



KIRILL WRIGHT/SHUTTERSTOCK

Golf's top consultants

These ten experts are the most recommended in the industry

BY REBECCA LARSEN

Golf course consultants may appear to be a dime a dozen. After all, when management professionals leave a company and are between jobs, they often hang out a shingle and call themselves consultants.

Yet, many consultants offer a wealth of information, experience and know-how that can help a golf course identify problems and craft solutions.

Having a tax problem? Wondering what to repair first: the roof, the locker rooms or the dining rooms? Or, just want to make more money? Consultants can help golf businesses punch above their weight classes.

But who do you call first? Golf Inc. has a database of consultants on our website

with hundreds of consultants — so many that it can be a bit daunting to narrow down. So, we decided to help make it easier. We surveyed those consultants to find out who they would recommend if they were unable to take a job or did not have the required expertise.

The result is the 10 most-recommended consultants in the golf industry. Some are generalists who can deal with almost any issue, from food and beverage to human resources. Others have specific focuses, such as taxes, capital spending or private club operations.

These consultants are based primarily in the Sun Belt, but many have offices in other places and are willing to travel.

They also have personal visions and ideas about how the golf business needs to change.

Henry DeLozier Global Golf Advisors

Global Golf Advisors is an international consulting firm that assists golf courses with all aspects of the business. The firm started as a specialist practice



at KPMG in 1992 and branched out on its own in 2006. DeLozier joined the firm in 2008, after eight years as vice president of golf for Pulte Homes. He specializes in financial planning and transaction engineering.

"We're not Realtors or brokers," said DeLozier, who is based in Phoenix. "We do financial analysis to help people maximize the financial side of the deal."

DeLozier recently worked with the city of Los Angeles to develop a long-term strategy for its 14 municipal golf courses.

Global Golf Advisors also works with private clubs, helping boards of directors and shareholders determine how to properly manage clubs and rewrite club documents to fit the times. The firm also does strategic planning for companies serving golf businesses. Steve Johnston, who founded the practice, is based in Toronto and the firm also has a partner, Rob Hill, in Dublin.

DeLozier said his No. 1 goal is to treat clients as if they were members of his own family.



**Arthur
Jeffords**

Lighthouse Golf
Consulting

Lighthouse Golf
Consulting in
Atlanta was
founded in 1998
by Arthur Jeffords,

previously director of golf for Sea Pines on Hilton Head Island, S.C., and general manager of the Wachesaw Plantation Club, the Myrtle Beach area's first private golf community.

His background led him to specialize in working with individual clubs or golf course communities and with individual owners rather than investors.

"I can size up the problems of a course or community and do a one-day overview for managers, and then refer them to someone else for analysis of a problem

area – for example, a media specialist or someone in real estate," Jeffords said.

His expertise includes golf operations, maintenance, food and beverage, revenue enhancement programs, membership and marketing, business plan review and interim club management.

He has a passion for helping owners get out of dire straits by attracting new golfers or even turning over property to the real estate market.

"But I'm still more optimistic today than I was five years ago about the golf industry," he said. "Owners are less in denial and are recognizing problems and dealing with them."

Ted Robinson

Private Club Associates

During the economic slowdown, Private



Club Associates in Macon, Ga., helped owners of troubled properties, including clubs in foreclosure. Owner Ted Robinson has 35 years of experience in golf and club management.

His partner, Steve Paris, was previously chief operating officer of American Golf.

"Now that the properties have been rescued, we are going in a very different direction," Robinson said. "As real estate prices go up, new owners need help in improving the golf communities that they acquired."

Examples of improvements might be remodeling clubhouses or adding amenities such as food service, tennis facilities and swimming pools to enhance real estate sales. His firm can help clubs find banks, lenders and real estate consultants.

The firm also works with munis and semi-private clubs.

"One of the main steps many clubs

have to take is to achieve a balance between the quality of a member's experience and the club's financial performance," Robinson said. "Our passion is to deal with the business components of a club to help it achieve its full potential."

Pete Davison

Davison Golf Consulting/Sage Golf
Group

Pete Davison, based in Ponte Vedra, Fla., is known in the golf industry as the former senior vice president and chief operating officer of PGA Tour Golf Course Properties and the TPC Network. After 25 years with TPC, he left to form the Sage Golf Group, a management firm, and Davison Consulting.

He said his extensive background allows his consulting firm to provide services in all areas of club operations, including accounting, food and beverage, sales and marketing, human resources, agronomy and more.

"I have the ability to analyze and identify golf-club-related problems and their causes, and to develop and execute both operational and/or strategic plans to cause the necessary corrections to occur," Davison said.

His own passion in working in golf management has always been in the areas of team building, motivation and training for employees.

"Right now, we're working with a world-class resort in the Caribbean that's doing some refurbishing, including its maintenance facility and its greens," he said. "Most jobs that we do, we get via word-of-mouth through the recommendations of people that we have worked for."



Paul Mueller

Club Capital Planners
Club Capital Planners, headed by archi-



tect Paul Mueller of Milwaukee, puts together 20-year capital replacement studies for private clubs nationwide.

“Replacement of golf course assets, course maintenance equipment and often-neglected maintenance facilities

(account for) a significant percentage of a club’s total capital expenditure needs,” said Mueller, who has worked in the field since 1999.

