



ISSUE 66 // SUMMER 2024

BY DESIGN

Excellence in Golf Design from the American Society of Golf Course Architects



TRANSFORMATION

How four golf clubs have overseen a reconfiguration of their golf facilities to secure a prosperous future

PROTECTING DESIGN

ASGCA Past President Robert Trent Jones, Jr. provides insight into what the BIRDIE Act means for architects

ALSO:

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Michael Benkusky
President, ASGCA

Overseeing change

Golf clubs that face financial uncertainty will, like many businesses, often think first about how they are promoting their product. Maybe a new membership offer, or a social media campaign, will restore revenues. This type of activity can provide a short-term boost. A long-term solution, however, often requires a transformation of the product itself.

Many clubs have successfully overcome adversity by reconfiguring their golf facilities. This can bring multiple potential benefits, from freeing up land for sale to creating new features that better meet the needs of the local market.

A golf course architect is an essential member of the team to manage a successful transition. We draw on years of experience with often hundreds of different clients to propose a solution that a club may not initially have considered. And we have the creativity and expertise to turn a concept into a practical plan for the future.

The cover story for this issue of *By Design*, which begins on page 20, explores the stories of four clubs that – with the guiding hand of a golf course architect – have gone through a transformation that has set them up for many years of future success.

ASGCA has seen its fair share of transformation too. For the past 20 years, this has been under the meticulous stewardship of Chad Ritterbusch. As he prepares to hand over the reins to a new executive director, we asked Chad to reflect on the evolution of ASGCA over his time at the helm (see page 24). On behalf of all ASGCA members, I would like to give a special thank you to Chad for his vision, professionalism, dedication and friendship. He has set a high bar, and will be a hard act to follow.

I hope you enjoy the read!

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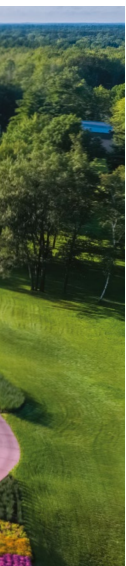
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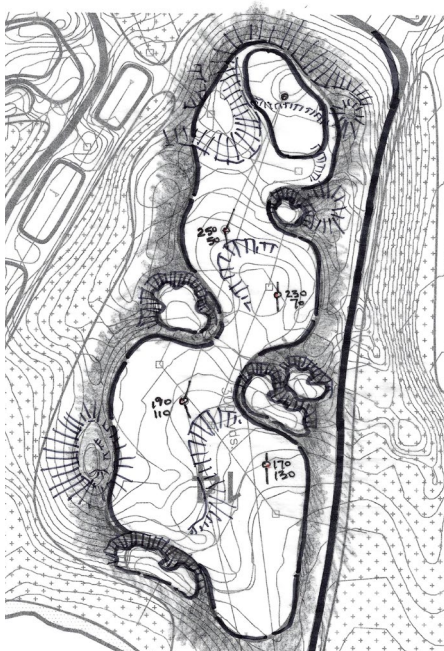
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The 27-hole Royal Auckland and Grange Golf Club in New Zealand, which has been designed by Chris Cochran, ASGCA. Read more about the club in our main feature on page 12. Photography by Gary Lisbon

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Editor and Publisher

Toby Ingleton

Editorial contributors

Rebecca Gibson, Larry Hirsh, Richard Humphreys, Robert Trent Jones, Jr.

Design

Bruce Graham, Libby Sidebotham, Dhanika Vansia

ASGCA Staff

Jeff Brauer, Chad Ritterbusch, Mike Sheffy, Marc Whitney, Ann Woelfel

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www.asgca.org

Brian Curley designs new course for Red Sea island



Brian Curley, ASGCA, of Curley-Wagner Golf Design is under way with Shura Links, a course located on an island off the west coast of Saudi Arabia.

“There are very few places in the world that can offer year-round sunshine, stunning vermillion sunsets and a wonderfully natural design,” said Curley. “Shura has it all. We expect everyone from professionals to beginners to be

drawn to this unique course and have designed it accordingly.”

The course is being grassed with Platinum TE paspalum, supplied from the Atlas Turf Arabia turf farm set up as a joint venture between Golf Saudi and Atlas Turf International. “I was an early convert to paspalums, using them all over Asia in the late 1990s but the earlier versions were sometimes far from what I wanted

in density and firmness,” said Curley. “The Platinum, however, is a massive leap forward in quality and will be a huge factor in contributing to both playability and environmental stewardship.”

Construction is progressing well. “The course will be minimally turfed,” said Curley. “When you do desert golf, it’s not about what you do in the turfed areas so much as what you do in the areas that



Photo: Curley-Wagner Golf Design

A sketch of the fifteenth hole at Shura Links, which is located on an island off the west coast of Saudi Arabia

aren't turfed. When you have salt water at a zero level and your playing surface is two meters above it, the question is what do you do in between? We don't want rock walls, so the first meter will be vegetation and the second will be bunkering, which we're trying to keep a little irregular, rugged and natural.

"There are villas down the sides of some of the holes, but it won't

feel as though you're playing through a housing estate, because the villas have a curvy roofline, and when combined with the dune landforms thereabouts, it will feel as though you're playing through sand dunes. It will be very much a find your ball kind of golf course. Seven of Shura's holes look out to sea, and there are another four or five holes on the internal water channels."

ASGCA Foundation now accepting applications for Wadsworth scholarship



Photo: ASGCA

The 2023 Wadsworth scholars: Scott Powers, Whitney Couchard, Alexa Moncada and Trey Jensen with Wadsworth's Pat Karnick and ASGCA Past President Michael Hurdzan

This year's application process for the ASGCA Foundation's Wadsworth Scholar Program, which provides students interested in golf course development with a chance to kickstart their career in golf, is now open.

Read more: *By Design* spoke with the previous recipients about the program's impact in the Summer 2023 issue.

This program will see two college students and two professionals in the early stages of their careers receive a \$2,500 scholarship and the opportunity to attend the ASGCA Annual Meeting in San Francisco this fall.

