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# Golf: Pros and Cons of Proximity

By ELSA BRENNER

BEFORE Ridgeway Golf Club in White Plains closed two years ago, it wasn't unusual for neighbors to have to cope with broken windows and other damage caused by golfers' wildly off-the-mark shots. And, recalled Terence Guerriere, who lives nearby, even when nothing was damaged, such incidents often resulted in the arrival of a search party, breaching the privacy of residents barbecuing or sunning themselves on a weekend afternoon.

For those homeowners whose backyards abutted Ridgeway and whose front lawns were also in the line of fire of Westchester Hills Golf Club across the street, it was even worse: players there were known to overshoot the mark occasionally, breaking the windows of parked cars and then rummaging through residents' shrubbery to retrieve golf balls.

But now Ridgeway has sold its 128 acres to the nonprofit French American School, which plans to build quarters there for 1,200 students, and many residents find themselves wishing they could turn back the clock, said Mr. Guerriere, president of the Gedney Association, a White Plains neighborhood group representing 450 families.

Instead of school buildings rising in their backyards, neighbors say, they prefer the expansive views and the property tax income the club generated for White Plains's coffers. In fact, broken windows are a minor irritation by comparison.

Homeowners who live next to golf clubs also at times have concerns about the environmental hazards associated with chemicals used to maintain fairways. In Bedford, Donald J. Trump had planned to build a golf course on the 213-acre Seven Springs Estate, formerly the home of the newspaper magnate Eugene Meyer, a property on a high point reaching into Bedford, North Castle and New Castle.

In the face of intense opposition from residents worried about runoff from the course into the Byram Lake watershed, Mr. Trump is instead seeking approval for a nine-lot subdivision there.

Beyond Pesticides, a Washington nonprofit, credits changes to studies from the 1990s indicating a higher mortality rate among golf course superintendents from certain

cancers. Two “Toxic Fairways” studies by the New York attorney general’s office, in 1991 and 1995, helped prompt environmental and health groups, player organizations, and the Golf Course Superintendents Association to adopt what was called “Environmental Principles for Golf Courses in the United States.”

In part, according to Web data posted by Beyond Pesticides, course officials got involved in the effort because they learned that developers were experiencing more resistance to golf courses because of pesticide drift off of the greens and runoff into waterways.

These days, said Michael Hurdzan, president Hurdzan/Fry Environmental Golf Course Design in Columbus, Ohio, “the industry has taken quantum leaps forward.” He says the indiscriminate application of broad-spectrum pesticides and fungicides has given way to more targeted uses of slow-release chemicals.

Course managers are also exploring natural remedies, like applying a mixture of water and molasses to the soil, because increased sugar content encourages healthy microorganisms.

On top of which, Mr. Hurdzan pointed out, much of the public may not be aware that grasses used on courses today have often been genetically engineered to be resistant to infestation.

Audubon International, a nonprofit organization near Albany (and no relation to the National Audubon Society), is working with landowners, municipalities, hotels and homeowner associations in different parts of the country to encourage the use of organic products. It also promotes the creation of pesticide-free areas on courses, where wildlife can thrive.

Of the 2,500 courses that belong to the group, said Joellen Lampman, a program director, 96 percent are using fewer pesticides. (There are about 16,000 courses in the country and 832 in New York, according to Ms. Lampman.) However, she said, “we have not been able to convince golf course managers to abandon all use of chemicals, because of demand by golfers for green, perfectly manicured, weed-free courses.”

Mr. Hurdzan cited a different reason. Saying there were at most four courses in the country that were 100 percent organic, he added that others were “a step or two down because of the costs of running a totally organic course.”

On the other hand, some people love having a club as a neighbor. In [Garrison](#), Joann Alvis and Daniel Greenberg, who since 2005 have owned a three-bedroom colonial on two acres next to a golf course, say they are willing to contend with whatever cons there may be, in exchange for looking out back at a vast expanse of green as opposed to a

neighbor's backyard. And in winter, the course becomes a playground for their son, 15, and his friends, who sled there when it snows.

Ms. Alvis, a stay-at-home mother, says the location gives her family the opportunity "to live close to nature and get to see a lot more wildlife — foxes and coyotes, for example — than if we were in a subdivision." She and Mr. Greenberg, a retired garment executive, have their well water tested regularly, and to date, she said, "we haven't had a problem."

Chris Davis, the chairman of the Hudson Highland Land Trust and an owner of the club, which is called the Garrison, has instituted green practices, many of them having emerged from an educational program administered by Audubon International. Mr. Hurdzan says many club owners and managers today pride themselves on being part of the green movement. For them, he said, "chemicals are the last resort."

When it comes to the dangers of errant golf balls, of course, such changes are irrelevant. Not all houses on fairways are good buys. "It's still a matter of buyer beware," Mr. Hurdzan cautioned. "And be careful to ask the right questions, speak to the neighbors and make sure play areas are far enough away from where the house you are considering is located."

Or as Susy Glasgall, a broker for Houlihan Lawrence in Rye, put it: "Golf courses can be a very positive asset in selling a house, but they're not for everyone. A lot depends on how close the house is to the holes." In general, homes with golf course vistas command higher prices — up to 25 percent more, she said.