



Beyond The Boundaries: The Benefits of Golf

Harborside International in Chicago is an example of a golf course that transformed an industrial waste site into an environmental treasure, with positive recreation, economic and social ramifications for the area.

Photo credit, Wm. Daniels

Greg Martin

In the eyes of many, golf is a game of the rich, a sport of the privileged and a phenomenon of the 20th century. Golf is seen as a sport of dubious distinction: an elitist game played in lush and secured communities, far removed from the distress of our culture. Perceived as a waste of time, a waste of money or a waste of land, golf is seemingly excessive.

This image is too bad, because golf is a great game in the minds of those of us who

play the game. While golf may appear extravagant, the cultural and environmental benefits of golf are significant.

Few sports offer what golf can provide. Golf is a sport that brings man and nature together. The game is endlessly interesting to the mind, senses and spirit. Viewed in a larger context, the game benefits more than just those who play. Golf has a host of advantages; its benefits can be felt far beyond the boundaries of the golf course.

First, golf is a great game.

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requires focus and allows for reflection; it demands ability, but not brute strength; it is a solitary game that secures the deepest friendships; it provides fair competition for the less able; it illustrates a man's character, even when the game is unbearable. Golf requires a degree of patience and an ability to understand personal strengths and weaknesses. It is a sport that can grant good luck as well as render bad breaks. Golf provides character-building because of its ability to develop individuals who understand the bad breaks of life or, as some say, "the rub of the green." Golfers value perseverance

and persistence, and they discern fair play and distinguish a positive environmental experience.

Golf is, in its most basic form, man against nature. The intrigue of the game is our instinct to compete against the forces of physics, nature and ourselves to conquer our limitations. There has never been a perfect round of golf; the laws of nature will not permit it. So we continue to chase the butterfly or try to catch the

big one. Golf is transfixing, addicting, stupefying and wondrous all at the same time.

Golf has a history of distinction, characters and color. But there are other aspects of the game that are equally intriguing. Those of us who play understand that golf is a great game. And when seen in a larger cultural framework, the game of golf and its playing field are nothing less than a cultural remedy, enriching

not only those who play and work within the confines of a golf course, but also those who don't immediately appreciate golf's benefits. Golf has great restorative powers that transcend the boundaries of a golf course.

Second, golf courses are an environmental asset.

The overall environmental benefits of golf far outweigh its negative impacts, and those bene-

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Golf courses can buffer detrimental development from sensitive microenvironments, like the wetlands this frog calls home.

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fits are resounding. It is no great surprise that those of us within the golf industry actively support landscape stewardship and environmental sensitivity. This trend seems to be more than current fashion. The broad-based support for environmental issues seems to reach deeply into many aspects of the golf industry.

Golf course architects have for years attempted to merge the needs of a golfer with site limitations and decrease the maintained portion of the facility. Golf course superintendents are adapting better to specific microenvironments and landscape-sensitive areas. This sensitivity appears to indicate a maturation of the industry. Maybe it is a natural outgrowth of environmental awareness established in the early 1970s. It could be a reaction to stronger environmental legislation, or maybe public protest. It could be a result of better and wider-ranging education on plant biology, or a greater understanding of biological systems. No matter, our industry has become more environmentally aware and environmentally sensitive to the ultimate benefit of our culture.

Still, golf courses are seen as a product of a decadent culture. This shouldn't be surprising. Golf courses are highly managed landscapes and therefore, warrant close attention. Fertilizer, pesticides and other chemicals are often used on the golf course. Irrigation is employed extensively, potentially impacting groundwater resources. This high degree of landscape management perpetuates an impression of an artificial environment. However, the golf course environment is no more artificial than agricultural landscapes, or any other domain that is changed for cultural usage.

