Hurdzan Cooks up a treat outside Columbus

By MARK LESLIE

SHIVILLE, Ohio — From cornfield and atrazine to golf course and ecology. That’s the story of Cooks Creek here — a golf course that has transformed a flood plain into a wetland haven for waterfowl and other wildlife.

“I think it’s probably a good prototype of what modern golf architecture is going to be in the years to come,” said Dr. Michael Hurdzan, who designed the course along with PGA Tour pro John Cook. “It doesn’t look contrived. It looks natural. It’s believable, even though we did an enormous amount of earthwork. It enhances the environment.”

For Hurdzan’s consultant on Cooks Creek, PGA Tour pro John Cook, it is a family affair. His grandfather, Bert, and father, Jim, once farmed the land. Jim decided to build a golf course on it.

John’s sister and former LPGA Tour pro Cathy is interested as well, but the new mother will not be working there. GolfCorp, the public golf arm of ChbCorp, joined the project as majority owner, infusing finances and managing the facility, whose second nine opened at the end of June.

“Our expertise is in operations and marketing. Jim and John will be involved to an extent, promotionally,” said GolfCorp Senior Vice-President of Marketing C.J. McDaniel, adding that...
Cooks Creek points way to future

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Jim plans to build some housing on the property.

For them all, especially course builder Niebur Golf, it was a major undertaking confronted by one massive problem — flooding. The Scioto River runs along the 355-acre property and merges with Little Walnut Creek onsite. That confluence over the years has often submerged the property under three to four feet of flood water.

"We explained it was a lousy site, virtually flat except for one huge ridge that runs down the middle," Hurdzan said. "But Jim said, 'By God, we'll do it anyway.'"

With the help of environmental groups and the Ohio departments of Natural Resources (DNR) and Fish and Wildlife, they have done just that. Some 63 acres of wetlands were created, and the soil dredged up was used to raise the fairways six to seven feet to get out of the flood plain and not alter any of the flood capacity of the valley. Some 800,000 cubic yards of dirt were moved.

"We had to build big detention areas," Hurdzan said. "Those areas became wetlands and, ultimately, the habitat."

Audubon Society of New York President Ron Dodson counted some 40 varieties of birds on the property when he visited to sign Cooks Creek into the group's Cooperative Sanctuary Program.

"We're promoting the bluebirds," said superintendent Galen Scharenberg. "We've installed houses one form or another."