Canadians build in face of recession

By Mark Leslie

A nationwide recession and regional permitting hangups have hampered golf course development in Canada, but pent-up demand for public courses remains strong.

"In 1986-87 the future looked tremendous. A lot of people put shovels into the ground," said John Gordon, executive director of the Canadian Golf Foundation. "But building a golf course isn't like building a car. You don't turn one out every 12 minutes. And by the time the courses came on stream, there was a glut in the upper end of the market. Had they been decent-calibre semi-private or public golf courses, I don't think they would have suffered."

Mike Hurdzan of Hurdzan Design Group in Columbus, Ohio, who has three courses under construction in Canada, said: "The Canadian economy is much worse than ours. It's a lot harder to borrow money. Plus, they've instituted a value-added tax that has tightened up the money supply."

"But the demand for golf is so high, they're building anyhow. They are even more golf-crazy than we are."

Hurdzan added that obtaining permits to build is also more difficult than in the United States. "It's more bureaucratic. An example is Vancouver, where there is a tremendous need for golf, but you can not take land out of production for golf," he said.

Douglas Carrick, of the architectural firm Robinson, Carrick & Associates in Willowdale, Ontario, said: "(More difficult) permitting is an irreversible trend. Money is temporary."

Ted George, of the golf course building company Bruce S. Evans Ltd in Scarborough, Ontario, said: "Quite a few builders are worried that environmental controls will get stiffer and slow things down... Two years of studies are needed before most courses get approval. Twenty-eight agencies are involved."

George said it is estimated this procedure costs $300,000 to $400,000.

"Permitting has gotten steadily tighter over the last 10 years," he said, but added: "I think it's all for the good. It does not restrict you other than it costs more money to build that way. We can build a course with hardly a drop of water leaving the site with a speck of color, and that's because of what we have to do to control it."

Evans usually includes in his bids a $100,000 allowance to meet environmental procedures for an 18-hole course.

"In the West, with high elevation changes and other factors, it can go way beyond that," George said.

And yet, George said builders agree, if anything is slower, it's "the ability of new owners to raise funds. Banks have never been

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Johnston's touch a traditional one at Southerness

ATLANTA, Ga. — Southerness Golf Club, the city's newest daily-fee golf course, designed by Clyde Johnston, opened Nov. 1.

Located 20 minutes from downtown Atlanta, next to the Parcada Mountain State Park, Southerness is being developed and operated by The Clubs Group, Ltd of Hilton Head Island, S.C.

Adjoining South River on the grounds of an antebellum cotton plantation, its builders feel Southerness combines Southern hospitality and resort service with some of the best traits of Scottish golf.

Southern touches include: the original plantation house (circa 1822 and spared by General Sherman, who passed on the other side of the river), which stands at the club entrance; 200-year-old oak trees throughout the course; and historic Flat Bridge, which crosses the South River near the 10th green.

The most visible Scottish touch is the use of a traditional wicker basket to top each flagpole. The rolling hills, grass bunkering and eight different grasses found on the golf course also add a Scottish flavor.

The course's signature hole is the 16th, a 175-yard par-3, playing across Alexander Lake and framed by a waterfall.