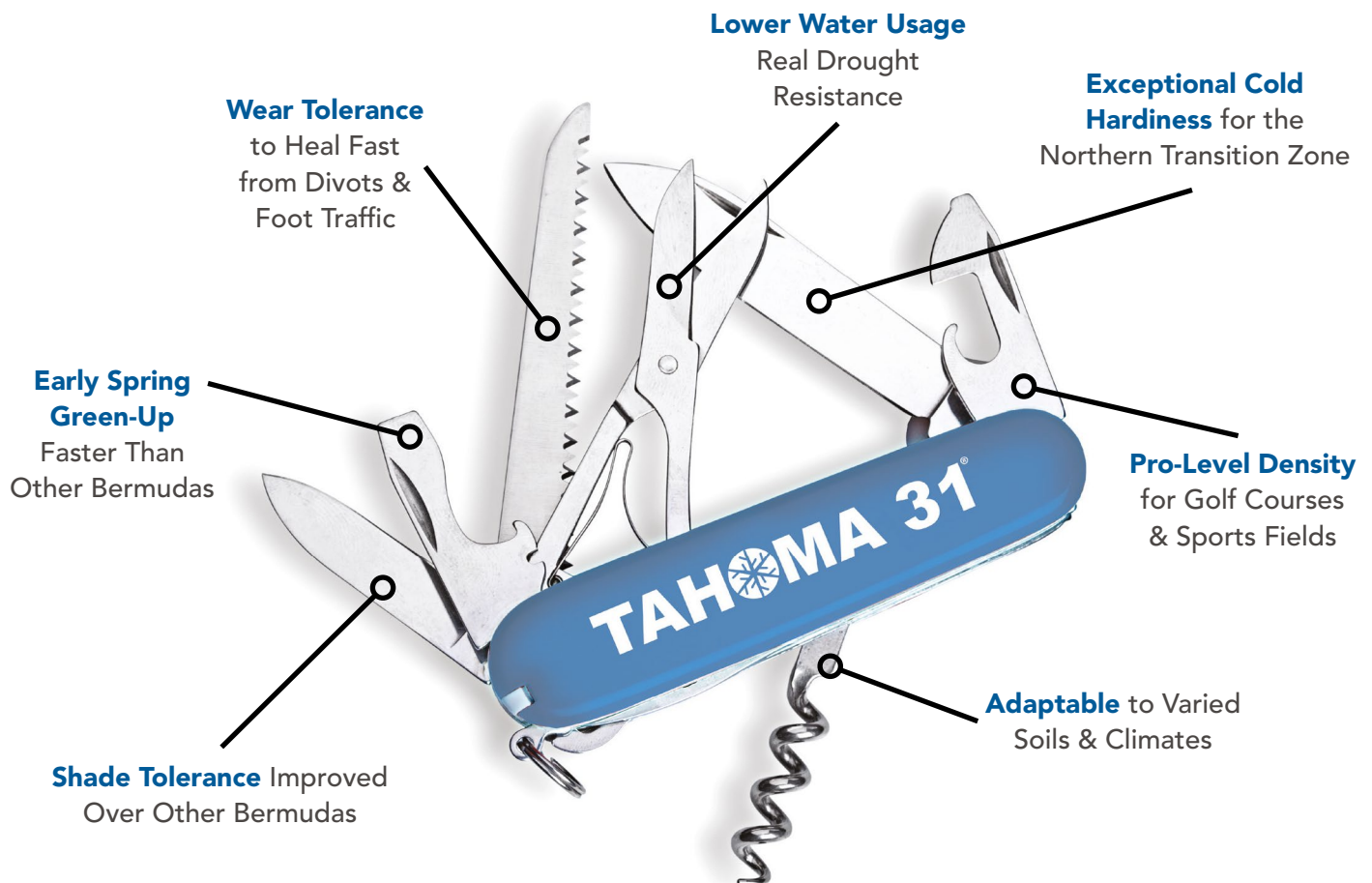
ASGCA Foundation has made updates to the program based on the increased funds contributed by Wadsworth Golf Construction and Wadsworth Golf Charities Foundation.

The 2024 Wadsworth Scholarship application can be found here: bit.ly/3yFI1sR.

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The Pines at The International to reopen

Bill Coore, ASGCA, and Ben Crenshaw have redesigned the Pines course at The International Golf Club & Resort in the greater Boston area of Massachusetts.

The course was originally designed by Geoffrey Cornish, ASGCA, in 1954 at 8,000 yards. It was extended to 8,325 yards in 1972 by ASGCA Founding Member Robert Trent Jones.

The club now believes golfers are less focused on difficulty as a measure of quality and instead prefer courses that are strategic, walkable and enjoyable for players of all skill levels.

The design team has created new corridors and green sites, with holes framed by sandy waste areas and



Photo: The International

pitch pines. The tees, fairways and rough areas have been planted with fescue grass, while greens now have bentgrass. The course is now growing-in and will open for limited member play in fall.

“Bill, Ben, shapers Ryan Farrow and Zach Varty, and the Coore & Crenshaw team have worked their magic, taking an exceptional

site and crafting what we strongly believe will be considered one of the country’s best new golf courses,” said Paul Celano, golf director at The International.

Escalante Golf acquired The International in early 2021 and have also renovated the Oaks course, a project completed by Tripp Davis, ASGCA, in the same year.



“I always design for the everyday player first”

Gene Bates, ASGCA

In the latest podcast from *Golf Course Industry’s* “Tartan Talks” series, Gene Bates, ASGCA, talks about designing public courses.

In 1983, Bates attended the Ryder Cup at PGA National, Florida, with his wife and son. They had positioned themselves at the par-three seventh. “The hole had a forced carry of around 140 yards, even from the forward tee,” says

Bates. “I realized that a hole of that length, which excluded the wind, would make it impossible for my wife and son to play. It got me thinking, how many other people say the same thing about certain golf holes?”

Bates decided that he would focus on designing for players of all abilities. “I always design for the everyday player first, then look to

provide challenges for the better golfer,” says Bates. “It also needs to be manageable for players and the clubs themselves. Delivering a golf course on a reasonable budget translates to the club being able to offer green fees the golfer can afford to pay.”

Listen to the full “Tartan Talk” at golfcourseindustry.com.

Here are links to other recent “Tartan Talks”, now featuring over 90 episodes:

- Erik Larsen, ASGCA, [explains the difference between renovations, restorations and remodels.](#)
- Jim Nagle, ASGCA, [talks about transitioning from Forse Golf Design to his own firm.](#)



Photo: Tyler Rae

Detroit to begin \$16m renovation of North in 2025

Detroit Golf Club in Michigan will begin a \$16 million renovation of its North course in summer 2025, following a masterplan developed by Tyler Rae, ASGCA.

The course was designed by ASGCA Founding Member Donald Ross in 1914 and has since been altered multiple times. Rae has studied Ross's original plans and historical aerial and ground-level photography to

develop a renovation plan for updating every feature of the course and reincorporating original design elements.

Rae will reshape and rebuild all greens to their original scale and height, recapture lost pin positions, and install subsurface drainage, a four-inch pea gravel layer and 12 inches of USGA-approved rootzone material. He will also reshape bunkers and rebuild tees.

The drainage and irrigation systems will be replaced, ditches will be deepened and widened, and two-inch slit drainage will be installed throughout fairway and approach areas to improve playing conditions without the need for significant regrading.

Once the North has hosted the PGA Tour's Rocket Mortgage Classic in June 2025, Rae will begin similar work on the South course.

Pangaea to renovate two Scottish courses

Pangaea Golf Architecture, the design practice of Jeff Danner, ASGCA, and Stuart Rennie, is developing renovation plans for South Ayrshire Council's Darley and Belleisle courses in Scotland.

The architects are carrying out detailed site analysis, including topographical and ecological surveys, to better understand each course's character. The initial design concepts are expected to be shared publicly in summer 2024 to enable golfers and community members to provide feedback.

"We are looking to leverage and elevate the firm and fast attributes of a sandy site with



Photo: Pangaea Golf Architecture

endless potential in the Darley," said Danner. "At Belleisle, we have an opportunity to immerse ourselves in James Braid's legacy and pay tribute while meeting the needs of modern golfers."

