A tale of two projects: North, South, fast-forward & slow-going

By A. JOHN HARVEY

The Robert Trent Jones Co. — continuing its management of the greater Myrtle Beach area — eventually declared itself lead agency for the project. After an extensive review by the agencies and local citizens, the team assembled all questions concerning the proposal and answered each and every one with a written response or refinement of the plan. The team then submitted the revised layout and documentation in the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) in May 1991.

In general, a correlation can be made between the amount of paperwork required to secure approvals and the speed of construction. The route plan and approval documents for Anglebrook were refined, re-routed and reworked in concept and detail, many times at the will of agencies and the team's consultants, whereas a route plan for the Trail was all that was necessary.

In April of this year SGA received its final construction approvals, three years after submission of the FEIS. During the intervening years, refinement of the Somers plan was primarily due to the extent proposed golf course features were located within the two archaeologically significant sites; restrictions on grading of steep slopes; and grading or tree clearing required in wetland areas. In addition, the town of Somers required the team to prepare a construction planning program which listed activities in a chronological sequence of operations from clearing to grading. Together with Design-Build drafting, our office devised an extensive erosion-control plan using a series of catchment, diversion and filter treatment devices around the perimeter of wetlands, golf construction corridors and within grading areas as progression of construction warrants. As a condition of the approvals, the town stipulated that construction could disturb no more than 14 acres of wetlands and replace or enhance 14 acres of wetlands within these areas. The town further required SGA to institute an on-site water monitoring program.

The massive scale afforded many benefits and economics to the Trail developers, Golf Development Company. All the land and infrastructure required for these courses were given to Sunbelt by private landholders, developers and municipalities. A few courses were built along ecologically fragile environments without jeopardizing their landscape value. For example, the Abohara/Ophelia course was built on heavily wooded property surrounding Lake Ophelia, owned by the Opelika Water Works Board. The surface area of the lake is about 400 acres and was formed to supplement the city's water supply. Today, during the second year of regular maintenance of the golf complex, lake water tests indicate no elevated levels of sediment or turfgrass chemicals as a result of the operation. No wetlands were filled; however, three acres were created.

A full six years after RTJ joined the Somers project, construction at Anglebrook is scheduled to begin this September.

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