

Issue 48 | Spring 2020

BY DESIGN



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Back from the brink

Also: Distance research • Pete Dye, ASGCA Fellow • Routing a concept course

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Design ingenuity

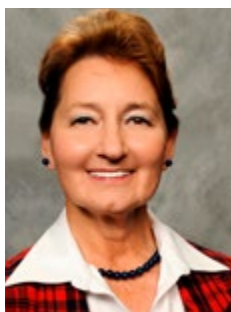
Golf course architects require a great degree of ingenuity for design and renovation projects. There will always be challenges and obstacles to overcome, and it is our obligation to help clubs find a solution that will benefit the club and its local community.

I recall ASGCA Past President Erik Larsen's words: "Golf courses benefit communities as revenue and tax sources, green space, wildlife and plant sanctuaries and aid in water filtration, among other uses. There is an inherent goodness to the community that comes from the positive financial, social and environmental impact of a golf course."

Erik walked this talk when helping to bring a course in Jacksonville, Florida, back from the brink. Atlantic Beach Country Club features in this issue's cover story, which begins on page 18. Golf writer and ASGCA Donald Ross Award winner Joe Passov looks at this and other examples of golf courses that have been reborn, and the positive impact that ingenious work by ASGCA members has on clubs and their communities.

Also in this issue of *By Design*, ASGCA members pay tribute to one of the most ingenious architects in the history of golf. We were all saddened to hear that Pete Dye, ASGCA Fellow, passed away at the start of the year. Pete, a Past President of ASGCA, was responsible for many of modern golf's most ground-breaking and celebrated designs, including TPC Sawgrass, Whistling Straits and The Ocean Course at Kiawah Island. ASGCA members reflect on Pete's impact in the article that begins on page 12.

There's plenty more in this issue too, including distance research, member project news, and an interview with Richard Mandell, ASGCA, on the concept course he created for a site close to his office.



Jan Bel Jan, ASGCA
President
American Society of Golf Course Architects

BY DESIGN

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COVER



Cover photography courtesy of Atlantic Beach Country Club in Jacksonville, Florida.

ASGCA supports conclusions of latest distance research



Image: iStockphoto/ Dmytro Aksanov

The ASGCA provided information and data to the USGA and R&A for its Distance Insights Report

The executive committee of the American Society of Golf Course Architects (ASGCA) agrees with the initial conclusions reached by the United States Golf Association (USGA) and the R&A in the recently released *Distance Insights Report*.

The report concluded that “the inherent strategic challenge presented by many golf courses can be compromised” and “the overall trend of golf courses becoming longer has its own adverse consequences that ultimately affect golfers at all levels and the game as a whole.”

It said that golf would flourish best if the continuing cycle of ever-increasing hitting distances and golf course lengths is “brought to an end.”

“Longer distances, longer courses, playing from longer tees and longer times to play are taking golf in the wrong direction and are not necessary to make golf challenging, enjoyable or sustainable in the future,” read the report. “In reaching

this conclusion, our focus is forward-looking with a goal of building on the strengths of the game today while taking steps to alter the direction and impacts of hitting distances in the best interests of its long-term future.”

ASGCA President Jan Bel Jan said, “We look forward to reviewing with all ASGCA members the complete report findings, which appear to confirm what ASGCA members have seen from their work for some time: increased hitting distance can lead to golf course lengthening. This cycle may have a negative impact in a number of areas, including economic sustainability of facilities, their environmental footprint, the strategic challenge of playing the course as designed by the golf course architect and the pure fun that comes from playing the game from tees that match a player’s skill level.”

Forrest Richardson, ASGCA, added, “Discussions have gone on for over 100 years. Designers responded by adding tees, widening hitting

areas and expanding ranges. I hope strategic principles, and need to conserve natural resources, are stronger through the study’s results.”

The report’s findings also serve to reinforce the value ASGCA members place on forward tees and multiple tee options, stating “that many recreational golfers are playing from longer tees than necessary. We have a particular concern that the forward tees at many courses are very long for the hitting distances of many of the golfers who play them.”

Bel Jan said, “Golfers of all skill levels should be encouraged to play from tees that provide the most enjoyment and the best opportunity for them to score well. We are thrilled to see continued promotion of the benefits of moving forward.”

Download the USGA and R&A *Distance Insights Report* at: usga.org/content/dam/usga/pdf/2020/distance-insights/SOC-FINAL.pdf

Industry news

USGA showcases the art of the golf course



Photo image: USGA Golf Museum



The USGA has created a new exhibition that examines golf courses through art. ‘The Art of the Golf Course’ will be on display at the USGA Golf Museum until the end of August 2020.

“Visitors to this exhibition will draw parallels between the choices made by artists and those of golf course architects, whether to create playing interest and challenge, or visual interest and beauty, enhancing their appreciation and understanding of the golf course as a work of art,” said Hilary Cronheim, director of the USGA Golf Museum.

Curated by Rand Jerris, the USGA’s senior managing director of public services and former director of the museum, the exhibition showcases a variety of perspectives through paintings, prints, drawings, photography, sculpture and the museum’s fine art collection.

The exhibition features panoramic images by photographer John Yang and bronze sculptures of green complexes by Henry Whiting II, as well as artwork by golf course architects, including a rare watercolor by A.W. Tillinghast and a selection of drawings by Desmond Muirhead.

Sharp rise in master plan and short game developments



Photo: Lohmann Quirino

According to the 2020 *Golf Facility Market Trend Watch* report, master plan and short game developments are now the two most popular types of projects for golf architects.

Respondents to the study—commissioned by the ASGCA and conducted by Sports & Leisure Research Group (SLRG)—included hundreds of golf course architects, superintendents, general managers, facility owners/operators, golf professionals and industry leaders.

Eighty-eight percent of architects reported that in the last two years that they have been employed to develop a golf course master plan—the most popular type of project the recent study finds.

Jon Last, SLRG founder and president, said: “It is interesting to note the continued increase in general managers thinking their golfers would welcome enhanced short game areas and practice ranges; it’s a full 20-point increase over two years.”

The report notes that short game area developments that architects have been involved with has jumped from 75 percent in 2018 to 85 percent in 2020.

Download the highlights of the report at: asgca.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/2020-Market-Trend-Watch-FINAL.pdf

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Renovation

Reversible nine for Martin County

Construction work is in progress at Martin County golf course in Stuart, Florida, as part of a transformation that is being overseen by ASGCA Past President John Sanford.