Former Open champion Paul Lawrie will support Danner and Rennie on the project, offering a player's perspective to ensure the new designs align with golfers' needs and expectations.

Alex Hay to address safety issue at Vancouver's University GC



Photo: Lobb + Partners

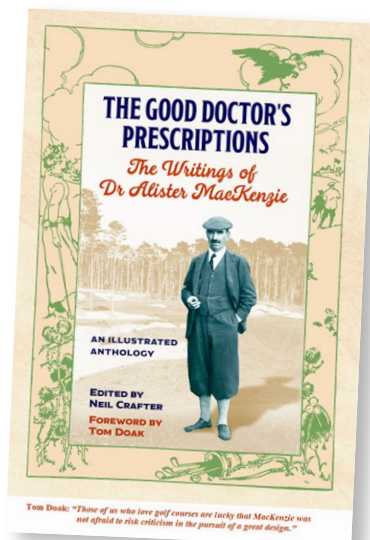
University Golf Club in Vancouver, Canada, has contracted Alex Hay, ASGCA, of Lobb + Partners to rework its sixth hole to reduce the number of balls being hit onto a residential road from the tee shot.

Hay will convert the hole from a par four into a par three and introduce a large bunker on the left side to guide golfers away from the road and a shortgrass

runoff to the right. He will also create a new par-four seventh hole to replace the existing par three and introduce native grasses in out-of-play areas to reduce irrigation requirements.

Construction has started on the sixth, with a temporary hole created so the course has 18 in play throughout the project. Work on the new seventh is expected to begin in 2025.

New Alister MacKenzie book released



The Good Doctor's Prescriptions: The Writings of Dr Alister MacKenzie, an illustrated anthology edited by Australian golf course architect Neil Crafter, is available for purchase.

The book features MacKenzie's philosophies on golf course architecture and other topics.

The Good Doctor's Prescriptions is illustrated in colour with many period photographs, drawings and plans.

For more information, visit: ryanpub.com.au/thegooddoctor.htm

SOCIAL UPDATE



Golf Course Architecture
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"Our work at Canal Shores has helped create a facility that is environmentally sustainable and enhances the lives of the community," says Doug Myslinski, from Wadsworth on the renovation.



Matt Devine
@BamaGolfTurf

More sod progress... nice and green with @Tahoma31Bermuda, @wadsworth_golf and @Love3GolfDesign



Evan Schiller
@evan_schiller_photography

Recently, @frystrakaglobalgolf have completed a full renovation of the Belleair golf course, keeping in mind the original Donald Ross design.

Search ASGCA on the below channels for more posts:



New tricks for old tracks

Golf clubs that are facing uncertainty can, with some reconfiguration, secure their future prosperity. Richard Humphreys learns about four transformation projects.

Waynesville Inn and Golf Club in North Carolina has gone from the verge of closure to a full membership and waiting list following a transformation project

Filmmaker Robert Redford once said: “Problems can become opportunities when the right people come together.”

For golf clubs that are experiencing financial uncertainty, or other challenges that are putting their future in doubt, the answer often lies in having the right people coming together.

As part of a club’s team of advisors, a golf course architect can bring a new perspective – often drawing on their experience working with other clubs in similar situations – to devise a creative reconfiguration of their golf facilities that can help address the challenges faced.

Over the following pages, we look at four examples from across the globe where transformation has set clubs on a new direction and given them a more prosperous outlook.

Wayne’s world

Waynesville Inn and Golf Club in North Carolina was on the verge of closure before The Raines Company, a hotel management and development group, stepped in. “When we took ownership, the golf course was completely dilapidated,” says Grey Raines, the development firm’s managing partner.

“We immediately recognized the golf course and resort’s untapped potential. After the development of The Foundry Hotel in nearby Asheville, we understood the need for a quality golf course and boutique property in western North Carolina.”

Raines appointed Bobby Weed Golf Design to evaluate the 27 holes, which had become dated and overgrown. The Carolina nine had been laid out by Donald Ross in 1926, with the Dogwood nine added shortly after and the Blue Ridge nine built in 1986. “All options were on the table,” says Bobby Weed, ASGCA. “Once on site, it was apparent that the 27 holes were too shoe-horned and compressed. We quickly determined that reducing the routing to 18 and creating much-needed practice areas was the best path forward. It also presented us with a special opportunity to restore Ross’s nine to its former glory.

“While the bones of the 1926 routing were in place, updating holes for modern players was a hurdle. Never one to succumb to length being the determining factor, the Ross nine fits the ground with variety and half-par holes, a tactic that Ross excelled at.”

The design team then created a new nine, by renovating selected holes from the Dogwood and Blue Ridge nines. “The composite Weed nine consists of a 3-3-3 routing of par threes, fours and fives, with the next challenge being to meld the two nines into a seamless round,” says Weed.

The land from the unused holes was put to good use. A new wedge course, driving range, short-game complex, lighted Himalayas-style putting green and golf cottages were located on an area formerly occupied by two holes. And another



