Study: Course maintenance costs up 4.9%

By PETER BLAIS

Course managers have done an excellent job trimming budgets while maintaining quality in the face of an ongoing recession, said a private country club industry consultant.

Golf course maintenance expenses rose just 4.9 percent in 1992 at private country clubs, compared to 9.8 percent the year before, according to a preliminary study of 90 courses by the accounting firm Pannell Kerr Forster. The survey is part of its annual Clubs in Town & Country report involving hundreds of private clubs nationwide.

Payroll and related costs (which make up about two-thirds of course maintenance budgets) rose a mere 5 percent in 1992, according to the study. The study also showed that the average annual payroll rose to $323,000.

Bridging the 'market gap' with design technology

By MARK LESLIE

Walt Disney animators, move over. Larry Hawkins is center stage at his easel, and while his rendering of Mickey may not compare, his animation of prospective golf courses could win him an Emmy.

You know those televised fly-overs of golf holes? Hawkins' Geoscience Golf Development Services has developed a computer program to create similar three-dimensional animations of proposed golf courses. The digitized animations are transferred to videotape, creating a VHS-ready fly-over before dirt is ever moved.

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The celebrated Winged Foot elm was taken down in February.

Effective treatment for Dutch elm emerges too late for Winged Foot

By MARK LESLIE

MAMARONECK, N.Y. — Had it been available for public use earlier, a new fungicide may have saved the life of the famous American elm tree that until recently dominated the 10th green at Winged Foot Country Club's East Course.

Dr. R.J. Stipes of Virginia Tech in Blacksburg, Va., one of the leading American tree scientists, said the new compound, called Alamo, is effective against Dutch elm disease, which is believed to have killed the Winged Foot tree. Alamo — the ornamental

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EPA insights on Browner, from fellow Floridians

By HAL PHILLIPS

WASHINGTON, D.C. — With 100 days of the Clinton Administration behind them, members of the golf course industry are still looking for clues as to how Carol Browner will conduct her business as head of the federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

However, Florida land planners, superintendents, engineers and chemical suppliers are plenty familiar with Browner, who led the state's Department of Environmental Regulation (DER) for just under two years. Opinions vary, but most agree Browner is an aggressive, intelligent, politically motivated person whose views on the environment are essentially protectionist, but not necessarily set in stone.

"We had a lot of clashes with her. She has a very strong personality," said Bobby Brantley, former lieutenant governor and state representative who served as the first executive

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Technology will half the cost
GAINESVILLE, Fla. — Cost-effectiveness for the client and speed are challenges Geoscience Golf Development Services has tackled since it began developing the program for its computer-driven "flyover" videotapes of proposed golf courses.

"One of the reasons we wrote our own software programs is that we wanted to stay in a PC (personal computer) — off-the-shelf — environment," said Geoscience President Larry Hawkins.

"The work-station environment is very expensive. There's a cost breakpoint where this is cost-effective for [prospective clients]. And we really had to contain the cost because it is a major animation production... "So we put a lot of work into getting on equipment, software and things of that nature."

Hawkins said some clients get so excited about the flyover's possibilities as a marketing tool that they don't worry about the cost. "But when it comes down to pure economics, we really have to be cost-effective," he said.

A major part of the solution lies in advances in the speed of computers, including processors due on the market this year that will half processing time, Hawkins said. In a Geoscience videotape, the flyover of each hole takes 12 to 17 seconds. There are 30 frames per second of view- ing. Each frame must be rendered as a separate image. Depending on the complexity of the image, it can take 15 minutes to 1 hour per frame to create.

"You can see the magnifi- citude of the work," said Hawkins, who employs three people working full-time on the images.

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"It bridges that marketing gap" between conception and construction, said Hawkins. His "site previews" are attracting interest for use in developing, marketing, designing — even obtaining permitting approval.

"A developer looking for money, a marketer seeking to sell memberships in a golf course, a developer looking for a site where this is cost-effective, we have to be cost-effective," he said.

A still-frame view, taken from the animated video, of Elbow Valley's as-yet-unbuilt 17th green, with the 10th green in the trees at left rear.

"We'll probably do a mix [of animation and real-life video]," he said.

Geoscience put four years of research and development into the software, taking the industry standard system to a more sophisticated level — the flyover. It creates a sense of action, movement. Sound-overs and voice-overs can add yet another dimension.

Additionally, Hawkins said that the use of "flyover" video is a "new frontier" for Geoscience — "the next level" for Geoscience.

Geoscience got into animation as an outgrowth of its permitting work. It was providing CAD services to golf course architects and developers, including Gary Player Design Company.

As a result, some of its clients started asking if the company could render conceptual views of golf holes. "The more we did, the more interesting it got... and the more encouragement we got," Hawkins said.

So in March 1992 Geoscience unveiled its new capabilities, gaining Mission Hills as one client, along with others in New Jersey and New York. Its work at Mission Hills was preliminary, three-dimensional concepts and "still" renderings of holes, courses and areas that involved water features at the Gary Player course.

Then along came the developers of Elbow Valley in Calgary, Alberta, Canada, which features a golf course designed by David Graham and Gary Panks. The Elbow Valley video includes a lot of background because it was a three-dimensional model of the entire 1,100 acres.

"Otherwise, we'd do a narrow view of just the golf course envelope. Here, we showed more of the surrounding territory. That was important because this site has so many beautiful features and streams," Hawkins said.

Aaron Alberts of Elbow Valley said he will use the site preview primarily as a marketing tool.

WHAT'S NEEDED
To do its work, Geoscience requires a two-tiered presentation — high-altitude fly-over and a two-tiered green with a rise of a foot and a half, we have to be able to show that. If he specifies he wants raised elevation at the back of traps or hazards and it's a matter of a only few feet, we will show that,”

A view created by Geoscience Inc. of the 10th green at Elbow Valley from one of the hillside homesites overlooking the course outside Calgary, Alberta.