The facility will be reduced from 36 to 27 holes, with a new reversible nine-hole layout created.

"We are honored to team up with TDI Golf to transform Martin County's 36 holes into a unique and modernized golf and entertainment complex," said Sanford. "This is a cutting-edge approach to gain interest and grow the game on a local level."

The first phase includes creating the new nine-hole layout that will use portions of the existing Red and White nines. Each hole will have five sets of tees and the course will be playable in both directions.

The range is being relocated with a new clubhouse, allowing for new



Image: Sanford Golf Design

ASGCA Past President John Sanford will introduce a reversible nine-hole layout at Martin County in Florida

practice facilities to be built. There will also be covered hitting bays with ball tracking technology and there are plans for a new short game area and a large putting green.

The Blue and Gold nines will be rebuilt and re-grassed in phase two. Greens will be expanded, bunkers rebuilt with new drainage and forward tees added.



"Pete Dye was magical when it came to be talking with owners. He always got his way."

BRIAN CURLEY, ASGCA

In the latest podcast from *Golf Course Industry's* "Tartan Talks" series, Brian Curley, ASGCA, reflects on the life of Pete Dye, ASGCA Fellow, and the impact he had on those he worked with.

"Prior to his career as a golf course architect, he was one of the best insurance salesmen in the business," said Curley. "One thing that struck me early on was if you're going

to succeed in the business of golf course architecture, you need to be able to sell your ideas and concepts to owners. Pete was magical when it came to be talking with owners. He always got his way."

Dye was known by many as a giant friend of the superintendents. "He would spend a significant amount of time with the superintendents during construction and grow-in, and even

when play had already started," said Curley.

"He was so fun to be around. He was unique. Of all the people I have met in my life, I can't think of anybody who was so uniquely suited to do what he did. He would draw the best out of everyone around him."

Listen to the full "Tartan Talk" at golfcourseindustry.com.

HERE ARE LINKS TO OTHER RECENT "TARTAN TALKS," NOW FEATURING OVER 20 EPISODES:

- Nathan Crace, ASGCA, [provides a golf architect's perspective on the past decade and looks ahead to the next 10 years.](#)
- Jason Straka, ASGCA, and Kenwood Country Club's Kent Turner [offer insight into the architect-superintendent relationship.](#)

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Renovation

Renovation under way at Sequoyah National

ASGCA Past President Robert Trent Jones, Jr., ASGCA Fellow, has returned to Sequoyah National Golf Club in Whittier, North Carolina, to oversee a bunker renovation and regrassing project.

According to the club, the renovations will provide better playing conditions for year-round playability on the layout, which was originally designed in 2009 by Jones, alongside professional golfer Notah Begay III.

“We’re investing in the future of the golf course by upgrading the playing surfaces and bunkers,” said Sequoyah National golf board chairman Curtis Wildcat. “With these improvements, Sequoyah National solidifies its place as one of the best mountain courses in the southeast.”

Capillary Concrete will be installed in the bunkers, while the fairways, tees and green surrounds will be converted to Zeon Zoysia turf.

The course will remain open during the project, with the renovations impacting play on a few holes each day. Work is scheduled for completion in July 2020.



Photo: KemperSports

A bunker renovation and regrassing project is in progress at Sequoyah National Golf Club in North Carolina

New golf course

New Vietnam course to open next year

Construction work is in progress on a golf course designed by Jack Nicklaus II, ASGCA, at Royal Golf Club near Hanoi, Vietnam.

Nicklaus Design’s Jim Wagner, ASGCA, said: “One of our tasks was to create a unique and challenging golfing experience that would have significant contrast to the existing course.”

The Queen’s Course, which is expected to open in June 2021, will become the second course at the club, joining the King’s Course, designed by Peter Rousseau.



Photo: Nicklaus Design

Renovation

Black Diamond Ranch completes bunker rebuild

David Whelchel, ASGCA, has completed a bunker rebuild on the Quarry course at Black Diamond Ranch in Lecanto, Florida.

“There are almost four acres of sand on the course and after 32 years, they were starting to need a facelift,” said Whelchel. “Many of the bunkers have been changed over the years, and some have even been taken out. We are trying to put some of those back and make others more playable and maintainable as they have got very steep as a result of major drainage issues.”

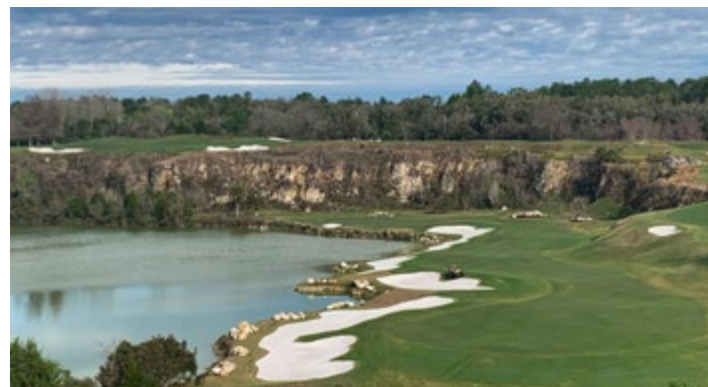


Photo: Black Diamond Ranch



“It’s always
been part art,
part science —
and pure joy.
I’m a voice of
the ASGCA.”

— DR. MIKE HURDZAN



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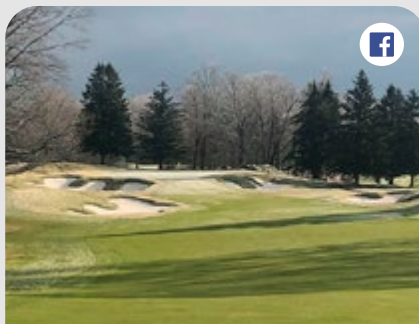
Social update



Great running into my old friend from Kansas City Kyle Phillips on our new project in Abu Dhabi. Kyle designed the original course on Yas Island called Yas Links. We sure came a long way from Kansas.



Fry Straka Golf
@FryStrakaGolf



Rees Jones is progressing with a bunker renovation project on the layout at Fairview Country Club in Greenwich, Connecticut, created by his father Robert Trent Jones in 1966.