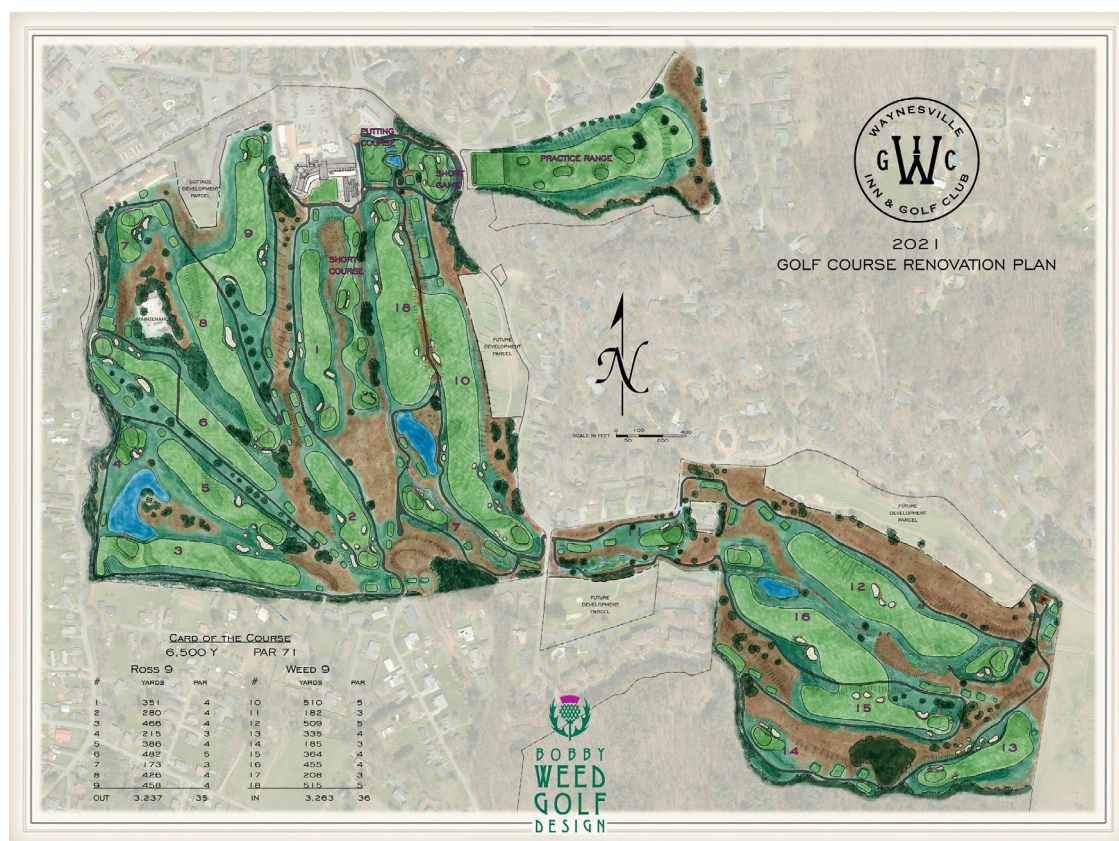
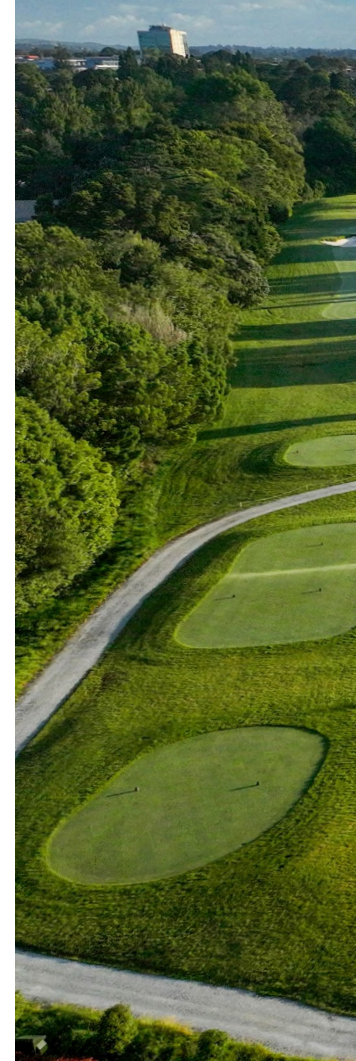


Image: Landon Owen



Bobby Weed's plan for Waynesville has parcels of land reserved for future real estate development

area was reserved for future residential development, located around the perimeter and therefore enabling the club to retain the grand mountainous vistas from the golf course.

The club is transformed, with an influx of new local and national members and resort guests. “After this project, we now offer a first-class golf and lodging experience,” says Raines. “As we complete our first year of operations, we are thrilled about the future of Waynesville. Our investments have completely reshaped the club’s finances.

“Opening a club with a full membership and waiting list exemplifies the demand for a modern, quality golf and lodging experience in the area. We now

see heavy usage of our golf course, short course, practice facilities and lodging by members and guests. This has also restored a sense of pride amongst club staff and residents. We are excited to build upon this momentum for years to come.”

A royal reinvention

In 2017, two clubs in New Zealand’s largest city, Auckland, were facing different challenges. “The Grange had land but was poor, while Royal Auckland had cash but needed extra land for future expansion,” reported the *New Zealand Herald*. The clubs realized that, together, they could create a stronger, more sustainable and higher quality golf experience, and sought the advice of Nicklaus Design on a merge of the facilities.

The firm’s senior designer, Chris Cochran, ASGCA, says: “It was a once in a lifetime opportunity to amalgamate neighboring clubs and create a world class golf facility... something that had not been available anywhere in metropolitan Auckland.”

Cochran developed a plan that would see 20 hectares of land sold to fund the transformation of 36 holes into a 27-hole layout with high-quality practice facilities, as well as the construction of a new clubhouse and staff accommodation.

The proposal to create the new Royal Auckland and Grange Golf Club (RAGGC) received strong support. “Royal Auckland’s constitution required 75 percent of members to vote in favor of the amalgamation and the



Photo: Gary Lisbon

The new Royal Auckland and Grange Golf Club is the result of a merger of two neighboring clubs and an amalgamation of their golf facilities

redevelopment,” says committee member Brent Patterson. “The membership voted 91 percent in favor of the project when it first went to them and then at the design stage it was approved by 89 percent.”

One of biggest challenges for Cochran, however, was convincing the committee and membership to allocate enough land for state-

the clubhouse,” he says. “This was challenging due to the Tamaki estuary and power lines and towers separating the two properties on top of the loss of land sold to pay for the redesign.”

The new Middlemore nine comprises holes from the old Royal Auckland site, the Grange nine is from the old Grange course and the Tamaki nine has holes from

least one round a month. There has also been a dramatic rise in new, younger members at the club.

“RAGGC is now more difficult, but it keeps the members entertained and prepares them for when they play on courses elsewhere,” says Patterson. “The new facility and extra benefits have enabled subscriptions to increase, which were required with the costs associated with running a new facility. We have a waiting list for members to join and are constantly receive requests for membership.”

Cochran says: “It has been a privilege to help two clubs with long-established cultures reinvent themselves, especially in a country that hasn’t done this at a private golf level before. I’ve not seen a private club in New Zealand have

“The new Royal Auckland and Grange facility and extra benefits have enabled subscriptions to increase”

of-the-art practice facilities rather than something smaller in scale. “I also had to create a routing where all three nines returned to

both former clubs. Since the new club opened in 2022, members have taken to the course in droves, with over 90 percent playing at



New state-of-the-art practice facilities at Royal Auckland and Grange include the Hunter's Run putting course that connects to the final green of the Middlemore nine.

nearly the amount of space for the practice facilities that RAGGC has.

“The range and short-game area are always packed and have been very well received. Hunter’s Run, the large putting course behind the clubhouse that joins with the ninth green on Middlemore, has been hugely popular, especially with the older members who don’t play golf anymore but enjoy coming to back to the club for the camaraderie and competitions held on the green.”

Serving up a fresh Mimosa

The Mimosa golf complex, around 60 miles north of Manila in the Philippines, has seen plenty over the past 35 years, from volcanic eruptions to tremors of a teenage Tiger Woods.

Now known as Mimosa Plus Golf Course, the facility was built

in the mid-1990s on Clark Field, a former US air base that was damaged in 1991 by the eruption of Mount Pinatubo. The US military abandoned the base – and its 18-hole course – and returned it to the Philippine authorities.

In 1992, the government appointed Nelson & Wright to design a new 36-hole golf complex on the former Clark Field. Mimosa comprised an 18-hole championship course (Mountainview) and two nine-hole layouts (Acacia and Lakeview). In 1998, a teenage Tiger Woods played his first international exhibition on Mountainview – this would be the height of Mimosa’s success, and saw a steady stream of Korean tourists coming to play the course.

Mimosa’s fortunes then took a turn for the worse. In the early

2010s, The Bases Conversion and Development Authority sued Antonio Gonzales, Mimosa’s chair, and took custody and ownership of the property. “After this takeover, the course saw little in the way of investment or maintenance and over time conditions at Mimosa had deteriorated significantly,” says Brett Mogg, partner at Nelson & Haworth.

