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INNOVATION AT ITS BEST

Innovation comes in all shapes and sizes and from all corners of the golf business. Here are four examples of innovation that give us more to look forward to in 2013.

Jim Singerling, the longtime CEO of the Club Managers Association of America, gets my vote as one of 2012's unsung champions. Alarmed at ever-increasing insurance premiums (estimated in excess of 220 percent over the last decade) that made insurance practically unaffordable for many clubs, for Singerling enough was enough.

What he decided to do was take his argument – basically that underwriting standards for private clubs over-estimated their risk – directly to the insurance companies. At the same time he and CMAA staffers were creating what they call the ClubDNA Program to leverage the association's membership for lower-cost coverage. The work is paying off. Jeff Magoon, the CMAA senior vice president of risk management, reports that clubs have increased their coverage value and decreased their premiums by an average of 10 percent from 2012 levels. Here's

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hoping that the clubs that benefit will redirect the savings into new member services.

Kristopher Hart, a clever young man who loves golf, also displayed an innovative spirit. While a student at Bryant University in Smithfield, R.I., Kris tried to play golf as often as his pizza-sized college budget allowed. After graduation and landing in the investment field, it dawned on Kris that college students were prime targets for courses with a lot of white space on their tee sheets. Course owners who have embraced Kris' College Golf Pass have discovered new demand for golf in the 20-to-25 age cohort, a group that American Express says makes up 27 percent of the golf category spend.

More than 140 New England courses now welcome College Golf Pass players during off-peak times. Late last year College Golf Pass merged with the National Collegiate Club Golf Association, which represents more than 100 college and university competitive club golf programs, swelling CGP membership to nearly 3,000 students. Unless your course sells every tee time every day, you might see how College Golf Pass can increase demand with potential members.

Ever wish your swing had the consistency of a machine? Thanks to Scot Nei at the Tourbound Golf Academy in Chicago anyone can develop proper swing skills using his brainchild, the Swing Robot. As the robot proves, it doesn't take

long to develop a repeatable motion. Scot shows video examples of raw beginners progressing from dainty brushes at the ball to a bona fide golf swing in as little as three weeks. The ability to ingrain repetitive motion is enhanced significantly by consistent rehearsal on the robot. Will the Swing Robot revolutionize golf instruction? Perhaps. It will certainly accelerate teaching and learning swing basics. I'm all for anything that helps golfers find success. Success leads to fun and enjoyment, and that's what keeps us all coming back for more.

A final spirit of innovation recognition goes to the stodgy International Olympic Committee, which cleared the way for golf's return to the world stage in 2016. The anticipation is already starting to build for the global competition that will be held on the Gil Hanse-designed course in Rio de Janeiro. We've heard that Rory McIlroy is debating his participation because he's not sure which flag he should fly from his bag – Northern Ireland's or Great Britain's. Rest assured most of the world's top players will be there, with many countries seeing golf and the Olympics as a perfect opportunity to up their medal count. Fine players – many capable of winning gold – will emerge from every corner of the globe. A recent trip to Asia gave me insight to the preparations teens are making for the games. But the real winner will be golf and everyone in the world who loves the game. New champions will emerge, and the world will see golf for what it is – the greatest game of all. **GCI**