Golf Course Architecture
@gcamagazine



My friend Gene Bates renovated the @bbhgolf property from overgrown to awesome! Bayonet Black Horse is well worth playing and great value in Monterey.



brianoar
Brian Oar



Hard to believe that par-4 7th at California Golf Club of San Francisco wasn't a part of A.V. Macao's original design, as this true Cape hole, added by Kyle Phillips a decade ago, fits so perfectly amidst this terrific design. Drama, strategy, beauty: an instant favorite.



LinksGems Golf Photos
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We are excited to announce the completion of the master planning work at Chautauqua Golf Club, New York and the Donald Ross designed Lake Course.



chriswilczynski1
CW Golf Architecture



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Golf Course Architect of the Week: Chris Lutzke, @ASGCA. 2 decades w/Pete Dye started at Whistling Straits. Architectural education & creativity has enabled Chris to manifest some of the most dynamic forms in the golf world (Pic: Eagle Eye, Mich.)



The 12th hole at Chickasaw, showing our recent renovation to this 1922 William Langford gem!



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The ground breaker

Photo: David Spencer/Palm Beach Post/ZUMA Press

In January 2020, golf lost one of the most influential course architects of the twentieth century. Pete Dye, a Past President and Fellow of ASGCA, left quite a legacy. Not only did he create ground-breaking designs like TPC Sawgrass, but he also mentored many of the game's top golf architects.

“I first met Pete in the 1970s at Amelia Island Plantation,” says Bobby Weed, ASGCA. “That was the start of a 45-year relationship. We built Long Cove together in 1981, and I’ve been building golf courses ever since. I can hardly approve a feature without feeling Pete’s influence. Pete was always ahead of his time. How many golf designers could that be said about?”

“As much of a legacy as his courses will be, the impact he had on those fortunate to work with him may

be more enduring. The stories and memories are plentiful but seem insufficient. We all have someone who took hold of us and set us on our life’s path, maybe without our even knowing it. For me, that was Pete. Everything I hold dear in golf took root from my relationship with him. Not bad for someone that lived to be half of 188!”

The memories

“I can remember when my dad put me on a tractor for the first time,

as well as all of those other things I did growing up as a farm boy in Indiana” says P.B. Dye, ASGCA. “The construction business was an integral part of my life. Building these golf courses, not just being the architect’s son, but to physically work with everybody and to learn and build these golf courses with my dad.

“Our family always had white German shepherds and when we were going to work, us children would always ride in the back of the pickup truck with the dogs while someone



else drove—you're not allowed to do that today!

"Driving around in trucks with him was always a lot of fun. Neither my dad nor I have worked a day in our lives because we have had too much fun. We have gotten really dirty and really muddy, but it's never been work to us."

Tim Liddy, ASGCA, who worked very closely with Pete until the last years of his life, describes what a workday with Pete was like: "It was always fun but with much work involved. Meeting

with a client on site, walking the site, looking at drainage and always editing the visual aspects of the golf hole. They were normally long, dirty days and always his dog '60' accompanied us. One time, traveling out to the site from the airport at Kohler to Whistling Straits, the small front cab of the pickup truck allowed room only for

the driver, him and 60. I gladly rode in the open bed of the truck in 10-degree weather knowing I was working with a Hall of Fame architect."

ASGCA Past President Lee Schmidt says: "Upon graduating from Purdue University in 1970, I contacted Pete for an interview and was fortunately hired to work on a golf project near

/// Pete was always ahead of his time. How many golf designers could that be said about?



Columbus, Ohio. I always joked with him in later years that he paid me below slave labor. He would respond, 'I think I overpaid you!' Thus, began my long and wonderful relationship with Pete. Not a single word can accurately describe him. He was fun, a maverick, innovative, home spun, quick witted, a great storyteller, and most importantly, my friend."

// He pushed the envelope, always trying different things to bring a uniqueness to his designs

Greg Muirhead, ASGCA, began his career in golf architecture by completing two internships with Pete before assisting him with the construction of a course in Colorado. Pete and Alice then helped Muirhead secure his current position with Rees Jones, Inc.

"I first met Pete at Crooked Stick, where our family had a membership," says Muirhead. "He and Alice both counseled me regarding a career in golf architecture while I was in high school and throughout college. Golf design is a very small business that has always been very difficult for a young person to break into. Like several

of today's designers, my career is directly related to Pete and Alice generously giving me an opportunity and helping me along. They were both great players, designers, and most importantly, people.

"My fondest memories of Pete are remembering how he went about his

work when he came to town for a site visit. His passion for golf and design were unmatched. He was truly a 'field-architect', continuously modifying what had been shaped until he had what he wanted...and then changing it again during his next visit!"

A test of skill

"His courses were a great test for professionals, but I believe he also gave higher handicapped golfers options on how to play the hole," says Schmidt. "Leaving open entries to greens, safe routes of play from the tee and various options on how to play the hole were design philosophies he would instill.

"He loved testing the skills of professionals through his designs. Angles of play with increasing difficulty, varying green shapes and contours, using grass types to add contrast and creating half shots were other traits of his designs we learned to love.



Photo: Chip Henderson



Photo: Tim Liddy, ASGCA

"I think TPC Sawgrass is his most creative project," says Tim Liddy, ASGCA, pictured above on site with Pete. Left, the fourth hole at the world-renowned Florida course

"Detailed plans were minimal, often they were drawn on napkins from dinner the night before or on the back of a paper placemat from breakfast. He truly loved getting a feel of the land and adapting his design to it. The more he walked the site, yes, he loved to walk, the more his imagination worked to come up with a unique golf hole. Many golf architects drew plans and expected the construction crews to follow the plans exactly, not Pete. Routings were done, but that was just the beginning of a blank canvas to create something special. He pushed the envelope, always trying different things to bring a uniqueness to his designs."

"He's a little bit of Monet, a little bit of Picasso," says P.B. Dye. "Dad, like a lot of the great designers, did what he needed to do to challenge the golfer. The most important factor that he always followed was that a golf course does not need to be fair, but it needs to be fun, and it needs to be

playable. And even though he built the hardest golf courses in the world, they are still fun and playable for the higher handicap players."

Memorable projects

"I think TPC Sawgrass is his most creative project," says Liddy. "He had a very flat piece of ground. Pete established four layers of horizontal planes almost like a birthday cake using: water, waste bunker, fairway, and a green set off by vertical edges or railway ties or steep grass slopes. A golfer is constantly looking over, down or around these planes as he plays. He took a flat boring site and gave it spatial definition. It is pure genius."

"He was one of the first to use classical elements of Raynor, Ross and Langford in modern compositions, for it is not about style or decoration but about articulation of space. The strong geometry created the feeling of space—to look over and play around."

