

# Regulators provide fitting end to Landmark saga

The rags-to-riches-to-rags story of Landmark Land Co. appears to have ended in mid-September, when hordes of locust — disguised as agents of the Resolution Trust Co. — took over operations at Landmark offices in Carmel, Calif., and Oak Tree in Edmond, Okla.

This means you and I — via the long arm of federal law — now control the fortunes of all Landmark properties, including PGA West, Kiawah Island and Oak Tree. That's right — our government now pays the salaries at these prestigious golfing venues, and we pay federal salaries with our tax dollars. What a country!

The moral of this story is pretty simple: No matter how good things appear, don't open a savings & loan because 1) You're not the president's son; and 2) The rules of engagement may change in mid-stream.

The latter hazard befell Landmark, which opened Oak Tree

Savings & Loan on the strength of its successful golf course development ventures. However, in 1988, the government decided savings & loan institutions couldn't be in the commercial real estate business.

Funny how those things work.

As late as 1988, Landmark reported profits in excess of \$60 million. But the economy went down the dumper, Landmark couldn't find buyers for its properties, and the rest is history.

American Golf Corp. has been named the interim golf management company. Because it signed a federal assets management agreement, AGC cannot bid on any of the ex-Landmark properties.

However, there's a whole, wide world of speculators out there — including you! That's



Hal Phillips  
editor

why the feds have provided a toll-free number call the "asset hotline." If you want to put a bid down on PGA West, just call 1-800-RTC-DOOM (I'm not joking here, this is the real number).

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Landmark officials can be accused of many things, among them too closely associating their golf holdings with speculative real estate ventures. But circumstance, it seems, conspired against Landmark and its six subsidiaries.

Anyone who has played a Landmark course can vouch that quality came first — and I don't mean diamond-studded tee markers or Persian silk flags. Put simply, the courses were inventively designed, superbly kept, and most allowed the public an opportunity to play, albeit for a steep price.

However, the Sept. 14 raid on Carmel signaled the end of an era. Perhaps the greatest injustice was Landmark's plan for reorganization was not taken seriously, never given a chance.

It's interesting to consider the RTC's role in this debacle. By taking over the Landmark offices, it could be argued the government has devalued existing home sites. This leaves members in an even more vulnerable position, if that's possible.

Further, one can't help but be reminded of Indian Wells Country Club, which fell into Chapter 11 a few years back. The RTC, in its wisdom, handpicked Japanese financier Ken Mizuno to rescue the beleaguered club from fiscal oblivion. Well, Mizuno recently ran afoul of federal tax collectors and Indian Wells is now controlled by the Internal Revenue Service.

Thank heaven for the RTC, the good hands people.

## Letters

### DESERT COUSINS

To the editor:

I read with great interest the article about Furnace Creek Golf Course in your August 1992 *Golf Course News*. United States Gypsum Co. maintains one of the few remaining company-owned mining towns in the West. I have been town manager of Empire, Nev., the past 12 years. One of my responsibilities has been the maintenance and upgrading of the nine-hole Burning Sands Golf Course.

The course was started 30 years ago by a group of volunteers who divided into three teams, each to construct a green. Each green had three holes and they had to play around three times to get in their nine holes. The fairways were sand, hence the logical name, Burning Sands.

Over the years, improvements were made and greens added. The number 2 and 3 fairways were seeded in 1978, the 6 and 7 fairways in 1984. The 1, 2, 3 and 4 greens were opened for play in their present state in 1980.

We have many of the same conditions and problems as Furnace Creek. The soil is alkaline, water is extremely high in mineral content (non-potable) and maximum flow is only 275 GPW, the winds blow almost constantly from the west, and temperatures vary seasonally from 100 degrees to 105 degrees Fahrenheit down to as cold as minus 15-20 F at night in the dead of winter, though winter daytime temps usually are above freezing.

We, too, had the same problems with our sand traps. Available sand is DG (decomposed granite) which crusts over after it gets wet, and good sand merely blows away.

After reading the article and discussing it with the local golf

club, we decided to try turf bunkers and will lay sod tomorrow in the number 4 and 7 bunkers. If this is readily accepted by the local golfers, the others will be converted to solve a long-standing problem. Furnace Creek can no longer lay claim to be the only course with turf bunkers.

We have a feature I'm sure no other course can claim. It is open to the general public and it is free ... no greens fees! And, there is no reservation requirement and no waiting list. Though it is open year-round, there is no maintenance after the grass goes dormant.

Kenneth McCurdy,  
town manager  
The United States Gypsum Co.

### HURDZAN ON TRACS

To the editor:

While I preach "bearing the ax" on the U.S. Golf Association's recommended green construction methods, I am also "calling to arms" over the proposed TRACS service.

I take serious issue with several statements and concepts of TRACS and I can not let them pass without comment. My understanding of TRACS is from a recently published article — a November 1991 letter sent to the president of the American Society of Golf Course Architects by the national director of the USGA Green Section.

Perhaps the root of my discontent is the statement that reads "The green section's reputation as... unbiased source of scientific and practical information." In my experience these words are completely unfounded, for the USGA Green Section has proven itself repeatedly to be a very biased source of information, especially when it comes to green construc-

tion methods. Nor are they scientific or practical in most instances, except when it suits their position.

My point is that the USGA is NOT a point source of information on golf course construction for it lacks the necessary experience, exposure, and down-in-the-trenches knowledge of most long-term practitioners be, they designer or builder. Every day I am discovering new methods, concepts, and materials which improve the art and science of golf course construction, and I am certain that this is true of my colleagues as well. Who, then, will be the final arbitrator of what is best — the USGA TRACS representative? What are his or her qualifications that permit him to reach such conclusions?

But let us suppose that this USGA TRACS representative does possess this ultimate data bank of knowledge — whom, or what, replaces him when this super-talented person moves on, but the program remains as valid as ever in the eyes of the consumer? Will the program fold, will USGA search out another uniquely qualified expert, or simply lower the professional qualification of his successor and hence, the level of services? People move on, programs don't, so we in the industry will be stuck with this initiative for a very long time.

Then, too, there is the problem of professional and public liability that this TRACS representative will assume each time he or she makes a recommendation. I trust that this expert who establishes quality-control procedures also recognizes the liability exposure that goes with it. It assures you that lawsuits involving golf course construction are not rare, and anyone offering to establish qual-

ity controls will in fact be the epicenter of that litigation. (Perhaps it takes being involved in a major lawsuit to drive home this point.)

The statement that "Under no circumstances will we (USGA) be involved in golf course design work" makes me smile and question if the USGA understands what golf course design work really is. Where does "design" separate from construction technique, or does the USGA not recognize that "form must follow function which must follow budget"?

In an attachment with the sub-heading "potential services", he offers that the USGA will "establish quality-control programs for the construction or renovation of greens, tees, bunkers, as well as the installation of drainage and irrigation systems." (The only thing missing was cart paths, dams, and bridges and those are the only services for which I could suggest our clients to hire outside consultants.)

Has USGA written these "quality-control programs," and, if so, where are they available? These "quality-control programs" are essentially the specifications that accompany the detailed drawings and, in fact, these "quality-control programs" may even dictate design. If these "quality-control programs" have not been written, then the result can only be conflicts between a designer's specification and "quality-control programs." The only way these "quality-control programs" can work is if they are universally agreed upon by all designers and are the basis for our common specifications.

Then in this same attachment the USGA offers to "identify qualified and experienced contractors, architects, consultants, and any

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