GOTHAM CITY GOLF INDUSTRY GETS NEW FACE

BY MARK LESLIE

NEW YORK CITY — New York City is reclaiming its Manhattan waterfront and golf has a hand in it. The natural feel of a golf course will be blended with a high-tech delivery system in a major project that will bring a four-deck golf range to a Hudson River pier.

"We're taking an urban concept you'd find in Japan and importing it to New York — the difference being, instead of a smaller parcel of land, our parcel happens to be a pier and one that is structurally quite substantial," said Steve diCostanzo, a consultant on the Chelsea Piers project.

Construction will begin in late spring on the Chelsea Piers Golf Course. Continued on page 42

Florida Public Television tunes in: How to construct a golf course

By Mark Leslie

BONITA SPRINGS, Fla. — With golf development booming all around it and the golf industry bringing billions of dollars a year into the state, the southwest Florida public television station is broadcasting a 13-part documentary, How To Build a Golf Course.

"Golf is a large component of the construction and real-estate business in southwest Florida. Most real-estate developments are using golf courses as a prime marketing tool," said Kirk Lehtomaa, station manager at WSFVT-TV, who will offer the series nationwide this summer. "Within a 10-mile radius of our station, at least six or seven 18-hole championship courses are under construction."

In the first segment an environmental consultant walks the audience over the course, pointing out wildlife that will have to be protected and enhanced. In another show, Wadsworth Golf Construction Co. will offer the series nationwide this summer. Continued on page 43

NYC skyline the backdrop for Jersey City track

By Peter Blais

JERSEY CITY, N.J. — There is a light at the end of the Liberty State Park tunnel. And the chief proponent of the long-awaited golf course project says there is a better than even chance believers will be able to drive through it by summer's end.

"We're hoping to get Department of Environmental Protection and Energy approval within the next six months," said Peter Yevsaker, president of the non-profit Liberty State Park Development Corp.

If approved, construction should start in early 1995. The course could be ready for play in 1997, two decades after the idea of a golf course was first proposed. Continued on page 43

West's Golf Course News: You believe you may be the only member of the American Society of Golf Course Architects who is also a Certified Golf Course Superintendent. How has that helped your design career?

Bobby Weed: I know from my agronomic background what a superintendent can live with and maintain. When I'm designing fairways, sometimes I imagine I'm on a mower. Knowing how something will have to be maintained can give you an edge. Labor is 60 to 70 percent of your maintenance budget. Maintenance people are tuning into that in the design phase. If you address it then, it dominoes through to the superintendent's budget and ultimately the fee charged the consumer, who is really paying for all this, anyway.

GCN: How early do you like to bring in

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Call him 'Colonel, sir'  
Hurdzan will retire outranking some, but not Arnold

Dr. Michael Hurdzan is a golf course architect most of the time, but for a few days each month, he is Colonel Hurdzan, commander of an Army Reserve unit. Recently he received one of the Army's highest peacetime honors, the Legion of Merit Medal, from Maj. Gen. Donald Campbell, commander of the U.S. Army Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations Command, Fort Bragg, N.C. Hurdzan was decorated for superior leadership and dedication as retiring commander of the 2nd Psychological Operations Group, one of the largest units in the Army Special Operations Forces.

Hurdzan's basic branch is Special Forces, more commonly called "green berets," but he is also qualified in psychological operations, civil affairs, infantry and chemical warfare. He is an experienced military parachutist, has earned the expert infantry badge, as well as foreign airborne qualifications from the British and German military forces.

Col. Hurdzan is planning to retire within a few months. "Many people are encouraging me to stay longer to make the rank of general," he said, "but I now outrank Alister MacKenzie and Hugh Alison, who were majors, and Pete Dye, who was a sergeant. Besides, golf already has one fine general, (in name only) Arnold Palmer."

Extensive pole-and-net technology from Japan will encircle the range. A pedestrian walkway will go around the outside of all the piers.

There should be no shortage of clients, diCostanzo said.

"We have a captured audience and will do aggressive community outreach programs to all golfers in the metropolitan area," he said.