"One of my best memories of Pete was in 1974 while I was working in the Dominican Republic on the Links course at Casa de Campo," says Schmidt. "We were about two months into the start of construction with several holes roughly shaped on the front nine. I was traveling home for a 10-day trip to get married, so Pete volunteered to run the crews during my absence. Knowing Pete is not the most organized person, I made a list on top of list for what I wanted done and in what sequence. As always and in Pete's words, he said, 'No problem, I got it.'"

"When I returned with my new bride, I was anxious to see the progress made during my absence. Pete met me on arrival and said, 'everything went great, I only changed one thing.' I was astounded, 'Only one thing?' 'Yes, the more I walked the site, the more I felt the course was better if we reversed the routing. Where we previously had

greens, I shaped in tees and where we had tees I started shaping in the new greens.' I was shocked, but the course stayed that way and I will say it was a better course because of just one small change."

Great rapport

"Pete had a better rapport with superintendents than any architect who has ever been in the business," says Liddy. "He liked them, he listened to them and the result is that his courses are easier to maintain than they might seem at first glance.

"The people who build golf courses want to enjoy the process, but a lot of times they don't quite know what their goals are. They have a general idea, but I saw how much Pete helped his clients refine their mission. Many times, building a golf course is a two-year process. When you get through it successfully, it's a great feeling, and there's a real bond that forms.

"In later years, Pete spent time returning to projects that he finished 20, 30, even 40 years ago. Part of this is because a course's infrastructure naturally ages, but it's also because he didn't consider anyone a 'former' client."

"He always treated everyone the same whether you were the owner, shaper or laborer," says Schmidt. "I appreciated how he would involve everyone in the design process. As we were reviewing a specific hole, he would say to me and possibly the shaper, 'do you like it, what do you think?' Various comments would be exchanged, and I remember often I would say 'it just doesn't look right.' He would then counter saying, 'what would you do?' After a back and forth open discussion he would take our comments and say, 'let's try this.'

"He had a basic concept before designing a hole, but his true talent was modifying, adjusting and tweaking the work on the ground until he liked it. He made everyone feel a part of the process and because of that I sincerely believe everyone gave their best effort to improve the design."



"Pete loved everything about the game of golf including building golf courses and the people," says P.B.

Ground-breaking designs

"Pete and Alice had made such an amazing team in life and golf," says Bill Coore, ASGCA. "Professionally, I would say that Pete Dye was one of the most influential golf architects in the history of the profession.

"He was the only golf architect who changed the course of golf architecture twice, first with Harbour Town, an old-world design with characteristics totally opposite to the contemporary

/// He was the only golf architect that changed the course of golf architecture twice

golf architecture then in vogue. Then, he and Alice redirected golf architecture again with the creation of TPC Sawgrass, a course that would dictate the direction and style of golf architecture around the world for the next two decades.

"Personally, I can say Pete Dye was one of the most influential people in

my life. Golf, golf architecture and I will miss him."

"His designs matched his personality: strong, bold, smart and creative," says Liddy. "He was a mentor to so many, a true legacy of his genius and compassion. He was my mentor and his love of golf and golf design was infectious.

"One of Pete's most famous quotes was, 'If you can get a pro thinking, you've won the game.' The interesting thing is that it applies just as much, if not more, to a shot or hole that will be played hours later as it does to the shot immediately at hand. The lesson is that every course should have something that the golfer is already thinking about before he or she steps on to the first tee."

"Pete's midwestern background showed in his personality," says Schmidt. "He was a great storyteller, worked hard, loved to learn about people and gave generously to many. My alma mater, Purdue University, benefited greatly as Pete remodeled two of the university's golf courses for one dollar each.

"He lived a full and wonderful life and touched so many lives. The legacy he left through his courses, other architects he mentored and the impact he left on the game of golf is a life well played. I will miss you, Pete."

"Pete was a generational figure in architecture and golf," says Muirhead.



The 2017 ASGCA Annual Meeting in Jupiter, Florida, saw Pete and Alice Dye joined by some of the many golf course architects they have influenced. From left, Tom Doak, Brian Curley, Scot Sherman, Perry Dye, Pete Dye, Bobby Weed, Alice Dye, Tim Liddy, Greg Muirhead, Lee Schmidt, Taylor Zimbelman and P.B. Dye. Top left, the Ocean Course at Kiawah Island in South Carolina and, top, Whistling Straits in Kohler, Wisconsin

“He was a visionary designer who made every architect re-assess his or her own philosophy and style. His landforms, design angles and often intimidating visuals transformed professional golf, perhaps like no other architect before him. He challenged Tour players and made them think

about each shot, which often led to ‘doubt’ and poor execution.”

“There are so many highlights of my dad’s career,” says P.B. Dye. “Our family is very blessed. The game of golf has been very good to my family. Because of my mom and dad, golf has become part of my life.

“I’ve always said that Pete is my dad, but I have shared him with a lot of other people. All those people who have worked with him—that is his impact on golf. The Bobby Weeds, Bill Coores, all of these guys have worked with my dad, and learned from him...that’s the legacy.” ●

Back from the brink



When a golf course closes, there can often be a string of negative effects on the community. Bringing back the golf, maybe in a re-imagined form, is often a far better solution. Joe Passov considers some rebirth stories

No good golf course deserves to disappear, though many do—and for many reasons. Among them are fiscal mismanagement and natural disasters, but in most cases, the demise of a golf course is tied to simple macroeconomic fundamentals. Perhaps the raw land is worth more being used in some other capacity, typically for residential and commercial real estate; the golf may succumb.

Within a course's lifespan, the warning signs toward abandonment pulse intermittently in red. Start with the scenario where the golf course operation costs consistently exceed income. In a retirement community, for instance, when members are dying off or quitting the game faster than they can be replaced, revenues are

diminished. So, too, there's a cost to repair aging, failing golf course infrastructure. Key items that need replacement on a 20-year-old course, from the irrigation system to cart paths to broken drainage pipes can add up. It's not unlike needing to put a new roof on your house. Ignore it for too long and your entire house is in peril—but what can be done if you don't have the money for that new roof? You sell the house or else do nothing and face the consequences later.

In the case of many municipal courses facing decommission, the blame can be similar to private sector woes: rounds are down and so are revenues. Yet, there has also been a philosophical change among some municipalities, that no longer should



Photo: Atlantic Beach CC

A new design from ASGCA Past President Erik Larsen brought Jacksonville's Selva Marina course back to life

golf courses be subsidized recreation, but instead may be treated as sink-or-swim cash flow assets.

