Furthermore, there’s nothing like an economic reality check to prompt businesses to scrutinize expenses, flush out any inefficiencies uncovered, and improve operating systems to protect the bottom line. Ultimately, this may lead to much more profitable operations once the economy recovers. And recover it will. Nobody knows for sure how long that will take, but we do know that every recession since the Great Depression has always been followed by a period of unusually strong economic growth. With the current credit freeze putting a halt to any further golf course construction, supply will remain static and the pent up demand beyond the recession may lead to some very successful golf seasons afterwards.

The labour market is another potentially optimistic situation. In recent years, the humming economy led to labour shortages and high wages. However, a contracting economy sheds jobs, therefore reducing employee income expectations and turnover. Perhaps the Gen Y demographic, for example, will become more reliable golf course staff as the luxury of infinite job opportunities is replaced by a period of employers hiring and keeping only the best candidates.

Ultimately, I would suggest that the proactive golf course operators will manage through the 2009 season quite effectively despite the economy. It won’t likely be an easy year, but the extra ingenuity and effort necessary to succeed in a recession may actually be a healthy business exercise in the long run. As the theme of our Conference in Niagara Falls put it: “Think Outside The Barrel” to succeed in turbulent times.

**The Upside To The Downturn**

One of the many highlights of the 2008 Golf Business Canada Conference & Trade Show was the ‘State Of The Industry’ panel discussion, and the greatest concern from the audience of 300 golf course operators, was clearly the impact that the economy may have on their businesses in 2009.

Following up on this important theme, the feature story in this issue of Golf Business Canada magazine addresses some of these economic realities, including a cross section of opinions from golf course operators throughout the country. And, as tempting as it is to succumb to the negative hype that sells so well in most media coverage these days, you’ll read a more balanced perspective here by the writer, Mr. Bruce Dowbiggen.

With successful entrepreneurs’ tendency to see the tee sheet as half-full rather than half-empty, I think the blend of optimism alongside the reality check of operating in a recession is indeed the way to approach the 2009 golf season.

For starters, Canada is better positioned to withstand an economic downturn than almost any other country. Our banking system, for example, is proving to be the envy of the world as failures of financial institutions elsewhere make headlines.

Secondly, golf in Canada is more recession resistant than most industries we compete with. For core golfers, the first thing eliminated when times get tough will not be their passion for golf. That doesn’t mean demand won’t soften in some sectors, but the good operators will adjust their marketing strategies accordingly to recover.