Aqua range delivers novelty, profitability

**By Lisa Maki**

One trend that may further aid the rebirth of practice facilities — even the cow pastures and country clubs — is the aqua range, which combines beauty, drama, challenge and shot value, not to mention the novelty of floating golf balls.

The notion of hitting balls into a lake may sound counterproductive.

But the aqua range generates income and offers the developer a number of advantages: increased value of neighboring homes, decreased maintenance costs, and the fill necessary for further development.

Jim Cocchi, director of golf at Glenn Lakes Golf Club in Weeki Wachee, Fla., supports the aqua range concept.

Cocchi said his clients enjoy the aqua range, and it's been very profitable.

Its success can be partially linked to Cocchi’s belief in supplying good quality balls.

Although floating balls are about 60 cents more expensive than ordinary balls, the initial investment will be returned in kind, he said.

**American Golf executive: Market runs the risk of over-expansion**

**By Peter Blais**

The market for practice range facilities may not be as bright as many believe, according to an executive with one of the nation's largest course management companies.

The past few years, many ill-conceived projects have been built in areas with insufficient demand, said Joe Guerra, senior vice president of corporate development with American Golf Corp.

Consequently, some municipalities are overstocked with practice centers, a situation that isn't likely to change until the local economy improves.

For example, two practice centers were recently built within five miles of AGC's Irvine, Calif., facility. While it isn't meeting expectations, the AGC center is still earning a fair return, Guerra said.

But Irvine can't support the additional 150 new hitting stations and he expects the new facilities to have a tough time surviving.

"Many new practice ranges were built on mid-season sales,“ the AGC executive said. "The developers wanted in on what they saw as a glamourous business."

"One of the main problems is that the barriers to entry are so low. You can build a range for $200,000 to $3 million and 12 acres of land. A lot of people wanted to get into the business and were willing to mortgage the house to do so. But the market just didn't justify the investment."

Many developers bought land when they would have been better off signing a long-term lease, the AGC executive said. Those projects performing best are generally on land the developers have owned and operated as practice ranges for many years, adding a "safety measure".

**Continued on page 34**