While some locales became overbuilt during the real estate boom of the 1990s and early 2000s, with golf often merely a means—an amenity—to push home sales, these excess courses in most instances can and should be preserved. This is especially true given the huge negatives associated with an abandoned golf course.

When a course is decommissioned, it affects more than merely the golfers who once enjoyed it. It impacts wage-earners who made their livelihood from that golf course. It affects the property values of homeowners on the course or

in the community. It influences the town or city which benefited from the resulting commerce.

Horror stories from abandoned golf courses crop up all too frequently. Copperhead snakes, bikers and meth

safety concerns plague many abandoned tracks, from utility lines to crumbling cart paths to underground sprinklers. There's virtually no end to the potential menaces.

Not every course is destined to live

// Horror stories from abandoned golf courses crop up all too frequently

cookers took roost at a lost South Carolina course. Feral pigs took over another. At a fallow Philadelphia-area course, a marijuana-growing operation prospered until being discovered. A decommissioned layout on Florida's Gulf Coast was choked with weeds 12 feet high. Countless

forever, but many of them don't have to go under, either. With persistence and creativity—and the assistance of a golf course architect—even a struggling golf property can be reimagined into something that benefits the greater good, in many cases with some form of golf playing



Photo: Atlantic Beach CC

The newly-named Atlantic Beach Country Club was cleverly reworked to accommodate some housing lots and a new design aesthetic that is authentic to the area

a significant role. Here are three examples, each at a different stage of the process, of a golf course that was either abandoned or nearly so that is now on the rebound.

The beach is back

In 2012, the premier private equity country club in suburban Jacksonville's Atlantic Beach, Selva Marina, was running out of gas. Conditions had been spiraling downward for years and the membership rolls experienced a similar plunge. Needed maintenance was deferred again and again. The club was having trouble making payroll. In 2012, bankruptcy was tap-tap-tapping at the door.

Site of the only double eagle that Jack Nicklaus, ASGCA Fellow, recorded in his PGA Tour career, at the par-five 72nd hole in the 1966 Jacksonville Open, Selva Marina prospered from 1958 until early in the 21st century, when it was drenched with water woes. Things began sinking fast.

Enter Erik Larsen. A Past President of ASGCA, Larsen had spent nearly 30 years designing courses for Arnold Palmer, ASGCA Fellow, so it's likely he knew a thing or two about heroic recoveries from the man who practically invented them on the golf course. In the case of Selva Marina, it was personal. Larsen was a member.

"By the early 2000s, the golf course was literally dying from within," said Larsen. "Simply, the club had poor irrigation water. It was drawn from Sherman Creek, which cuts diagonally across the property and it was almost brackish. You really needed a new irrigation source in order to resurrect the golf course."

What the club did have, Larsen noted, was remnant land. "I proposed selling the extra land, and letting me re-route the golf course. A developer would build new homes and mandate membership purchase on the new homebuyers, which would create guaranteed revenues through dues. That would let us make more

improvements and because of that, we would attract even more members. And that's exactly what happened. And it only took us two years to do it."

Larsen's plan was shepherded through the process by his friend and fellow club member Pete Rodriguez and also by then club president Mike Carlin. Entitlements and financing complications slowed the process, but in time these issues were overcome. Eventually, 178 new single family units emerged of mostly high-end homes. By 2014 Selva Marina began morphing into Atlantic Beach Country Club.

The developer was also required to provide a golf course of at least 6,900 yards, and contribute to a new clubhouse. The community rallied behind the project and Larsen delivered a superb golf course. "It had to be a wow!" says Larsen. "It had to look like something authentic to Atlantic Beach. It couldn't look like anything else in Jacksonville." It didn't.

Most distinctive were the dunesy-



Photo: Atlantic Beach CC



Image: Larsen Golf

looking bunker features that resembled the beach dunes of the nearby Atlantic Ocean. With lips ranging from four to eighteen inches and Bahia grass on the backside, it yields the sensation of playing a course sculpted right from the beach. All he kept was the old par-five eighteenth hole, for sentimental reasons—where Arnold Palmer’s chief nemesis, Jack Nicklaus, made history.

Larsen is proud of the golf, but freely acknowledges that what preserved his club was the land itself. “This was basically a real estate deal that saved it,” he said. “As of 2019, there wasn’t one lot without a home on it. It’s completely built out and sold out.”

Snead’s sacred ground

In late May, 1949, Belmont Golf Course in Richmond, Virginia, sat atop the golf world. Known then as Hermitage Country Club, the 1916 A.W. Tillinghast design was

among the finest in the south and had benefited from a subsequent Donald Ross tweak. That final week in May, native Virginian Sam Snead, the current Masters champion, was bidding for back-to-back majors as Hermitage served as venue for the PGA Championship. Snead downed Johnny Palmer in the final, 3 & 2, to capture the Wanamaker Trophy for the second time.

It was hard to fathom that exactly seventy years later, the only course ever to host a major championship in the state of Virginia faced extinction. Then things changed dramatically.

After Henrico County bought Hermitage Country Club in 1977 and changed the course name to Belmont, it enjoyed a long, healthy run operating the historic spread. However, by March 2018, ominous warning signs had emerged. Belmont’s operations had turned a profit only once since 2000 (\$5,429 in 2008).

The county explored their options. By October 2018, six proposals

Waters Edge Golf Course

Fremont, Michigan

Golf course architect:
Raymond Hearn, ASGCA



Image: Raymond Hearn Golf Course Design

Waters Edge is a ‘small town USA’ golf course that has long been a significant part of the fabric of the idyllic town of Fremont in western Michigan. In 2015, the course was auctioned off due to upkeep issues and declining revenue. A decommission was contemplated with a plan for golf to give way to real estate. Instead, new investors hired Ray Hearn to develop a long-range master plan and ultimately to refurbish and repurpose. Two new holes opened in 2019 and a third is on tap for 2020, together with a new Player Performance Area (range, practice green, chipping, short game and sand practice). When the tee is closed, the range can be transformed into a three- or six-hole par-three course. More improvements are slated over the next four years, including clubhouse upgrades and a new training center. Play is up, revenues have increased and the course once again is the pride of Fremont.