In 2016, however, a change of ownership signaled a better future. Mogg and Neil Haworth, ASGCA, were approached by Filinvest, a major Filipino property developer, and were appointed to develop a 36-hole masterplan. Filinvest wanted to reserve part of the property for the development of a shopping mall and more, which meant that several holes on the Lakeview nine needed to be



Several holes on the Lakeview nine at Mimosa in the Philippines have been reconfigured by Nelson & Haworth to make room for a retail development

reconfigured, while retaining most of the original routing.

“The reasoning for retaining the routing was that the original worked well and there was a desire and government requirement to retain all of the large mimosa trees that form the backbone of the course’s character,” says Mogg. “The shaping and contouring that had been undertaken in 1997 was also still relatively intact and required little in the way of alteration.

“Our work was largely to improve playing conditions, which was made possible by a new Rain Bird irrigation system, an AquaFUSION polyethylene fusion system by CMF Global and encouraging the native zoysia to take over the original 419 bermuda.”

Other changes have included green expansion and the removal

of bunkers on the Mountainview course that were only impacting high handicappers. This work to improve conditions and playability has helped the resort spread play more evenly over the 36 holes and the early feedback to the renovation has been very positive, evidenced by increased levels of play and many bookings being made, and once again attracting tourists from South Korea.

Less is more

Of the original 15 founding clubs in the Georgia State Golf Association, Valdosta Country Club has historically been in the shadows of illustrious peers like East Lake, Sea Island and Atlanta CC.

Despite a thriving real estate market in the area, the club was finding it difficult to drum up

interest in the golf, with average annual rounds as low as 12,000.

“The course had experienced several years of deferred maintenance,” says Cary Brown, general manager and director of golf at Valdosta. “The green complexes had become diseased and were in dire need of replacement.”

Bill Bergin, ASGCA, was hired in 2022 with the brief to resolve the situation. Brown says that after hearing the architect’s vision for Valdosta, “it quickly became apparent we could have something special if we went all in.”

The club had a 27-hole layout, and Bergin considered multiple options to keep them all intact. Ultimately though, a more radical solution was proposed. “By reducing the course back to 18, resources and



Photo: Bill Bergin, ASGCA

Bill Bergin has created a playing experience at Valdosta that is 'in a different stratosphere', according to general manager Cary Brown

maintenance could be focused on greatly improving the core golf course,” says Bergin. “Additionally, land previously occupied by a portion of the third nine was made available to add a six-hole short course and to increase the size and quality of the practice facilities.”

“The new layout has the opening hole playing backwards down the last

Brown adds: “We could have done something smaller in regard to renovating, but when you looked at the condition of bunkers and cart paths, plus the age of the irrigation system, we knew the scope needed to be larger.”

Bergin created a layout in a 1920s style, befitting of Valdosta’s historical pedigree and providing a playing

says Bergin. “Strategically, it is quite diverse with larger and more complex putting surfaces. Green surrounds now present golfers with a tremendous variety of recovery shots. And, importantly, for the less skilled player, the course offers forward tees and more room to play less-than-perfect golf.”

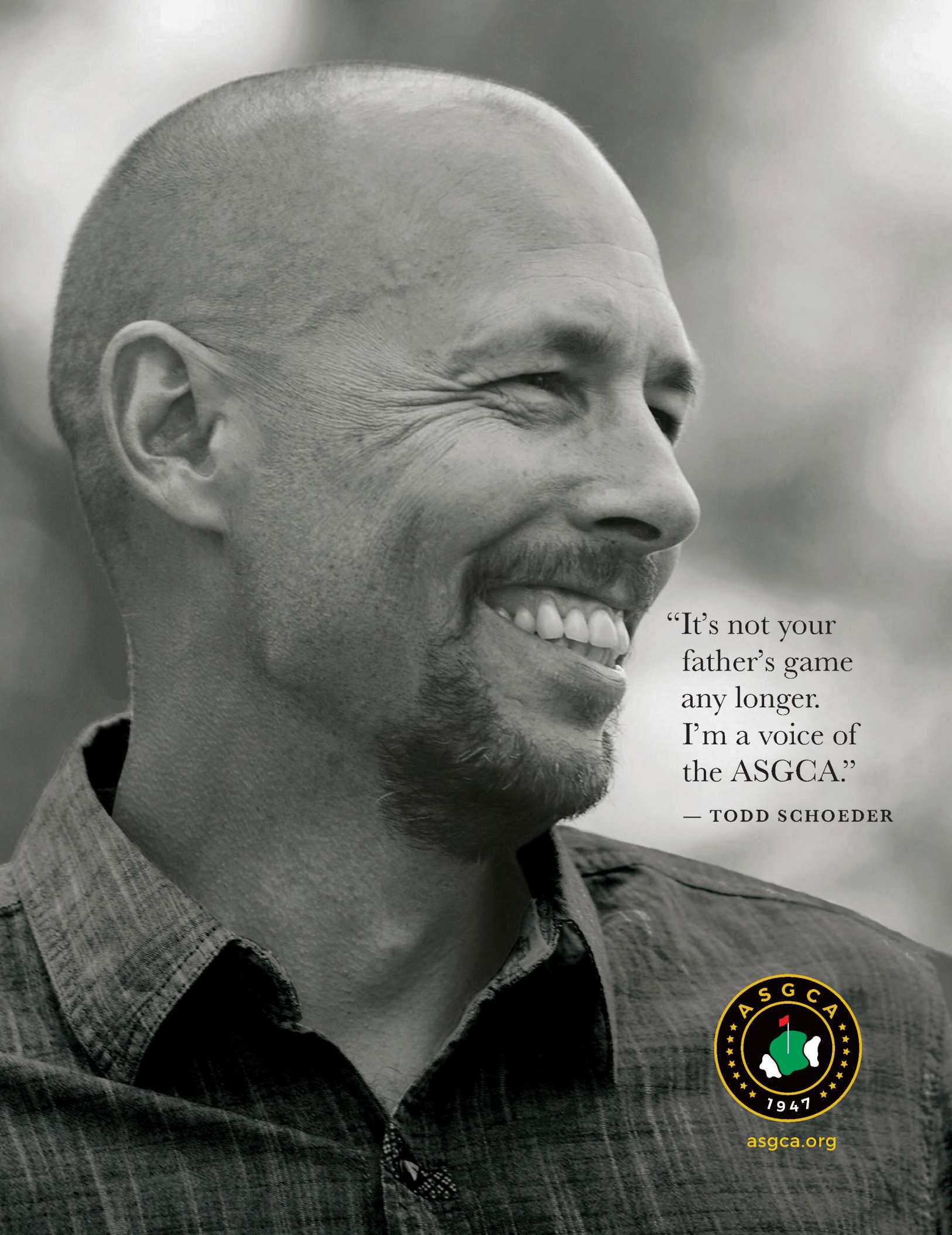
The reconfiguration was completed in October 2023 and Valdosta’s initiation fees and dues have since risen to a level that Brown says is “suitable from a value proposition in regard to the final product.” The reaction from members to the revamped course has been positive and the club fully expects an increase in membership numbers as it enters the first full year of operation. ●

“By reducing the course back to 18, resources and maintenance could be focused on improving the core golf”

hole of the abandoned nine,” says Bergin. “This choice enabled us to double the size of the range and add the six-hole short course.”

experience that is, according to Brown, “in a different stratosphere”.

