Finger takes expertise to wide-open territory — Mexico

By Frances G. Trimble

The adage, "Go west, young man," has taken a directional and age twist for the retired golf course architect Joe Finger, who has headed south to help Mexicanders build courses.

Only about 150 private clubs and no municipal courses exist in Mexico, said Finger. Yet there is "a big market" for munis and daily fee courses in that country, known as the "big trouble." 

"The Mexican developer has the right to expect the same kind of professionalism from the architect and contractors as one expects in the U.S.," Finger said. He added that even in the United States, professional standards are neither required by the industry nor offered by some individuals and companies.

"Construction costs are similar in both countries. "Even though labor is cheap, it takes a lot more of it," he said. "They are not as efficient."

Mexican equipment is frequently "American case-off" and less powerful than that north of the border, he said. Parts and supplies are in short supply or unavailable.

"Herbicides approved for use here are held up by the Mexican counterpart agency," Finger said.

"The upside is Mexico's weather, which is better for building than that in the United States. "They have a predictable rainy season when some work can be done. Otherwise, work is unhindered by weather," Finger said.

"Mexico also offers spectacular sites for golf courses. "Terrain varies from mountainous regions to swampland. There are areas that are rocky and covered with cactus and areas that look like the Austrian Alps. One course I consulted on — Los Encinos — was built by a Mexican amateur champion named Mauricio Urdaneta. Mauricio did a great job but called on me to help with the technical aspects of his operation. The waterfalls around the course are my doing," he said.

"About 25 minutes from Mexico City and 10,000 feet above sea level, Los Encinos has 100-foot-tall white cedars, pines and eucalyptus all around. It is part of a residential development that will have condos and houses for summer vacationers and is, according to Finger, "the place to join if you're a serious Mexican golfer."

"They already have a couple of beachfront hotels there," Finger said. The course will sit behind them on hillsides, with "hills and ravines, huge cactus, but very little top soil and water."

"Though the contrast between Cabo Real and Los Encinos is striking, Finger said Mexico can be counted on to amaze visitors with her "density of color," the year-round green of her courses, and the hospitality of her people.

Golf is certainly blooming in a country abundant in natural color. And Finger, who has designed or remodeled around 100 courses in the United States, intends to add to the nine "flowers" he has created there.

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Quarantine Kikuyugrass, Finger urges

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