Wynn Golf Club

Las Vegas, Nevada

Golf course architect:
Tom Fazio, ASGCA



Photo: Brian Oar

When Steve Wynn built his eponymous sequel to Shadow Creek, he knew it might not be a forever proposition. In 2005, he said of his soon-to-open, Tom Fazio-designed Wynn Golf Club: "My property is worth 10 to 15 million an acre. I've got a billion and a half dollars of real estate under that golf course. It *better* become a top destination, or else goodbye golf course. There will be no more golf course. It'll be filled with buildings." Fast forward to December 2017. Wynn's prognosis was on target. His golf course closed to make way for a planned hotel addition, convention space expansion and a 20-acre lagoon to be called Paradise Park. Alas, as the course sat abandoned, the buildings never materialized. Fazio and his son Logan were summoned to repurpose the course. Yardage was shaved from 7,042 to 6,722, eight entirely new holes were constructed and ten others were remodeled. Modified contours, wider landing areas, altered bunkers and a new 6,500-square-ft. putting green adjacent to the first tee have changed the layout's look and playability. Wynn reopened in October 2019. Welcome back!



were being considered. None of them retained a golf component. Most ambitious was a radical repurposing that would eliminate golf and substitute a massive mixed-use project. It would have included a multipurpose indoor arena, an outdoor whitewater park, an adventure park and a blend of hotel, office, retail and residential space.

In the spring of 2019, following a series of public meetings, the Henrico County Board of Supervisors agreed to hold off implementing any plan that involved repurposing Belmont that didn't include golf. As the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* reported: "Belmont Golf Course is safe for now, but Henrico can't promise it will always be a golf course."

As always in life, Love is the answer. Enter Scot Sherman, ASGCA, lead designer for Love Golf Design. Together with Davis Love III and Davis's brother Mark, Sherman has joined forces with the First Tee of Greater Richmond to take a course with the real possibility of being decommissioned and repurpose it into something that will benefit the greatest number of people possible.

On December 10, 2019, the First Tee of Greater Richmond won the bid to assume management of Belmont with a \$4 million plan that would alter the makeup of the existing golf course and add significantly to the number of potential users. The course closed down in January and is expected to reopen in late spring 2021. Purists won't be thrilled that the 18-hole PGA Championship course will be reduced to 12 holes, but there are other reasons to get them to smile.

When The First Tee approached Love Golf Design and proposed 12 holes and plenty of practice options, Sherman and the Love team were engaged from the start. "We all chimed in very quickly and said that not only does The First Tee aspect interest us," said Sherman, "but you're checking all of the boxes that golf is begging for. Start with a fast-playing course—12 holes does that for you. Lots of practice. Next, an entry-level facility—the putting course we're building is as entry-level as you can get. And the six-hole short course we're crafting is the very next step up to the big course, which will have 12 Tillinghast golf holes. It's a way to



An imaginative new design proposal from Scot Sherman, ASGCA, of Love Golf Design could breathe new life into Belmont Golf Course in Richmond, Virginia. He plans to use parts of the existing front nine for a short course and practice area (below), while twelve Tillinghast-designed holes (including the back nine, left) will remain largely intact

Images: Courtesy of Scot Sherman, ASGCA



impact the community, number one, but it's also a way to show there are different ways to do this, rather than just an 18-hole experience."

From the original 18 holes, Sherman will keep holes seven through 18 in the new Belmont design. The holes won't replicate what Tillinghast originally crafted, but will embrace his design tenets. "Davis won his PGA Championship at Winged Foot," said Sherman. "So he and Mark have quite a bit of affinity for Winged Foot, and of course Mr. Tillinghast's work." The preliminary par is 48, with two par-threes, eight par-fours and two par-fives and should now stretch to 4,500 yards.

The one-acre putting green will have the potential to contain an actual putting course and the range will accommodate roughly 30 players and extend 300 yards. Perhaps most intriguing, especially for architecture buffs, is the prospect of the six-hole short course, which will occupy the plot that once housed the old fifth and sixth holes. The course features holes ranging from 85 to 150 yards and the concept Love Golf Design

has settled on is to create six replica green complexes of their favorite Tillinghast par-threes.

For A.W. Tillinghast fans and students of golf history, it's always disappointing to lose a true championship course. What The First Tee of Greater Richmond, Love Golf Design and Scot Sherman plan, however, is not only the next best thing, it might even be a better thing. The new setup will encourage a lot more people in the community to be able to use it. And yet, with 12 holes intact, folks will still get to walk in those famous footsteps.

A modest proposal

At Club West in Phoenix, the blight is startling. As of January 2020, once lush turf had turned weed-choked, splotchy green in some spots, parched dark brown in others. A handsome lake at the clubhouse was barely liquified, its shore rutted with broken bricks and discarded trash. Coyotes, birds and rodents scurried and fluttered in the clubhouse before the caved in windows and doorways were finally boarded up. Not two minutes away stands a development

of upscale homes that boast a median sales price of \$518,000. One home is on the market for \$1.74 million. The contrast is eye-popping and disheartening.

While many homeowners blame the current owner for mismanagement, there was one undeniable culprit: water. Or, rather, it was the cost and availability of water. The backstory is complicated, but the bottom line is that there has been no water and no playable golf course since 2018.

Potential buyers for Club West came and went. The cost to water the golf course, estimated at \$700,000 per year and heading higher, is prohibitive. It proved to be the deal-killer every time. At one point, a pipeline was proposed that would transport water from the Gila River Indian Community, travel beneath the new South Mountain Freeway and wind up at the golf course. That idea, too, failed to launch.

There is no happy ending in sight for Club West and the concerned Foothills Club West homeowners—not yet, anyway. However, a proposed plan is on the table. Enter Forrest Richardson, ASGCA. His firm is



There is new hope for homeowners alongside the abandoned Club West course in Phoenix. Forrest Richardson, ASGCA, has created a solution that will transform the landscape (see visualisation above and, inset, the same hole as it is now) and is also helping to rebrand the club

part of a development team that will endeavor to re-brand the community and repurpose the decommissioned golf course into a different facility, with golf as the primary feature. In return, homeowners will have to confront a new reality.

The proposal is in its infancy. No votes have taken place, no court battles have been fought, no rezoning hearings so far. But potentially, the plan represents a way forward.