“The course is longer and more challenging for the better players,”

A black and white profile photograph of a man with a shaved head and a goatee, smiling broadly. He is wearing a dark, collared shirt. The background is a soft-focus outdoor scene.

“It’s not your
father’s game
any longer.
I’m a voice of
the ASGCA.”

— TODD SCHOEDER



asgca.org

Protecting design for the benefit of all

ASGCA Past President Robert Trent Jones, Jr. provides insight into the BIRDIE Act and what it means for golf course architects.



Robert Trent Jones, Jr.

ASGCA Past President Robert Trent Jones, Jr. was asked to write this piece because, for more than three decades, he and his firm have carried the banner for copyright protection for golf course design. RTJ II's individual agreements with clients – including with Washington's Pierce County, owners of Chambers Bay – has led to recent Congressional legislation to amend the Copyright Protection Act of 1990 to include golf course architecture.

Silicon Valley, California, is known for being a global center of technological innovation. I live and work in this bustling area, so am keenly aware of how important regulations and protections are to new developments.

Golf course architecture is an art form – interactive with those who play the 500-year-old sport of golf. All other art forms have copyright protection in the United States, such as music, writing and photography; basically, any original work created by a human and not a machine.

After I authored *Golf by Design*, copyright 1993, published by Little Brown, the interactive nature of the game of golf became more apparent. The thesis of the book was instructions to players on how to beat the strategies of the architect by reading the features of the golf course. Subsequently I was invited to assist in the first virtual golf game, called SimGolf, which allowed

the user on the computer to move obstacles on the course as well as play a game of golf over the internet with another SimGolf user. We had a similar experience with Chambers Bay in Washington. RTJ II designed the golf course for Pierce County, and the USGA chose Chambers Bay for its Amateur Championship in 2010. After observing the competition, Mike Davis, who was the executive director of the USGA, asked RTJ II to refine certain holes and gallery areas for the US Open that was held there in June 2015. We then cooperated with USGA on the creation of an electronic game of the course that was offered during that championship.

These experiences have proved useful for our role in supporting the BIRDIE (Bolstering Intellectual Property Rights against Digital Infringement Enhancement) Act. The BIRDIE Act simply follows suit of the copyright protection



Photo: SentryWorld

The Flower Hole at SentryWorld in Wisconsin was created by Robert Trent Jones, Jr.

afforded to structural architects that was sponsored by the American Institute of Architects in 1990.

The purpose of H. R. 7228 (BIRDIE Act) is supported by all ASGCA Past Presidents and members. In fact, at the USGA annual meeting, ASGCA President Mike Benkusky informed Fred Perpall, president of the USGA, of the contents of the BIRDIE Act. Perpall responded that as an architect himself and for the good of the game of golf, he understood the purpose of the BIRDIE Act.

The ASGCA is the sponsor of this bill on behalf of all golf course architects and the owners of the golf courses. I and other ASGCA Past Presidents such as Forrest Richardson and Jan Bel Jan have been aware that lidar is used to map accurate representations of golf course architects' original works, which have been sold to third parties indiscriminately.

The copyright amendment of 1990 was endorsed by owners of the structures. The Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation acted to protect owner's rights to modify, remodel, or even destroy their structures at will. Therefore, in keeping with that principle, the owners of golf courses can renovate or alter their courses as they wish under the BIRDIE Act. And it benefits owners and architects by giving them the tools to protect the unique designs of their courses, bringing value to the golfer.

The act does not change how the Copyright Act covers historically designed golf courses before 1990. Current new works can take inspiration from the features of historical designs. The 1990 sponsored amendment, however, confused courts and local parks authorities because it excluded the copyright protection of the works that were produced/designed by landscape architects.

The lawmakers in Congress wish to clear up these misunderstandings. The bipartisan BIRDIE Act, as introduced by Republican Brian Fitzpatrick of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and Democrat Jimmy Panetta of Monterey, California, is being discussed in committee.

As we know, the future of golf course architecture is ever evolving. The use of runway tees and ponds as water hazards by my father, Robert Trent Jones, Sr., railroad ties in bunkers by Pete Dye, and the extensive use of flowers as a hazard at Wisconsin's SentryWorld by myself, were new in their time. In fact, the future of golf is changing even now with the advent of TopGolf, simulators and virtual golf games.

The BIRDIE Act is simple: it is written to keep up with the times. The BIRDIE Act is an ace for all who enjoy the great game of golf. ●

Considering the culture

Larry Hirsh of Golf Property Analysts explains the importance of understanding the character of a club when evaluating its course design.



Larry Hirsh

Larry Hirsh is the president and senior consultant at Golf Property Analysts, which is a leader in golf and club consulting, valuation and brokerage.

Culture refers to the unique character and atmosphere of a club, shaped by its history, leadership, policies and member interactions. It encompasses the club's values, traditions, level of activity and social norms, which influence everything from dress codes and behavior to the overall environment and sense of community within the club.

A club's culture can evolve over time due to changes in leadership or significant events, such as the pandemic, which has prompted many clubs to reevaluate and often modernize their practices to attract a broader and more diverse membership. Understanding a club's culture is crucial for assessing its economic potential and ensuring it meets the expectations of both current and prospective members.

From a golf course architect's perspective, knowing and understanding the target market is essential. Assuming the club is an existing one (versus a new course), not only does it have a culture, but that culture is likely to evolve, to

some degree, and change with the generations. For instance, if the club caters to serious, highly skilled golfers, they may want to make the course more challenging. If it is more of a family club, making the course playable is a likely goal.

Given the high level of confidence (and investment) most clubs place in their architect, they can have a significant impact in transforming it and most importantly the architect needs to be able to push back, when appropriate, at overzealous board members and greens chairmen who think they're going to host a major championship or become the most exclusive club in town, even when the club and course aren't suited. We encourage any club to have a culture analysis done so they understand the proper market position both now and in the future.

One question that clubs need to consider is how sustainable the pandemic surge in golf is, long term. We're seeing some signs and trends, but we don't know yet. Plenty of clubs are incurring substantial debt to make these improvements, and I

have attended conferences where the major management companies have stated publicly that they are ready and waiting to take on clubs deeply in debt should the economy take a negative turn. No club is ‘bullet proof’ and future planning needs to take this consideration seriously.

Real, sustainable growth of the game has been a challenge. The pressures of inflation are real, but things can be done differently to manage costs, whether it be how you build a bunker, or how you maintain the course. I am a big advocate of clubs looking to improve and to invest in their golf facilities, but it should be done intelligently.

