Golf in the Far East

By Hal Phillips

Vietnam — yes, Vietnam — joins blitz

No longer an insular backwater content to watch its neighbors soak up the foreign capital, Vietnam has leapt into the golf development arena with both feet.

While investors are looking at numerous projects all over the country, two projects — one outside Hanoi, the other near Ho Chi Minh City — illustrate the opportunity in Vietnam and the willingness of its government to embrace free market notions. Indeed, both golf resorts are being developed in concert with the state-run tourism department.

"It's a one-party system that wants to see an end-product when nothing was there before," said Earhart. "There's a market notion. Indeed, both golf resorts are being developed in concert with the state-run tourism department.

In addition to the 18 holes, an aquatic sports center, boating facilities, 80-room guest lodge and 50 corporate villas for long-term rental. Ground was broken on the first 18 holes in February. The first nine should open before the close of 1993, said Earhart.

King's Island Corp. Ltd. of Bangkok is the developer, in cooperation with the Ha Tay Province Tourism Dept. Earhart said it will cost individuals US$5,000 to join the club, US$15,000 for total resort privileges. However, King's Island is designed to be a true destination resort that also caters to non-Vietnamese doing business locally.

"If you want to get anything done in Vietnam, you have to come to Hanoi. And the common lament is, 'There's nothing to do here,'" Earhart explained. "There's a Korean businessman in the city who's waiting for his permits to come through. I've seen him hitting golf balls off the dike into the Red River."

Sun rises on two Casper, Nash additions out West

By Hal Phillips

Two golf courses designed by Casper/Nash architects have opened at Del Webb's Sun City communities in Palm Springs, Calif., and Las Vegas, Nev.

The course in Palm Springs is designed around the new Sun City retirement community there. "It's a beautiful desert golf course," said Greg Nash. "The layout features sand dunes, 14 lakes, palm trees, ornamental flowers, waterfalls, and large greens.

"We've planted over 1,000 new palm trees, and about 1,500 other trees on the course — 800 of those are mature date palms, and about 200 surround the 18th green."

The course in Las Vegas is on the north-west hillside, said Nash. "It's built on the highest point overlooking the city. We took advantage of the terrain. Most holes play uphill or downhill, with elevated tees and greens. We planted a lot of pines, so it doesn't look like a desert course. The greens are large, the pin placements varied, and the terrain rises and drops 360 feet. The last five holes are all downhill, and the view is spectacular."

The Las Vegas course is 6,330 yards long, plays par 72. "Billy Casper and I represent a unique design team," says Nash. "I'm the artist and technician. Billy looks at a course from a player's standpoint."

"I know how to make a course fun to play for senior players. He is very particular about the greens. For example, some of the greens on these new courses are 10,000 square feet, large and contoured, with various pin placements, making putting interesting every time you play the course," he explained.
Vietnam joins golf marketplace

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The situation is similar outside Ho Chi Minh City in the south, where the US$30 million Song Be Golf Resort is being developed by the Palm Song Be Golf Company, a joint venture between the state-owned enterprise Protrade and the Singapore-based TCI Group of Companies.

"There's a huge demand for golf in Ho Chi Minh City because there's very little to do during the day," explained Australian architect of Song Be. "It's like going out to the wild west. Frontier stuff. There's just nothing there."

Song Be is also designed to be a full-service resort, complete with 18-hole golf course, banquet rooms, health/ massage/sauna facilities, shops, hotel accommodations and housing lots. It, too, is taking aim at the idle business community in Ho Chi Minh City.

Named after a Mekong tributary, Song Be ("Little River") is 20 km north of the city center. Scott described the 104-hectare site as extraordinarily beautiful and quite unique, to say the least.

"We've found elaborate tunnel systems left over from the war and we keep finding unexploded bombs in rice paddies," he said. "When we find the bombs, the local expert comes out and defuses them on site, and lake dye. Other ingredients include a temporary colorant. Dy'On is also recommended as a pond and lake dye. Other diluted, imitator products are worth far less.

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"When we first saw the site, there was a little hostility because they thought we were American," said Scott.

"But I think the biggest misconception is that the Vietnamese don't know what they're doing. They're extremely placid people in the main, but underneath there is this incredible will to learn and succeed."

"We have only one expatriate overseeing the project. All other work is done under the direction of Vietnamese."