Chelsea Management is making arrangements for a golf academy and to lease out the pro shop.

From 52 heated teeing stations, the 60-by-225-yard driving range will "evolve the feelings" of three famous greens — the 11th at St. Andrews' Old Course, TPC Sawgrass's island green and Pebble Beach's 18th, diCostanzo said.

The Hudson River and a waste area on the left will create the feel of Pebble's finale; railroad ties and foot-deep water around the green will simulate Sawgrass's 17th; and the bunker complex fronting St. Andrews' green will add to the illusion.

Artificial turfgrass will be on the contoured landing areas and slightly elevated, pitched greens. Video cameras at hitting stalls will provide instant replay of golf swings.

All this will blend with an automatic tee-up delivery system imported from Japan's Sunaga Kailatsu, a leader in the field. Balls will be picked up automatically at low points on the fairway and brought to the retrieval system, which will return the golf balls in water troughs and into a conveyor network that will deliver the balls to each level and then to each tee.

"The tee-up accepts a debit card so there is good cash control," diCostanzo said, adding that per-hour costs will range from $15 to $25, depending on the time of day.

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Liberty Park course revenues 'will drive development' on the site

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Revenues from the $10 million golf course — which will afford spectacular views of Ellis Island, Statue of Liberty and Manhattan skyline — will also pay for $13 million in improvements and additions to the rest of the park.

Approximately 75 percent of Liberty State Park, which opened in 1976, has remained undeveloped for lack of funds.

"The course is the engine that will drive development," Ylvisaker said.

Ylvisaker has been around for most of the past 20 years. He has seen environmentalists and no-growthers delay the project again and again, through the courts and through the media. But opponents have never provided an alternate plan that would pay for the needed improvements at a time when the government simply doesn't have the cash.

"It's been frustrating," Ylvisaker said. "It's been a deliberate effort to stop the project and frustrate any development plans."

We recently won a court case involving a marina there. It's about the sixth time we've been to court. The judge chastised the environmental groups for bringing such a frivolous case to trial. It's taken patience and perseverance to get this done. But it should finally pay off."

The turning point, Ylvisaker said, came in December. That's when the working committee — consisting of local and state officials, concerned organizations and individuals — endorsed reducing the course size by 75 acres. Many opponents warmed to the revised plan and the recommendation was forwarded to the DEPE, Ylvisaker said.

"It will still be a quality course and leaves room for everything else," said Mark Mungeam, associate designer with course architect Cornish & Silva.

The park sits on an abandoned rail yard where the presence of heavy metals has been an ongoing concern.

Experts have recommended putting a two-foot-thick soil cap over much of the site.

The cost has been estimated at $4 million.

But a recent development could reduce and possibly eliminate that expense, making additional money available for other Liberty State Park projects.

The state Department of Transportation must remove 800,000 cubic yards of clean fill as part of a wetlands mitigation project on nearby Route 287.

DOT expects to receive bids on the project in February and could make the fill available, at no cost, to Liberty State Park.

"It would assure public safety, help with the design and significantly reduce golf course costs," Ylvisaker said.

Once completed, greens fees are expected to be between $20 and $26, Ylvisaker said.

At a projected 53,000 annual rounds, he said the golf facility could generate $2 million in annual revenues within a few years.

Public TV covers construction

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takes viewers to two golf holes under construction, discussing what his crews are doing, what he looks for from shapers, and other related issues.

In another show, Fazio Golf Course Designers' project director Charlie Feeley explains how to build a golf green.

Since public television stations are independent, some may choose to run the shows while others may not.

But, Lehtomaa said he has talked to several public television station managers who enjoy golf and "they seem to have an interest in the series." (Coincidentally, a number of them played Pelican's Nest, a popular public track, during a conference two years ago.)

The part of the construction that most impressed Lehtomaa was "There is a great deal that goes on under the golf course that people never see. I was astonished at how much time and energy is spent moving water off the course after it rains."

When will the series be airing on stations that pick it up? "With public television, you never know," Lehtomaa said. Stay tuned.