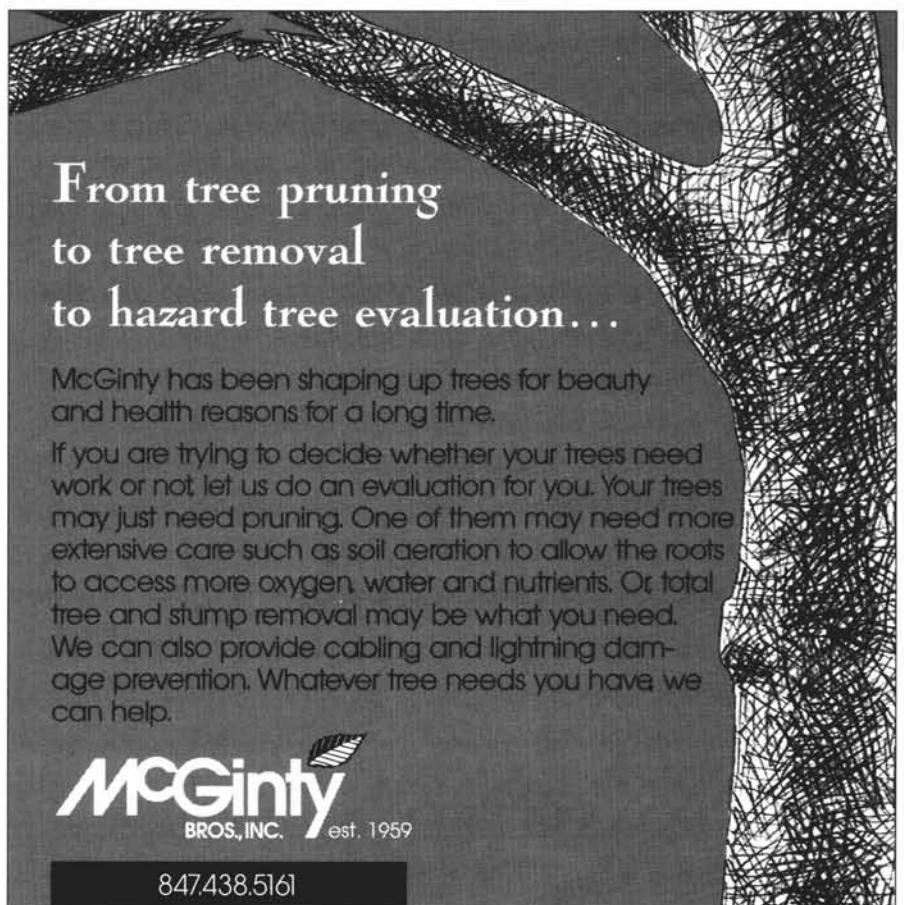
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Over the past two decades, conservation efforts have placed scrutiny on the fast pace of development of sensitive lands. Unfortunately, as the pace of development quickens, all sorts and types of development are more likely to impact unsuitable and more sensitive lands. This is a legitimate concern. We should not and can not ignore the systematic destruction of temperamental landscapes. Our survival on this planet is fundamental, and preservation of sensitive habitats is warranted.

The great debate lies in how growth and development should be managed. Untamed development is not good for anyone, nor are overzealous conservation efforts that thwart potentially positive development trends. Planned growth is far better than haphazard growth and the environmental benefits of golf course develop-

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ment reach far beyond its boundaries or the community in which it resides.

Golf development can be a positive element to progress. First, the land it takes to support a golf course is significant. On average, 150 acres are needed to support a golf course. The extent of the land mass alone is an excellent opportunity to solve a host of environmental needs within a given community or region.

Specifically, planned biodiversity within golf courses has increased over the past years. Existing facilities, in an effort to reduce maintenance costs, continue to expand low-maintenance areas. Architects are committed to incorporating existing and new wetlands, grasslands and sensitive areas into planning efforts for the betterment of the golf course as well as the community.

Recent survey data indicate that almost 20% of total golf course area is dedicated to low maintenance, no maintenance or "wildness." More than 3,780 acres are currently devoted to this "wilderness crusade." This is substantial and cannot be ignored by environmental campaigners.

Further, architects and engineers actively seek to address a host of environmental solutions within a golf course corridor by protecting, enhancing or minimizing impacts to sensitive areas. Water quality and storm water management are specific engineering issues addressed during the development of golf courses. Wetlands and open space can be expanded in golf course corridors to accommodate larger-framework open space plans or wetland mitigation banking. Erosion control practices can help reduce the potentially strangling effects of farm runoff and construc-

tion sedimentation. Finally, golf courses can buffer detrimental development from sensitive microenvironments. These are positive influences golf courses have for the enrichment of the entire community.

For instance, Colliers Reserve in Florida and Spanish Bay in California are courses that are standards of environmental

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protection and enhancement. These courses aid the environment with their presence by protecting plants and wildlife, expanding wetlands, buffering development and augmenting wildlife sanctuaries.

Other courses have been cited for efforts to reclaim abandoned strip mines and develop them into environmental assets.