Golf course architects can advise clubs not only on where and when to invest but also where and when they can design and build more cost-effectively. What I call the ‘space race’ between clubs all trying to outdo one another has led to not only excessive costs, but often excessive debt, which has been fatal to many clubs. There are numerous ways to accomplish goals and still create a quality product. Outspending the next club shouldn’t be the goal. We have a concept in the appraisal/valuation world called ‘the theory of contribution’, which states that one should spend no more on an improvement than its contribution to value. That’s often tough to accomplish with golf courses, but if the attempt is made, it can be the difference between long term success and economic failure.

An architect’s role is to ensure the project satisfies the members *and* is



Tomorrow's members want the golf club to be a fun place that the entire family can enjoy

accomplished in an economically feasible manner. Warren Buffet sums it up perfectly: “price is what you pay, value is what you get.”

Tomorrow’s member is not looking for ‘your father’s country club’. They want the club to be a fun place, where the entire family can enjoy the facilities and not be burdened by arcane and overbearing rules, as well as excessive costs. Golf course architects can contribute to this by building courses that are challenging for strong players and fun for recreational golfers with lots of tee options, modern practice facilities, walkable for health-conscious younger players and playable for older folks. I don’t think it’s focusing on ‘that person’ as much as multiple groups. It’s a balancing act between challenging and playable, but today’s best architects are recognizing that.

Enhancing return on investment (ROI) means designing and building efficiently. Not every course requires SubAir in the greens or a six-row irrigation system. They may, however, need larger tee areas and greens with more pin placements if high traffic is anticipated. It also

means designing to appeal to a broader segment and ensuring that they have fun. Golf is hard enough and while it seems to attract lots of players, retaining those players has been a consistent challenge.

In the UK, golf is an everyman’s game, but in the United States, it has become a status symbol which turns lots of people off. Broadening the game’s appeal is good for everybody, including those who seek to make it aspirational. The architect plays a big role in both club culture and ROI because when people talk about golf courses, the architect is often a defining feature, and they play a big role in both the cost and desirability of the course. The term value-engineering is one often used in conjunction with the best projects and any appraiser would encourage on any project.

Architects all want to do great work that they be proud of. That work may not be building a course for a major championship, it may be making the course fun for the members and keeping them happy. They, along with financial performance, are both measures of success. ●

Reflections on progression

By Design speaks with the outgoing ASGCA Executive Director Chad Ritterbusch about how the Society, and the golf course design industry, has evolved over the past 20 years.

Since 1970 the American Society of Golf Course Architects has had just two Executive Directors.

Paul Fullmer, a Chicago ad executive, was the first to assume the role, from 1970 to 2004, with a goal to raise the profile of the profession. He succeeded in, as ASGCA Past President Dr Mike Hurdzan put it, “bringing a new level of awareness” to golf course architects.

A protege of Fullmer, Chad Ritterbusch became Executive Director in 2004 and has continued to oversee the evolution of the ASGCA, further developing its leadership role in the golf industry. Before handing over the reins later this year, Chad spoke with *By Design* about the progression of the industry in the past twenty years.

When you began as Executive Director in 2024, what were your initial priorities?

First, I went on a ‘listening tour’, to hear members’ questions, concerns and ideas. It was key to understand

what they thought of the Society and what we could do to make it even better.

The members and leaders were very supportive. I recall Clyde Johnston, who was ASGCA President at the time, saying: ‘Chad, we believe you know how to take us forward, but there is one thing that

at ways to provide added support for our members and their golf club clients. Then the financial crisis of 2007-08 hit, which made things even tougher. During this period, we stressed greater communication among members to share their experiences, we reminded them that we’re here

“Collaboration has helped to strengthen and elevate our role in the industry”

we hope you’ll prioritize, and that is outreach to our allied association friends’. I agreed that there were opportunities to forge stronger and better relationships. We prioritized that in those first few years and have continued to do so since.

At that time, the industry was beginning to slow. We were coming off an incredible building boom of the late 1990s and early 2000s. It was obvious that we needed to look

to serve them, and stay engaged. There are great parallels between this and how we later approached our work during the pandemic.

How has the ASGCA evolved in the last 20 years?

Our membership has become broader and deeper. We have people who are designing with detailed plans and specifications, others who design more on the



Chad Ritterbusch has served as ASGCA Executive Director for 20 years

ground; architects that create new golf courses, and those more focused on renovations; environmental geniuses and others who are leaders on issues like pace of play, forward tees or accessible golf. The list really goes on.

I have also enjoyed the way that our members interact with others in golf. This evolution of collaboration has helped to strengthen and elevate our role in the industry.

There are times when we are very good followers and the allied associations would note that ASGCA is a very good partner, whether it be lobbying in Washington DC or supporting industry efforts to grow the game. But we're also good leaders. Just look at the forward tee initiative, which helped to popularize

the idea of teeing areas that can broaden the appeal of golf and enhance the experience for many players. Things like that have really elevated our role in an industry where those in it are collaborating better than ever before. I tip my cap to many of the allied association leaders who have worked hard to be united and support one another.

The ASGCA has also evolved in terms of participation with our partners. These companies have supported ASGCA in important ways, not the least of which is providing intellectual resources, ideas and contacts that are helping our members and our industry to do great work. Their participation in ASGCA has really made it a stronger and richer organization.

And then there's our ASGCA Foundation, which has done wonderful work in supporting the profession of golf course architecture, in educating golf course decision makers, and supporting grow the game efforts.

What themes have been important over this time?

One theme is simply creating the best golf courses that have ever been created in the history of the profession. I know there may be some out there who point to these wonderful facilities that were built in 1895 or 1910, but we have to remember that the cream of the crop has remained a golf course and the lesser golf courses have become something else. When you



An Environmental Approach to
Golf Course Development
American Society of Golf Course Architects



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ASGCA's work on education, an early example of which was the publication of An Environmental Approach to Golf Course Development, has continued to expand, more recently including work on the placement of forward tees

look at the technical, aesthetic and strategic sophistication of today's golf courses, there's no doubt in my mind that they are, whether new or renovated, the best golf courses that have ever been created.

It speaks to the educational mission that we have provided for our members. We've helped to make them better informed, resourced and networked as well as helping to educate golf course decision makers to make better decisions as leaders.

The environment has also been an important factor during my time at the ASGCA. In my first project as an ASGCA intern in 1993, I was asked to help put together the book, *An Environmental Approach to Golf Course Development*, that Bill Love was creating. Bill, along with many others, really did something that was groundbreaking at the time. No one had really told the story about golf's relationship to the environment

in that way, and the book was quite informative and beautifully prepared. It was quite useful and influential, so much so that we ended up doing another edition in 2006 and another reprint after that – we have distributed more than 30,000 copies. We even had officials from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) write in support of the

would go by that I didn't get a call from a member of the media who was about to do a negative story about golf and its relationship to the environment. And, because we collaborated well as an industry and willing to work with organizations like EPA and later groups like GEO Foundation and Audubon International, we were able to create

“We've helped to make architects better informed, resourced and networked”

book and the broader idea that golf courses can be developed in concert with mother nature and can be renovated in a way that is good for the environment. That was certainly not the attitude in the mid-1990s. I remember doing public relations work for ASGCA and not a week

a more open-minded attitude toward golf courses and their relationship to the environment. We still have work to do, but I'm proud of what we've achieved in this area.

