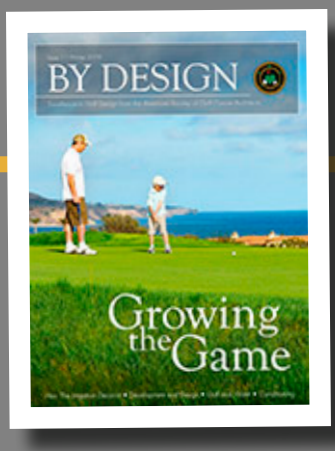
ASGCA members are easily identified by the Ross Tartan. "I have to admit that from a sartorial taste standpoint the coat is not high on my preferred style list," says Bradley S. Klein, *Golfweek* architecture editor. "I'm nonetheless envious of those who wear them because it means they embody the highest form of technical experience in course architecture planning, design and implementation. It completely separates them from your average golf architecture junkie, who might know about A.W. Tillinghast or Robert Trent Jones but has no real understanding of the 90 percent of infrastructure that's underground and invisible to the golfer's eye and that really enables the golf course to function. That jacket is a reminder that there is a world of difference between having an opinion about where a bunker should go and knowing how to create a bunker that will endure."

"ASGCA should not be a *Good Housekeeping* seal of approval," says Hurdzan, "but rather it should be a gathering of the brightest, most forward thinking, actual designers, who deeply care about the traditions of the Society and the history of our profession. If those are our future members, the Society's future is bright."



2006
'Life cycle' chart for golf courses first published

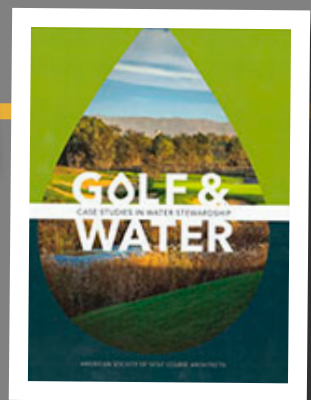
2010
First issue of *By Design* magazine published



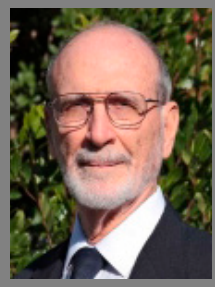


2012
ASGCA Design Excellence Recognition Program introduced

2016
Golf & Water: Case Studies in Water Stewardship published



"In a host of ways, the ASGCA has been a grand experience to me"



BILL AMICK, ASGCA FELLOW

With over 50 years as a member of the ASGCA, Bill Amick, ASGCA Fellow, highlights what the Society means to him.

In the mid-1950s I was an apprentice to one of the American Society of Golf Course Architects' founders and twice its president, William H. Diddel. From Mr. Diddel I learned a lot about the profession I had chosen. I became an associate member of the ASGCA in 1966 and a regular member in 1968. Being in the Society has let me meet and beco me friends with many of my fellow practitioners, and allowed me to learn more about golf course architecture. Becoming an officer, including president in 1977, gave me even wider exposure to the golf course field. In a host of ways, the ASGCA has been a grand experience to me.

The Society continues to contribute to the craft of each member, so in total how golf courses are now designed and constructed—the result being many more good golf courses and more in the future. This is accomplished through educational sessions during annual meetings and the year-round distribution of information by our team at ASGCA headquarters. We have an ever-expanding library and production of technical information about this field. Some of this material is regularly distributed to anyone who has an interest in better golf courses.

A huge step in the ASGCA's growth in effectiveness came from establishing our headquarters. This began in 1971 when we hired Paul Fullmer as our Executive Secretary. For 34 years Paul led many vital ASGCA initiatives and activities beneficial to members and our clients for their new and existing golf courses. Then when Paul became our Secretary Emeritus, Chad Ritterbusch took over this important role as our Executive Director. Both, and their staff, have aided all members to become better golf course architects, which benefited the golf courses we design and renovate.

Yet with all these accomplishments, many of us members believe that improving and expanding the range of types of golf course could better serve the enjoyment of a larger number of golfers in the future. This through courses that require less total land, are less expensive to maintain, need a smaller volume of water for irrigation, can be played in less time, and are not so difficult for mid- to high-handicap golfers, and beginners. For decades, many in the ASGCA and in other aspects of our recreational industry felt not enough attention has been devoted to these goals. Now through the efforts of our Society, we are alerting and exposing others to the benefits of these goals for golf facilities and the game in general.

I and most other members have established special friendships through ASGCA. For me I became one of the 'three amigos,' along with Robert Muir Graves and Eddie 'Ocean' Seay. To them I became 'Hawk' because I hit all my full golf shots with a slight fade—vaguely like Ben Hogan, who was given that nickname due to his tenacity in big-time competition.

Another special aspect of being a member is the golf we play at annual meetings—getting to observe noted courses and the fun of playing with different members. I got the thrill of winning the overall prize a couple of times, including the year we played at Pebble Beach, Spyglass Hill and Cypress Point. To me that was extra special because it was my only time I finished ahead of the outstanding golfer from Mexico and fellow member, the now late Percy Clifford. In truth at that time Percy was nearing the end of his illustrious career and I was still young enough to think I could play. The large winners' trophy is deservedly named for him.

It is a privilege to wear the ASGCA blazer. The Ross Tartan—a blaze of color—is in respect to our honorary president Donald Ross and also represents the Scottish heritage of golf. In honesty, when some of us first received material for our jackets we were a little hesitant about its 'distinctiveness.' But in time we came around and have since proudly worn it on many occasions. At some of our annual meetings, we do get stares from other hotel guests, especially when they see a gathering of a hundred or so of us together 'in uniform!'

May outstanding golf course design continue to live on, led in many ways by members of the American Society of Golf Course Architects.