Spending on these assets is often a necessity, he noted, so a club has to plan intelligently. Mueller said clubs are now beginning to turn to improving facilities after several years of deferring improvements.

“Clubs are learning to spend capital again on long-neglected assets,” he said. “Many clubs spent capital right before 2008 and are now turning attention to worn clubhouse furniture, fixtures and equipment and their building envelope.”

He predicts all private clubs will continue to face questions about their relevance in a time of changing demographics. He sees golf clubs adding more family-oriented and wellness amenities to attract new members.

Mitchell Stump

Club Tax
Network

Mitchell Stump of Palm Beach Gardens, Fla., is a certified public accountant and former Internal Revenue Service agent who now consults with pri-



vate clubs on tax issues. He is the author of “The Club Tax Book,” which is celebrating its 20th anniversary this year.

The 2,500-page book, delivered electronically as a PDF, is sold to club managers, CPAs and tax attorneys. It is updated quarterly so clubs can keep up with changes in tax laws. Stump also puts on webinars, gives speeches and provides phone consultations to subscribers.

Stump’s passion is for seeing new players join golf clubs and then learn to love the game. He recommends that private clubs pay golf professionals higher salaries, but he stresses that those pros must be outside, on the courses, helping players improve their games.

“I don’t want them folding sweaters in the clubhouse anymore,” he said. “If clubs pay them a decent salary, they could say, ‘I own you. Now go teach members how to play the game.’”

JJ Keegan

Golf Convergence

Jim Keegan of Golf Convergence in Castle Rock, Colo., says his firm provides “astute insights that spawn meaningful value.”



“Our methodology is quantitative melding of the qualitative aspects of the game with business disciplines,” he said. “We have developed 21 analytical, financial and operational master guides for our clients.”

The firm has published four books, which have sold more than 5,000 copies and are used by 15 colleges as part of their professional golf management programs.

“We’re optimistic about the future of golf,” Keegan said, citing surveys that say the participation rate of golfers between the ages of 6 and 22 is far higher than it

was 20 years ago. “But our optimism is balanced by a marked trend for avid and core golfers to be less engaged.”

Keegan said his passion for the business is rooted in the game’s core values of integrity, sportsmanship and respect. After starting as a caddie at age 12, he received a scholarship that enabled him to go to college. He went on to receive an MBA and became a certified public accountant. He has transformed his focus on the business of golf into an opportunity to mentor course owners so they can achieve greater returns on their investments.

Dick Kopplin

Kopplin & Kuebler

Kopplin & Kuebler has been active in the field of executive placement for 20 years, recruiting general managers, chief operating officers, superintendents, executive chefs and clubhouse managers for private clubs, resorts and developer-owned properties. Dick Kopplin works from Scottsdale, Ariz., but the firm has six other offices across the country.

“We founded the company because it seemed to us that private clubs were not hiring the talented type of candidates they needed,” Kopplin said. “We have a real passion for this business, and we basically work seven days a week.”

The firm’s team of experts represents more than 200 years of combined experience in clubs of all kinds. Kopplin & Kuebler has worked with more than 700 clubs around the world.

Kopplin said he believes there is a great future for the private-club business.

“We see renewed interest in golf clubs among millennials, and we see new people being brought into the game,” he said. “We want to see to it that clubs are well-managed and attract new members.”



Jim Riscigno

Club Specialists

Jim Riscigno and his partner, Kevin Stark, started Club Specialists in 1999 after working with ClubCorp for many years. Riscigno was executive vice president of ClubCorp when he left. Club Specialists focuses mainly on the golf industry but has diversified into other types of clubs as well, including equestrian, athletic and hunting clubs.



Riscigno said the key is to improve management so clubs can make more money.

“We take a 360-degree view of the entire business and look at all the options for clubs to improve business, ranging from tennis to spas, to concessions, to human resources, to financial areas. Then we write a 60- to 125-page report that puts all the pieces together with very specific recommendations. Clients make their own choices. They can hire us to implement the changes, or do it themselves, or put the report on a shelf and never look at it again.”

The firm doesn't manage properties but can refer clubs to other specialists who can help.

Riscigno sees the future of golf as being tied to the millennial generation.

“Golf will have to adapt to that population group,” he said. “It will happen, I'm sure.”

Andrea Sartori

KPMG

Andrea Sartori is the global head of sport, real estate, leisure and tourism practice at KPMG. Based in Hungary, he works throughout Europe, Africa and the Middle East.

revive or enhance their businesses. We also play a valuable role in supplying the industry with the latest research insights and benchmarks on a regular basis.”

Early in his career, Sartori joined KPMG in Cape Town, South Africa, he said, “and realized that I could combine my passions for golf and business in setting up a professional venture.”

Recently, KPMG has worked in the Caribbean and India, helping owners dis-

pose of golf facilities and doing operational reviews of clubs. The firm also has helped conceptualize integrated lifestyle developments and has assisted golf associations with their bids for the Ryder Cup.

Sartori's vision for the future is a return to pre-2008 participation levels in golf, he said. The latest KPMG report, “Golf Participation Report for Europe 2016,” indicates that demand for golf has started to stabilize after years of decline.

