

GOLF COURSE INDUSTRY

By Guy Cipriano October 24, 2017

Here's a sign the golf market can be declared steady: an economist opened the educational portion of the Golf Course Builders Association of America summer meeting and nobody left the Charlotte hotel ballroom grimacing.

The presence of an economist once frightened people whose livelihoods depend on golf facilities making capital investments, but nothing in **Bernard Baumohl's** address suggests immediate pain looms for the golf market. **Baumohl**, the chief global economist at **The Economic Outlook Group**, revealed three scenarios for 2017-18, with the one most likely to occur boosting GDP by 2 to 4 percent. "Frankly, the economy is in pretty good shape," he says.

Baumohl's assessment of two contrasting groups, Baby Boomers and millennials, offers optimism for the industry. Baby Boomers, **Baumohl** says, are selling possessions and downsizing their homes because they are focusing more on fitness and travel in retirement. And instead of seeking "fine dining and fancy cars," **Baumohl** says millennials are showing a penchant for "experiential" spending. The trends are encouraging for golf, an activity where an experience provides a fitness element. Moreover, a large segment of the golf economy is devoted to travel.

Despite the positive signs, **Baumohl** revealed three possibilities that could derail economic growth: a presidential term ending in turmoil, the U.S. making policy mistakes and geopolitical turmoil. The dour portion of **Baumohl's** presentation consumed less than 10 minutes of the allotted hour.

Economic stats can rattle the brain, the part of the body the self-proclaimed "oldest living student of golf course architecture" explored in his presentation. Golf Digest architecture sage Ron Whitten followed **Baumohl** by introducing the differences between left- and right-brain design. His words and accompanying images incited numerous chuckles and stares of astonishment from a group responsible for implementing architects' visions.

Left-brain architecture, according to Whitten, is organizational and analytical and requires habits and routines, while right-brain architecture is creative and spontaneous and requires a sense of humor. Alister MacKenzie was a left-brain architect; Donald Ross was a right-brain architect.

Understanding the forms of architecture provides insight into the maintenance needed on a course, and Whitten says, "right-brain courses require a lot of hand maintenance." Still, by the end of the presentation, it became obvious neither a technical nor artistic course is easy to maintain.

Past American Society of Golf Architects President Erik Larsen didn't describe himself as a left- or right-brain architect, but he did introduce tactics for monetizing land within a golf course. Working with owners, developers and home builders, Larsen has found ways to create additional real estate options for clients. Options include reducing golf course acreage on a property and trimming nine holes from stagnant or struggling 27- and 36-hole facilities.

"I think we have something here," says Larsen, who joined BrightView Golf Maintenance earlier this year as its Southeast business development executive. "Is it a long-term solution? Who knows? It depends on golf play ... But this is a life preserver and allows you to take a step ahead and gives you a chance to make improvements."

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