A dream comes true — and on a budget, too

BY MARK LESLIE

Wes Bulen realized a dream in the spring of 1987, and he did it on what most developers would consider a shoestring budget.

The longtime Minnesota farmer, who had looked over his fields of corn and hay and envisioned a golf course, is now turning profit on the 18-hole Rum River Hills course that has drawn raves from the golfing public despite being built for a mere $450,000.

The cornerstone of success for Bulen and his partners are that they already owned the land, they received a low-interest $450,000 loan from the Small Business Administration, and that their golf course is nestled in a region containing 75,000 residents.

In 1989 Bulen had surveyed the population north of Anoka, Minn., which sits 35 miles northwest of Minneapolis, and found that an average of 75,000 residents contained not a single golf course.

When investors bought the farm next door for real-estate development and offered land for a golf course, Bulen’s plan for a four-man team on his 80-acre spread turned into the 18-hole course over 120 acres.

The six original partners (there are now seven) each put up a total of $100,000, added a $50,000 auxiliary loan to the SBA money, and that with $600,000 built the course plus a clubhouse and restaurant.

A golfer-friendly public did the rest.

Right location

Bulen said, “Not many of our local people went golfing because they couldn’t get on the courses in Anoka.”

But the desire was there: Witness the course’s current 140 male members, 100 plus female members, eight 20-student classes, Tuesday night men’s tournaments plus female members, eight 20-student classes, Tuesday night men’s tournaments plus female members, eight 20-student classes, Tuesday night men’s tournaments plus female members, eight 20-student classes, Tuesday night men’s tournaments plus female members, eight 20-student classes.

One course has substituted individualism and astute management to make money the old-fashioned way: prudent supervision and fortuitous location.

Captains: Making it with no housing

Is it necessary that golf course developers link up with real-estate forces to insure success of a project?

That trend of the past 30 years now is the standard in approximately 90 percent of new course ventures.

But one course in New England has substituted individualism and astute management. It is making money the old-fashioned way — the way golf courses have long survived and prospered. Prudent supervision and fortuitous location in an area in need of a course are the keys.

In a setting increasingly pegged to real estate for financial security, the Captains Golf Course owned and operated by the town of Brewster, Mass., is unique.

The Captains, who own the 18-hole municipal layout, are in a throwback to the past, the Captains stands on its own.

The $2.2 million bond issue that propelled the course into operation in 1985 is being repaid on schedule.

Receipts exceed the most optimistic outlook and Jim Stewart, Golf Course Commission chairman, sees a bright future.

As evidence of the course’s popularity and quality, Golf Digest cited the Captains, designed by Massachusetts architects Geoffrey S. Cornish and Brian Silva, as the finest 18-hole municipal course built in the United States in 1985, and bestowed “most attractive” hole accolade to the par 3, 153 yard 11th.

After an open winter and temporary greens routing.

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with no municipal course. There’s no more room for non-residents. Guest play can climb to 128 persons a day.

Residents pay $250 annually, non-residents $500.

Club policy tee times is civil members as the lead foursome, non-members or guests in the second group at 7:08 and staggered in that manner until 3 p.m., when play is on a first-come, first-served basis.

Donald Deay, pro/manager who also gives lessons and handles the driving range, tracks course play. Future traffic flow will be controlled by computer. Reservations will be stored in the computer system. Guests may make reservations up to 60 days in advance. If the $100 foursome fee isn’t by reservation deadline, the computer wipes out the names.

Stewart said the town of Brewster had a stroke of fortune in landing the services of much honored superintendent Sherwood A. Moore.

Moore was contemplating retirement after shepherding the 1984 U.S. Open at Winged Foot Golf Club in Mamaroneck, N.Y. He was lured to the Captains course in 1985 as “Clerk of the Works.” Green supervision followed. He now serves on a consulting basis.

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