

# What do clubs (and golfers) want?

In the first of a series of articles drawing upon a recent ASGCA-commissioned research study, Jon Last of Sports & Leisure Research Group provides some insights into the factors that are driving decision making at golf facilities.

Over the past year, we have been working closely with the American Society of Golf Course Architects to try to understand more about what people within the golf industry consider to be the significant challenges, opportunities and issues in golf facility design and operations.

Together we have developed an annual proprietary insights program, called the *Golf Facility Market Trend Watch*, that we hope will provide valuable perspectives on key business issues, and help those involved with golf facilities to make good, informed decisions. In Fall 2017, survey respondents, including readers of *By Design* and *Golf Course Industry* magazines, spent an average of 22 minutes each completing the questionnaire. This represents a mix of roles from owners/operators and general managers to superintendents and golf course architects.

The findings have been fascinating, and over the next few issues of *By Design* magazine I look forward to sharing some of the key insights with you. For this first article, I'll focus in on the appeal of golf course renovation work, and how ASGCA members are seeing the market for renovation work evolving.

When asked which, if any, of a list of possible course enhancements

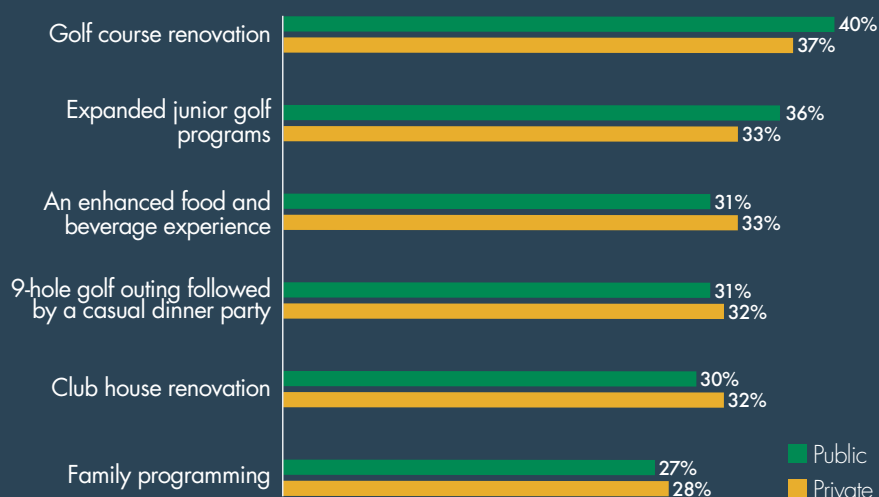
**Golf course architects are overwhelmingly bullish about the outlook for renovation work**

would be of significant interest to guests and members, and increase usage of the facility, operators at both public and private clubs were most interested in a golf course renovation (see Figure 1). Good news for golf course architects!

Forty percent of respondents at public clubs, and 37% at private clubs, considered a golf course renovation to be of significant

**Figure 1. Renovations are the most coveted enhancement**

*Percentage of respondents considering the below enhancements of significant interest*



interest. This was the highest score of any of the enhancements we listed, which included expanded junior golf programs (the second most popular enhancement), enhanced food and beverage experience and clubhouse renovation.

Our survey also revealed that facility managers have been more satisfied with the investments made in golf course renovation than those in clubhouse renovation or addition. Eighty percent of respondents at public facilities and 76% at private facilities reported high satisfaction for recent golf course renovation work, compared to 48% and 51% respectively for clubhouse renovations.

Turning our attention to the volume of renovation work that golf course architects are seeing (see Figure 2), over half (54%) reported an increase in renovation revenue over the past 24 months, compared to just 17% who reported a decline. Thirty-seven percent of the golf course architects that responded say that their renovation revenue over the past 24 months is up by more than 10%.

We also asked golf course architects about their expectations for the future (see Figure 3). Ninety percent

## Operators at both public and private clubs were most interested in a golf course renovation

of them felt that revenues from renovation work would be consistent or higher in the next 24 months. More than a quarter expected their renovation revenues to rise by more than 10% in the same period.

Golf course architects are overwhelmingly bullish about the outlook for renovation work.

Marc Whitney, ASGCA Director of Marketing, said: “I would agree with the findings. A golf course renovation is probably the single most important thing a club can do to reinvent itself, particularly because it is so visible.

“At most clubs, golf is the driver. Everyone wants fitness, pools, tennis, but you can get that in a lot of places. The golf member is often the one who pays the bills so the golf course is the most important asset. And when you invest in your most important asset, it gets attention.”

Whitney believes that because the golf course renovation cycle is longer

than most clubhouse renovation work, it has a much bigger impact. “If it’s a significant renovation, they don’t happen very often. It needs to last 20 to 25 years before you break into the golf course again.

“It’s been 10 years since the economic downturn, so you’re now seeing a pent-up demand for renovation. People have waited, and the timing is now right for many to do it.”

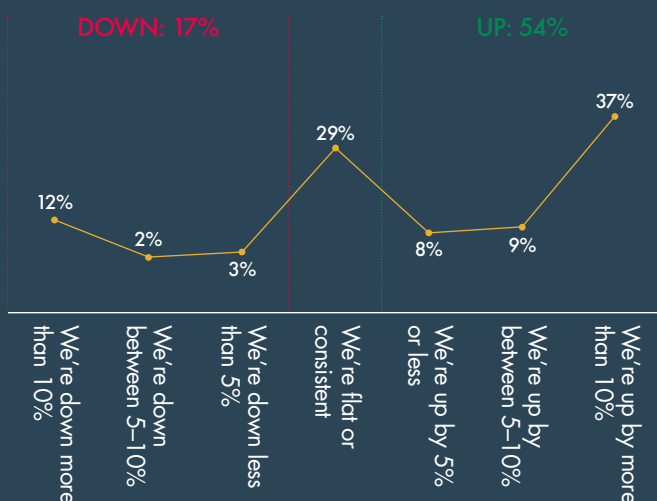
In the next article in this series, we’ll take a closer look at the most important factors for facility management to pull the trigger for a renovation of the golf course, and what type of projects golf course architects are working on. ●



Jon Last is founder and President of Sports & Leisure Research Group, a full-service marketing research consultancy.

**Figure 2. It’s been a good year for golf course architects**

*Renovation revenue over the past 24 months, as described by golf course architects*



**Figure 3. Expectations for the next two years are bullish**

*Renovation revenue expectations for the next 24 months, as described by golf course architects*

