There are three things that differentiate us," Rippey said. "First, we have the talent and expertise of the larger companies. Our senior management team is a match for anyone. We're small and can stay close to our clients, but our management team reads like that of a larger firm. That positions us well for the future."

"Second, we're a legitimate full-service firm that can take a project from conception through actual operation. That differentiates us from many other supposedly full-service companies that actually are a consortium bringing various firms together to complete a project. A truly full-service firm is an advantage to a new developer because he can look to one company for accountability all the way down the line."

"Third, we operate a wide range of facilities. Our most significant is Medinah (Ill.) Country Club. It's 54 holes, a prestigious layout with 300 employees. At the other end of the spectrum, we have some average-cost, daily-fee facilities where we've succeeded in producing a quality golf experience and a strong bottom line. Some people say it's a mistake to have a wide-focus. But because of our people, we can do a good job anywhere."

In addition to Medinah, NAG manages Blackhawk Golf Club (GC) in South Bend, Ind.; Hawk Ridge GC in Lake Saint Louis, Mo.; St. Lawrence GC in Canton, N.Y.; the Club at Mill Creek in Melbane, N.C.; Prairie Landing GC in West Chicago, Ill.; and Emerson (N.J.) GC.

In 1985, Rippey founded Can-Am Golf Enterprises, a full-service golf company that evolved into North America Golf, Inc. and one of the five principals in the company. Rippey directs all business-development activity at NAG facilities.

The firm recently added two golf industry veterans to its operations-management group. Allan Irwin is vice president of operations. In that capacity he heads the management teams at Medinah, Prairie Landing, and The Club at Mill Creek. Irwin formerly directed the club management division at Jack Nicklaus Development Co. and at one time managed SentryWorld in Stevens Point, Wis.

Joseph Zaleski is vice president of golf operations. He oversees Blackhawk GC, Emerson GC, Hawk Ridge GC, and St. Lawrence GC. A Class PGA professional, he has extensive daily operations experience. Zaleski was formerly chief operating officer of Fore Golf Inc. and vice president for operations of the Fairway Group.

Another key manager is Director of Construction and Maintenance Mark Fischesser. A Michigan State University graduate, he spent several years as a European project manager for Robert Trent Jones Sr. and later became director of maintenance for a European golf course management company. Fischesser directs on-site design and construction activities and serves as a consulting superintendent to NAG-operated courses.

"We have just three layers of management—the principals, two vice presidents and the people who work at the facilities," Rippey said. "That allows senior management to get to know our clients and have personal contact."

With the addition of a new financial partner, NAG management considered six course acquisitions in March alone, Rippey said. The firm is looking for public facilities in the $2-to-$5 million range with surrounding developable property. The company is concentrating on cities of 300,000 to 1 million people east of the Mississippi River.

"It's much easier to market a course in a community that size than a large city," Rippey said. "You have to spend $100,000 on advertising to even make a dent in Chicago. In South Bend we can get a lot of attention for $25,000."