Without any sort of golf course, the negative effects are tangible. Not only do locals lose a major aesthetic and recreational benefit, but research shows that they lose community value as well. Upon the closure of a golf course, the potential loss in value to homes in the development is between four and 18 percent, even as much as 30 percent for a property located directly on the course. Analysis of a nearby development which lost its golf course witnessed home prices

negatively impacted by an average of 9.5 percent. Thus, there's certainly financial incentive for homeowners to preserve a golf footprint.

Richardson's solution is a USGA-rated, 18-hole, par-60 layout to replace the existing par-72 tract. Supplementing the precision course will be a driving range, putting course and a short-game area. In addition, the plan calls for a banquet/wedding/corporate hosting facility, restaurant, coffee shop, gathering area and community area.

"The plan is to reduce the golf turf parcel from 162 acres to 110," said Richardson. "It's a precision course. On the old course, 40 percent of the land available for golf was covered with turf—about 70 acres. The rest was natural desert and native. We're taking that down to 30 acres, so roughly 30 percent of the 110 acres will be golf turf. The new percentage of golf turf is pretty close to the old

one, so the new course will be just as playable for everybody as the old one."

Richardson recognizes that not all community members are on board with precision golf as a substitute for championship golf. "A par-60 works because we're giving people everything," he said. "The plan is for 13 par-threes, one par-five and four par-fours. You can play in three to three-and-a-half hours. That's a good thing. But you still have those four par-fours, so you can whale away with your driver. And on the par five, you can take your chances for an eagle. You still have all the fun you want."

To pay for all of this—new course, new state-of-the-art irrigation, drought-tolerant turfgrass, new practice facilities and a new clubhouse, homeowners would yield three existing vacant parcels to a well-respected local homebuilder for the development of 168 new single-family homes. The revenue generated from



Photo: Courtesy of Alhwatukee Foothills Newspaper

that, says Richardson, will help pay for the capital investment needed in the golf course to turn it into something different. Without the housing, he says, no one is going to spend \$9 million making these improvements. For those existing homeowners who will lose their golf frontage because of the reconfigured design, the homebuilder will create enhanced landscape buffers and trails.

For any of these plans to come to fruition, it will take time. Right now Richardson and the rest of the development team are answering questions from community residents. Homeowners will have to vote to change the deed restrictions in place, which would allow the new homes to be constructed. If that happens, then the process moves to the city for rezoning meetings and hearings with the city council and planning commission. Even if every single step proceeded with a 'Yes' vote, the new

golf course facilities would still be at least two years away.

Richardson nods to the realities of the reduced turf/water situation. He's encountered it many times and offers a solution. "In almost all cases, it's making the golf course smaller in some fashion," he says. "Number two, it's finding some other use for some of the land that is a much higher and better use in terms of revenue and capitalism. And the third component is trying to appease as many existing neighbors and constituents as possible. And when all of those three things come together and balance nicely, you have the possibility of creating something really great." ●

ASGCA is always on the lookout for more golf courses that have been brought "back from the brink." If you know of such a course, please email the project information to marc@asgca.org.

Tower Tee

Afton, Missouri

Golf course architect:

Art Schaupeter, ASGCA



Image: Art Schaupeter, ASGCA

In July 2018, a south St. Louis, family-friendly, golf-oriented sports and recreation institution said goodbye after more than 50 years. Two months prior, Tower Tee owner Steve Lotz expressed his sentiments: "I've been touched by the outpouring of affection and nostalgia. But I want to be clear, there is no saving Tower Tee."

At that time, the 27 acres were destined for a new subdivision with more than 150 homes. A year later though, Lotz had to reach for his fork, knife and salt shaker. He was going to have to eat his words. After much pushback from locals, new investors Steve Walkenback and Mike Shamia decided that Tower Tee needed to stay put. They came to an agreement with the developers, purchased the property and engaged Art Schaupeter, ASGCA, to repurpose the facility. Schaupeter is in the process of converting the old 18-hole, par-three layout to nine holes composed of classic replica and homage holes plus some originals. Also on tap is a driving range with grass and artificial tees, a short game area, precision chipping area, a 15,000-square-ft. practice green/putting course, miniature golf, batting cages and footgolf. Further refinements include a playground for kids, bocce courts and a patio area. Opening day is expected to be in the fall of 2020.

The art of routing

Golf course architect Richard Mandell, ASGCA, talks to *By Design* about a concept course project

Most golf enthusiasts will have found themselves, at some point, staring from their car window at a stretch of land by the roadside, and imagining the holes that could be laid out there. Richard Mandell, ASGCA, was so intrigued by the possibilities of one such site, that he went a big step further: exploring the land, getting full topographical data, conceiving a full design and creating a routing map and hole visualizations. Since the start of 2020, he has been releasing details of each hole of this concept course, The Sandhills Club, on social media. We spoke with him to find out more.

What prompted you to develop this concept course?

I think many people take for granted the art of the golf course routing and how the best golf holes are the ones whose inherent strategy comes out of the ground itself. The topography of a hole should be the determining factor in how the hole should be approached. Routing from high point-to-high point, utilizing angles of attack, usually reveals natural hazards along the ground to challenge the golfer.

I don't want to dictate 'how it should be played' because I don't

really believe the architect should dictate specific paths from tee-to-green. Rather, I prefer to lay things out and let the golfer figure it out. The strategy should be there and, if done well, there is more than one answer from tee-to-green. That is what strategy is all about.

I came across some ground a few miles outside of Pinehurst that seemed interesting. One day I decided to walk the site and was intrigued by the variety of the ground. I asked Jim Ryan in my office to find the topo of the site so I could take a closer look. Once I did, I started routing golf holes. Each hole begat the following hole, all of which were determined based solely on the topography. It was a very organic, fast-moving, and free-flowing process for me, and I was amazed at how each hole fit so perfectly in the ground.

Tell us more about that site

The routing is based on an actual piece of property not far from the office. I walked the property and we covered the whole place. It never stood out with dramatic views or anything like that, but it did have some great roll to it.



As much as we all love the mythology of walking a site and 'seeing the holes unfold before our eyes,' it really doesn't happen like that. What really happens is you walk a site, become giddy about some very interesting landforms, visualize a bunch of golf holes that may or may not work together, and then find the need to process it from overhead, unless you have the topo map with you. On our first visit over the fence, we did not have any topo.

I had a good grip on the property from our visit and how it looked on paper, so the routing just flowed from there. Upon my return visit with a routing in hand, I fell in love with what I routed.

What has it been like to prepare a design without usual constraints, like land ownership, budget, environmental and client demands?

The actual constraints of the site are what makes this exercise a challenge.