These include Black Diamond Ranch in Florida and The Quarry in Texas. These courses have stabilized tenuous landforms and established wildlife refuges. Harborside International in Chicago is an example of a golf course that transformed an industrial waste site into an environmental treasure, with positive recreation, economic and social ramifications for the area.

Finally, "end-use" considerations for landfills include recreational facilities like sledding, hiking, fishing and golf. Golf as an "end-use" product for landfills can transform a "bad neighbor" into a positive environmental attraction.

These are some of the positive consequences of golf development for potentially ruinous landscapes. Environmentally, golf can actually solve a host of environmental, cultural and community needs within the boundaries of the golf course. If planned properly, golf provides a positive environmental experience to golfers as well as surrounding communities, ultimately enriching communities throughout a region.

Third, golf can provide great cultural benefits to our society.

The game of golf can help everyone become better citizens. Certainly, golf courses offer excellent recreational opportunities for a community. The complexity of our culture makes golf appealing and the benefits felt by the game are resonant. Smog-filled cities, crammed highways, computers, phones, faxes, radios and television invade our senses constantly. Is it any wonder that the popularity of golf has risen over the past decade?

We demand more and better environmental experiences like the
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ones we feel on the golf course. Only a few other sports are so richly filled with the environmental experiences that golf provides. These experiences reach deep into our need to see and feel nature in its most profound settings.

For centuries, the greatest of civilizations have created gardens in their cities. Whether the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, the Villa Gardens of Italy, the palatial formal estates of France at Versailles and Vaux, or the picturesque gardens in England, man has a need to create and recreate the elements of our environment to soften the impact of our "technocultural" needs.

These great civilizations understood the boundless, enriching advantage of "designed" open spaces. Intelligent cultures before

us produced the finest of landscape experiences in forms that, to a great degree, resemble golf courses. Those civilizations understood the inherent value of "wildness" and landscape experiences in everyday life. Wildlife and diverse plant habitats add to the quality of anyone's life in a complex urbanized culture.

What was your most memorable round of golf? Was it your lowest score? Was it the hole-in-one? Was it a fascinating golf course? I have played many golf courses and the most memorable rounds are those that thrill my senses. The game can uncover feelings of tranquility, admiration or awe at the purity of a particular landscape. Whether at the mountains of Castle Pines, the seaside at St. Andrews, Pebble Beach, Ballybunion or Black Wolf Run, the best of golf is found in the dignity of a landscape, its

complex simplicity, its diversity and environmental abundance.

This is the powerful curative potential of golf.

If we can get more people into the landscape, in a careful and meaningful manner, more people will appreciate its diversity, its clarity and intricacy, its sensitivity and significance. Quality-of-life issues are "hot buttons" in today's political atmosphere. Golf can generate positive residual "quality-of-life" effects by enhancing the recreational, economic, environmental and cultural welfare.

Programs such as Adopt-a-School, facilitated by Chicago-area golf course superintendents, provide schoolchildren with an avenue to environmental education. These programs and others allow children to study and understand natural systems at work by collecting wildflower seeds,

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Programs such as Adopt-A-School allow children to understand natural systems at work with activities like replanting native vegetation.

Photo credit, Village Links of Glen Ellyn

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establishing butterfly gardens, replanting native vegetation or conducting a wildlife census.

Within the next year, an 18-hole course with expanded practice facilities and a pitch-and-putt course is planned for the Village of Mooseheart in the central part of the Fox River Valley. This project is a unique initiative by a variety of public, private and not-for-profit organizations. The result of this effort will be a cornerstone facility utilized by thousands of youngsters each and every year.

This could be most effective in large urban areas, where the opportunities to interact in a natural setting are impossible. Initiatives such as First Tee and Hook-A-Kid on Golf are challenged to provide recreational experiences to children that would otherwise not be exposed. The mission of Hook-A-Kid on Golf is to expose this great game to as many children as possible and provide places for them to play. This means developing golf course facilities for youth specifically so that kids can learn the game, as well as understand the self-control and conduct required to participate in the game.

Imagine a practice facility, with a three-hole golf course and practice facilities developed within an inner city setting on urban blighted areas or brown-field sites. Imagine the pure and absolute benefit from a facility such as this. These types of facilities are now being contemplated, planned and developed in Chicago and other urban settings.

