Florida spearheads change

Summit brings all sides together

BY KIT BRADSHAW
Golf in Florida is a cornucopia, pouring $5.2 billion annually not only into the golf industry, but into resorts, restaurants, agriculture, real estate, tourism, retail sales and services.

But the economic impact of golf as a business and the environmental benefit of golf courses must be recognized and understood by the public, legislators and governmental regulators.

Continued on page 10

Pebble Beach course facelift going full tilt

BY FRANK POLLARD
Plagued by drought and turf problems, Pebble Beach Co. on California's Monterey Peninsula faces an aggressive renovation program at the hands of its new owners.

Prior to the billion-dollar sale of Pebble Beach Co. to Ben Hogan Properties, Inc., officials at the facility had started an extensive program to restore Pebble Beach Golf Links to its original design. At the same time, though plagued by drought, Pebble Beach was undertaking a program of additional course changes to meet the stringent requirements of the U.S. Golf Association for the U.S. Open, scheduled there in June 1992.

The primary challenge was eradicating Kikuyugrass and all noxious weeds from the tees, aprons, collars, fairways and rough.

Continued on page 15

Flood hits Augusta National and others

BY MARK LESLIE
Augusta National Golf Club lost its entire 11th green complex, Augusta Country Club faced washed-out riprap and one-quarter inch of silt on its 8th green, and other courses in Georgia and South Carolina dealt with their own problems after receiving as much as 15 inches of rain Oct. 10-12.

Tropical storms Klaus, Lily and Marco converged in a deluge creating the equivalent of 50-year floods in some areas.

Many courses simply watched the heavens open for two days and waited as the water soaked into the ground.

Continued on page 28

News

- Water allocations said unfair ................. 3
- University of Arizona sets up turfgrass lab ... 4
- GCSAA plans major topics for conference ... 4
- Irwin given Sold on St. Louis Award .......... 5
- State cites Legends for creating jobs .......... 5
- 5th Circuit Court hears Diazinon appeal ........ 6
- Judge supports Michigan developers .......... 7

Departments

Letters
England's J.H. Arthur speaks out ............. 9

Super Focus
Jarrell tackles Florida issues head-on .......... 10

New Courses
Wyss course replaces Iowa eyesore ............. 11

Government Update
California vote puts golf on the line .......... 12

Association News
GCSAA courses earn accreditation ............. 13

Regional News
Moneys raised, meetings set across nation ...... 14

Business News
Pickseed opens warehouse, plant ............... 24

On the Move
Lescos names Yarborough vice president ....... 25

New Literature
Golf community directory published ........... 26

New Products
New equipment hits the marketplace .......... 27

Calendar
November loaded with shows, seminars ......... 28

On the Green
Beating the crowds with backyard greens ...... 30
Lobbying—Continued from page 1

However, only Michigan and Florida have held state summits on the golf industry, and only Arizona and California have lobbyists at state capitols. Florida now expects to keep watch on legislation as a result of forming the Florida Golf Council in September.

And Robert Thomas, director of communications for the Southern California Golf Association in North Hollywood, said summits and lobbyists aren't for every state. "We've discussed having a summit. But at this point, if we did one, it would be very focused, such as on water. The feeling is the NGF is covering that area," Thomas said.

Concerning lobbyists, he said: "California is unique. We have year-round golf and it's a major, major industry. It's worth our time and effort to do it. "We have had a lobbyist for at least seven years in Sacramento to let us know what's coming up and provide us the ability to reach legislators. Our efforts are coordinated through that person."

Gowan said Florida's summit was "wonderfully timed."

"Everyone came to the realization that their problems are not three or four years off. Their problems have begun," he said. "That's very much what happened in Arizona five or six years ago."

"I think Florida has a great opportunity to protect the industry and help it grow. And they have the support of the governor, too, who understands golf is an important part of the community. It is an important part of tourism. And yet they are all also concerned about the environment, water use, and a lot of concerns."

He said those concerns "will have to be addressed in Sacramento. And with the Florida Golf Council, or there will be regulations written without their input. They can participate now or they will be regulated without their participation."

Although helping with new development, Arizona's lobbying efforts have been more important in protecting the future of existing courses, Gowan said. "Legislators and the staff at the Department of Water Resources and Department of Environmental Quality are educated concerning "the value of golf," he said. "Many entities want freedom and less restriction and they put their own lobbying to reflect that view."

Gowan suggested golf associations, or groups of courses where an association doesn't exist, should discuss their situation with regulatory and governing bodies, and "play an active role in the use of the natural resources. That is only going to become more critical as our population grows."

Gowan and others weren't aware of any other states with summit or lobbying plans. "The Florida effort was a case of people who perceived the need, wanted to be two or three steps ahead of regulations and wanted to participate in them," Gowan said. "I'm not sure other states are aware of the situation or looking at it."