Mandell's concept routing for a site a few miles from his office in Pinehurst, North Carolina

Image: Richard Mandell Golf Architecture/Jim Ryan

We worked to obtain the correct property lines for the site, downloaded wetlands from the Moore County GIS website, and had two-foot contours to work with. We had tree lines and water bodies to work with as well. My first task is to determine what those environmental site constraints are and develop my design based on those constraints. This project, although I could have made it up as I went, was no different. We wanted to see how special a routing this could be based on the site constraints.

The art of golf course routing is allowing the site to determine the routing and not let the routing determine the site. This is the exact ideal that has gotten lost for so long—

the cop-out of being able to manipulate the ground to fit your desires. I didn't want to do that here because that would just be counter to the whole point of why I was attracted to the site in the first place. I don't want to come up with something with the attitude that I 'can make it work in the field'. If that is my approach, then why bother using a real site?

Routing a golf course around real constraints and features is how we should all approach things. Changing the site to fit your desires isn't ever the same and isn't the authentic way to approach it. This site needed no manipulation, it just needed to be found, shot by shot.

As far as budget constraints go, it is the same thing. This routing requires almost no earthwork, the routing works that well. So, I haven't even thought about budgets one way or the other. Great sites require little

/// The art of golf course routing is allowing the site to determine the routing and not let the routing determine the site



Richard Mandell Golf Architecture design associate Jim Ryan created computer visualizations of each of his concept holes, with video flyovers. Clockwise from above, the double-dogleg eighteenth, short par-four fifteenth, the 'monster' eleventh and another short par-four, the eighth

dirt work, so they are inherently budget-friendly. More common is a big budget based on the materials used for conditioning and agronomics more so than making the holes work earthwork-wise. As far as not having any client demands to address, I decided the client wanted me to go find the best golf holes possible.

What are your favorite elements of the completed design?

What makes this exercise so special is that these holes only exist on this one piece of ground and will never be replicated for another project. Sure, there are elements of all these holes that I have designed before and will find again. However, they will only happen organically, when the ground of these future sites reveals them.

A few of my favorite holes are six, eight, eleven, fifteen, sixteen, and eighteen. With every one of these examples—except for the par-three sixteenth—the essence of high point to high point is in full display. Landing areas and green sites were already in their perfect places. Connecting these features through a variety of angles is where the strategy evolved. To make things stand out even more, natural features just fell into place along those lines of instinct to create differing lines of charm—and challenge.

Hole eight stands out as a natural drivable par four with a mesa landing area and a natural peninsula green site. Eleven is a monster along a dramatic ridge literally from tee to green, screaming for heroic play all the way to the hole.

Fifteen is a hole that I have never come close to developing elsewhere. It is another take on a short par four that reminds me of my home of Westchester County, New York, where so many short holes play up sheer rock cliffs. The Dunns and Stiles of the day never blasted these features away. Rather they just played them as they lay.

Sixteen is a Dell par three, a blind short shot that plays right over a big dune. Why not? Especially in a resort setting like the Sandhills. It will rival anything else in the area for fun and memorability.

The double dogleg eighteenth makes the Sandhills routing so special to me. The par five plays from ridge to ridge with bunkers set into each slope along the way. The angles these ground features revealed make it the epitome



Images: Richard Mandell Golf Architecture/Jim Ryan



of strategy. It also reminds me of one of my favorite ‘line of charm’ holes, four at Bethpage Black.

Are you pleased with the response?

I am pleased with the positive response from the social media world and hoped for such. The take-home here is the ability to share the vision of a piece of land through the essence of golf architecture—the golf course routing—and show what real minimalism is about. I prefer that some areas are left in their natural state and not touched at all, just roped off outside the limits of disturbance. This routing demonstrates that many areas can be left alone yet still contribute greatly to the story. ●

View every hole of *The Sandhills Club* routing on Richard Mandell’s Instagram page: [@RichardMandellGolfArchitecture](#)





“ Designing a reachable par four from the tee for the brave-hearted is a welcome blessing

A. John Harvey, ASGCA

After starting his career as a junior design associate with Robert Trent Jones, Sr., A. John Harvey moved to Roger Rulewich Group in 1995, before setting up his own design firm in 2011. Harvey has authored several environmental case studies for golf course projects and has served as a guest lecturer at Rutgers University for a number of turfgrass courses.

How is your game?

Every spring I keep telling myself that I'm going to be playing more golf. Last year was no exception, but it was a little different though. I guess I had more excuses this time!

My wife and I sold our house in New Jersey in April 2019, we rented from buyers for a few months until our twins AJ and Theresa graduated high school. In May, we started construction on a new house on 60 acres of land in Michigan and moved

my family and design practice out there. With all that said, it hasn't allowed me to play much golf!

Which three people would make up your dream fourball?

Certainly my father, who introduced my brother, sister and I to the game. Freddy Couples, who I admire on and off the course, not to mention watching his graceful, elegant and loose swing! To top it off, I'd go with Clint Eastwood, who's without question one of my favorite actors and he's not afraid to state his positions and opinions on things that matter to me.

What is your favorite hole in golf?

I'm a firm believer of having a short par three, four and five with versatile play options and angles off the tee or approach. Designing a reachable par four from the tee for the brave-hearted is a welcome blessing.

My favorite personal example is found on a course that Roger Rulewich, ASGCA Fellow, and I worked on together—the second hole at Ballyowen Golf Club in Hardyston, New Jersey. It's a short risk-reward, sharp dogleg left, par four that can be reached from the tee depending on tee location, prevailing wind, momentary courage and player ability. The left side of the hole is guarded by a deep ravine. We fortified the right side of the hole from landing area to the green with sculptured lacy edged bunkers. This is a hole that I've had my mind and hands on, so it's extremely important to me.

If you could change or add one rule, what would it be?

Creating a system for serving a warning then a penalty stroke for not fixing a ball-mark, pitch mark or divot. Player courtesy and etiquette seem to be a lost art these days! Otherwise, giving a breakfast ball or mulligan off the tee once in a full round of golf would be interesting.

What project are you currently working on?

I'm working on a full-scale bunker renovation project at Rockland Country Club in Sparkill, New York with superintendent Matt Ceplo. The course improvements also include the redesign of the first green and began on the heels of completing a new short game area and range tee renovation project. ●



Photo: A. John Harvey, ASGCA

A. John Harvey is in progress with a bunker renovation at Rockland Country Club

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