Golf can have significant positive effects upon urban renewal efforts. The cultural effects of these types of initiatives will be felt for generations. The positive attitudes of children, mentored by caring adults, learning a game of character that will stimulate their senses for a lifetime, will saturate our culture with penetrating results.

Golf is recreation. Golf is a positive environmental impact. Golf is a stimulating landscape experience. But most importantly, golf can have a profound effect on the lives of our youth. These are but a few of the enormous advantages of the game. Golf has much to offer our society. Let us defend the game, and boast about its benefits. Golf is a game that has benefits that reach far beyond its boundaries. 

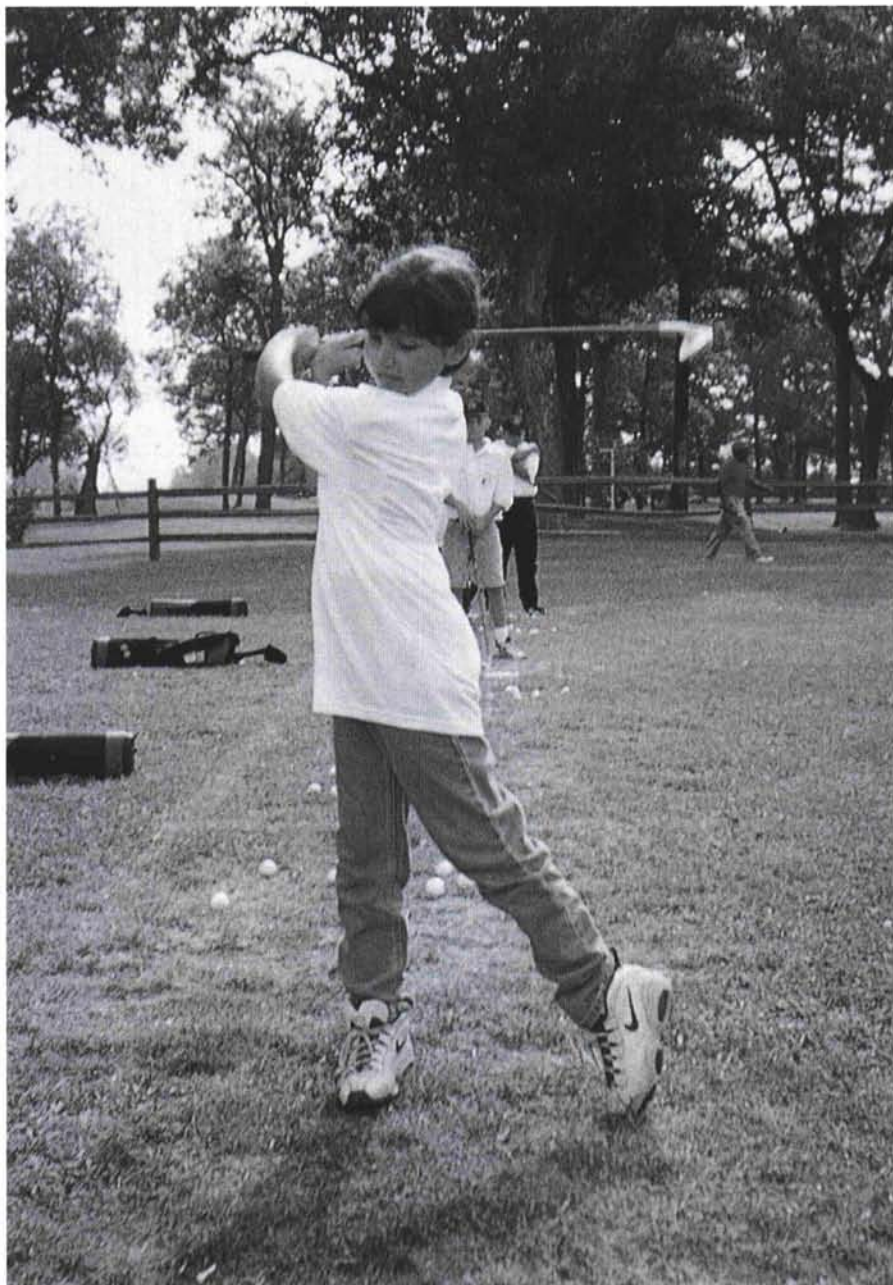


Photo credit, Hook-A-Kid on Golf

Initiatives such as Hook-a-Kid on Golf provide recreational opportunities to children that would not otherwise be exposed.