National Golf Foundation President Joe Bediltz said: "We certainly hope and encourage other states to do the same (as Florida). Often, facilities concerns and problems are better solved from the state level. We can provide the national picture, as we do at our summit, and hope that statewide summits can further help facilities and their process."

Faubel said the Michigan summit held in the fall of 1989 has already paid dividends and he expects biennial summits.

"Everyone is better informed," the GCSAA president said. "It got public golf and private golf together, brought out the environmental and slow-play issues, brought together the superintendents, university people, architects — everybody. We focused on where our efforts were going."

"We needed to get a better understanding of best management practices, because we didn't have that as far as maintenance goes. And the Department of Natural Resources did not have an understanding of what was really needed."

The DNR, superintendents and Michigan State experts are working to produce a manual "to show how a sensitive environmental area can be managed properly," Faubel said. He said everybody is now striving together for some of the same goals:

• Meeting the demands of the golfers for golf courses.
• Implementing environmentally safe maintenance practices.
• Increasing junior golf, a "critically important" job done well by the Professional Golfers Association.

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Florida summit

Continued from page 21
by the Florida Golf Course Superintendents Association and the Army Corps of Engineers' position that golf courses are non-water dependent activities for dredge and fill permitting.

Other areas of regulatory concern, he added, are proposed regulations that protect preservable upland species habitats and possible rules on buffer zones for isolated wetlands.

"Those involved in developing a golf course must create a consulting habit of creating habitats and possible rules on buffer zones for isolated wetlands," Matthews said.

The approval process is difficult and, without a pro-active position, it will become more difficult to build golf courses. A major problem in developing a golf course is that the approval process is multi-jurisdictional. There are too many cooks in the kitchen.

Fishkind offered some practical advice for sorting through the approval maze:

"Consider interim agricultural use for the property before you develop a golf course," he said.

"Integrate your effluent disposal and storm-water designs from the beginning of the project," Fishkind said.

He suggested that when developers present the plan for a course, they make it the initial plan, not the final one.

"The regulators want to see the steps involved in the evolution of the plan, and if you show them the steps taken to eventually create the final plan, it is much better," Fishkind said.

Fishkind said working with local governments to create a golf course as a recreational amenity will help fill the demand for public courses while providing an economic advantage to the developer.

"A golf course can have a wonder-

Lobbying

Continued from page 22
- Addressing the speed of play concern. "Americans do a horrendous job in speed of play. You go to any foreign country where they are walking and they'll get in 3-1/2 to 4-hour rounds like nobody's business. It's that darned cart, but the cart is a major income for the golf course owners."

- Getting industry to support research.

"We need to have a coordinated research effort, not having one state doing the same thing another state is doing. We need to make our research dollars count, because essentially they are coming out of the same pocket," Faubel said.

Events like summits have tended to be "cosmetic," said golf course consultant James McLoughlin of The McLoughlin Group in Pleasantville, N.Y. "But it won't hurt. If it will establish a warm, positive image in the state, it makes sense." He aired a sobering thought.

"While many issues must be addressed, he said golf's lobbying efforts against things like rising land taxes in the early 1970s have usually failed.

"Golf's not an easy beast to make the masses feel sorry for. It's not a sympathetic animal," McLoughlin said.

He added another thought: "Yet, that's not so say that can't change as

The council had put together a successful summit in three months, but its future depends upon strong financial support, development and dissemination of empirical data on the environmental impact of golf courses, interaction with regulators and legislators, and communication with members, the public and the media.

The challenges facing the fledgling organization were spelled out by Ed Gowan, executive director of the Arizona Golf Association. The AGA has tackled many of the issues facing Florida golf, and has successfully provided input to legislators and regulatory agencies in Arizona.

"You need to be active, to be there when the legislature discusses the issues, and provide them with facts," Gowan said. "You must also communicate to the members of the council, to the public and to the media the importance of golf, the issues that are affecting the industry."

Despite a $25,000 donation by the Florida Golf Course Superintendents Association, the need to raise funds to continue the work of the council is paramount to its success.

Nancy Oliver, interim executive director of the council, said a major fund-raising campaign will focus on Nov. 17—three days before Florida Golf Day and the World Cup event at Grand Cypress in Orlando.

The council is asking each of the state's 1,124 courses to donate $1 per round played Nov. 17 and challenging the golfers to equal that amount.

The council will then take calls at Grand Cypress on Nov. 20 and tally up the donations. Oliver said she hoped $25,000 could be raised.

"There's a lot of enthusiasm," Oliver said. "The teamwork has been incredible. We received a powerful message: that we're in this together, for the good of golf."

She said she hopes the council hires a director by the first of the year.

"When we go into political forums we need someone strong," she said. "We can't afford to wait much longer..."

The council's executive convenes in April May, and they're not going to wait for us. They won't table their decisions until we get our act together."

Kit Bradshaw is a freelance writer based in Jupiter, Fla.

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