This new Golden Age of golf course design and the environment feel related. There seems to be a



The bonds between members that are established at ASGCA events can often develop into working relationships

relationship that golf courses that are more environmentally positive are better golf courses as well. This has been the result – or has at least improved – due to ASGCA members willing to do the hard work of learning more, whether it be in an annual meeting where we have seminars, workshops or other forms of learning. They have continued to get better at their craft.

I have already touched on this, but one thing that has been prevalent over the last 20 years, and going back decades before that, is just a sense of collaboration.

Even back in the 60s and 70s, Robert Trent Jones would stand up at ASGCA Annual Meetings and teach others about how he ran his company. I remember in 2010 at our meeting in Ponte Vedra, one of the topics at the time was China. I recall how ASGCA members collaborated on how to work in the country, how

to get paid, how to protect their intellectual property when working overseas, all of that was impressive to me.

Over the last decade, I have also seen more and more golf course architects working together on projects. As a result, members are getting better. There's a proverb: as iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another. We've seen that idea really take deeper root inside of ASGCA and has developed even more speed and commonality over the last 20 years.

Collaboration has been a key theme throughout my time at ASGCA, but across the industry. We're now significantly smarter as an industry in recognizing that by working with others, we are serving more people far better than we were previously. We bring our members to the USGA, R&A, GCSAA, GCBA and partners, and vice versa. This

has enhanced our meetings, the work we do and has influenced the work that our members are doing, which ultimately benefits the golfer.

What are the lasting memories of your time at the helm of the ASGCA?

There are too many to count. I have enjoyed hearing the collective wisdom of our members and their inspiring stories are the moments that make this job a true honor. The funerals I have attended for our members have been tough, but it also gives us the chance to really get to the heart of what ASGCA is about. It's not about golf, the industry or the profession, it's about people. I have been lifted by our members for more than 30 years, and when I think about my time with the organization, I hope that I have been able to provide a lift to some others too. ●

Maple Meadows Golf Club

The proposed fourteenth hole at Maple Meadows Golf Club in Wood Dale, Illinois, has been sketched by ASGCA Past President Greg Martin, who is preparing a renovation plan for the course.

The hole currently plays as a mid-length dogleg right par four. “Our proposal for 14 will see it play as a short, 300-yard par four sited atop a ridgeline, falling off on all sides,” says Martin. “We developed this drivable par four between the difficult par-three thirteenth and the long and straight par-five fifteenth to make this area more engaging, more strategic and generate better green-to-tee relationships between this stretch of holes.

“Our design offers plenty of width, options and accompanying risks. The deep swale fronting the left side of the green encourages playing from the right. A back-left pin presents a ‘line of charm’ at its most elemental.

“A short par four is the most fun golf hole to design. While only 300 yards, the fourteenth at Maple Meadows will provide great long-range vistas across the property from the tee to green, be visually distracting, tempting and strategically dynamic.”

Martin’s work on Maple Meadows will begin in late 2025 and follows on from his work at the nearby Preserve at Oak Meadows. ●

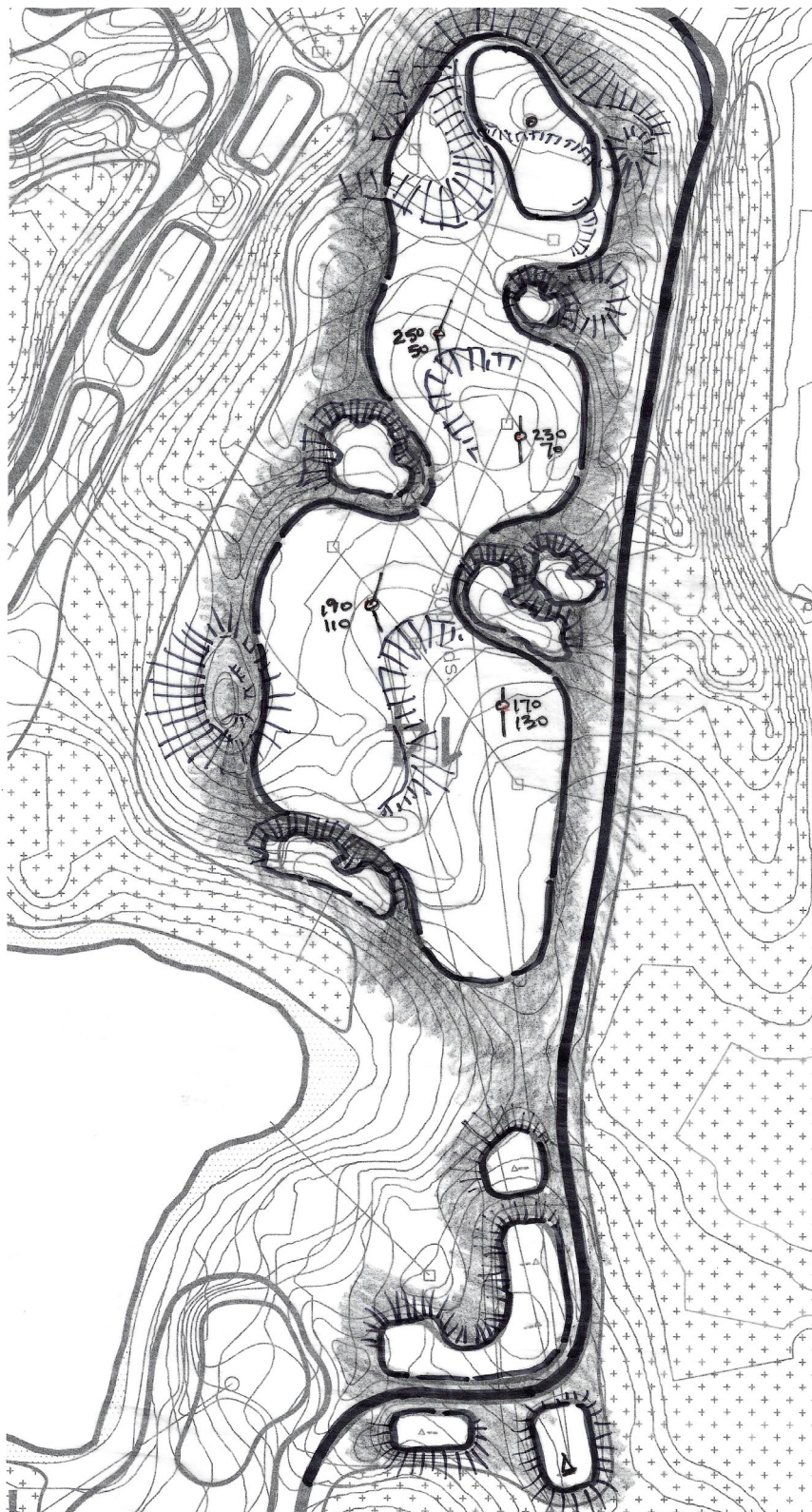


Image: Greg Martin



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