Environmental clearinghouse operational by mid-summer?

By Peter Blais

CHARLESTON, S.C. — A clearinghouse for environmental information regarding golf courses could be functioning by mid-summer, according to the National Golf Course Owners Association Executive Director Michael Hughes.

Representatives from the Allied Associations of Golf decided to move forward with the program during their late May gathering here.

Exactly what information the yet-to-be-named clearinghouse will provide was undetermined, Hughes said. The Allied Association’s environmental subcommittee, chaired by Hughes, expected to put the finishing touches on the program by late June, the NGCOA staffer said.

Prepared printed responses to some of the most commonly asked questions, particularly those involving wetlands and pesticides, will likely be available, Hughes said. Most will be written in laymen’s terms since many requests are expected from the media and general public.

For more technical questions, lists of qualified professionals who could help will be provided.

While much of the information may already be available through the Turfgrass Information Foundation, U.S. Department of Agriculture library and various colleges and institutions, the general public either is not aware of its availability or it is too technically written.

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American Golf leaps into private club market with both feet

By Peter Blais

When you think of American Golf Corp., you generally envision a public golf colossus.

“It’s ironic considering AGC’s roots are in the private club business,” said David Pillsbury, executive vice president of American Golf Country Clubs (AGCC), American Golf’s recently formed private country club division.

“(AGC Founder) David Price’s first course was a private layout in York, Calif. The public side has just grown much faster than the private side.”

Fast indeed. Santa Monica, Calif.-based AGC added an average 16 courses annually through the 1980s. It now numbers a whopping 180 facilities, most of the public variety.

Price began restructuring the firm two years ago to bring additional attention to AGC’s private clubs and members. The company added 15 private clubs in the past year, giving it 27 in the United States and five in Great Britain. Plans are to double those numbers in the next five years, Pillsbury said.

Formed earlier this year, AGCC is de-
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outs in the tri-county area. The extensive list of hoteliers includes the Ritz Carlton, Marriott, Embassy Suites and Holiday Inn.

"You need enough courses so that a group of friends can come down for a week, play 36 holes a day and never play the same course," the director said. "And you need to have enough empty hotel rooms that you can offer people a great deal.

"We're competing with areas like Myrtle Beach. When people read a brochure from that area and then one of ours, one of the first things they look at is price. "If an area is already pretty well booked and just looking to make some additional revenue, the regional concept won't work. It only works if you can offer significant discounts."

Once they realized they had the raw resources, course and hotel operators along with members of the local chambers of commerce and visitors bureaus ventured up to Myrtle Beach to discover how that 27-year success story worked.

Convinced it could also work for the First Coast — so named because it is the first coastal area one hits driving into Florida and because of first-city-in-the-nation St. Augustine — they began seeking a director.

That fall they chose Callaghan, a former University of Alabama sports information director and Gator Bowl organizer. Callaghan received a $215,000 budget, half funded by the state's Tourist Development Council and the other half by local golf courses and hotels.

Approximately $78,000 of that first-year budget went toward publishing 100,000 copies of a glossy, 48-page, 8-1/2-by-11-inch brochure detailing the First Coast's places to play and stay.

Rates range from as low as $41 per person for accommodations, 18 holes of golf daily chosen from among 21 courses, to $175 per person for accommodations, 54 holes of golf daily chosen from among 21 courses.

"We couldn't do this without the support of the visitors bureaus and chambers of commerce," Callaghan said. "They've provided us with free office space, computers and furniture.

"In addition to salaries and the brochures, we've just been responsible for phones, office supplies and mailings."

After 19 months as the only employee, Callaghan hired a secretary in early June.

"When I've been out of the office, all we've had is an answering machine to field calls," Callaghan said. "It should help to have someone who can respond personally to inquiries and send out information immediately."

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Kemper gives city courses a face lift

CHICAGO, I11. — Park District golf courses here are getting a face lift. Beginning last June, asphalt tees and walks were replaced with natural grass and stone walking paths.

To date, Kemper Golf Management Chicago, Inc. (KGMC) has planted more than 175 trees and shrubs, 35 flower gardens and 2,000 yards of grass.

It has used more than 50 truck loads of soil; 15 shipments of wood chips and cleaned more that 100 sandtraps in an effort to create a more positive impression.

The renovations also include added target greens at the Diversey range and a learning center at Jackson Park.

Last year the KGMC also installed a tee-time reservation system, which allows golfers to make reservations by phone using their credit card and social security number.