Klemme book touts golf’s kinship with environment

By PETER BLAIS

Mike Klemme was 6 years old when he first realized how visually oriented people are. “That’s when I first picked up a copy of National Geographic magazine and started looking at the pictures,” Klemme remembered. “When I got a little older I began reading the captions. But I still don’t think I’ve read an entire National Geographic story. And I have every issue.”

Given that tale, it’s not surprising Klemme has gone on to become a professional photographer and one of the best-known snappers of golf course shots in the business. It was his love for the game and belief in the power of photos that led the Eufaula, Okla., resident to begin pitching his idea for a picture-laden coffee table book touting the environmental benefits of golf courses.

“Every course I’ve gone to has an environmental success story,” said Klemme, who has been on the road as many as 300 days a year visiting golf courses. “Photos are such a great way to communicate those stories.”

After receiving a cold reception for his idea from many in the golf industry, Klemme finally found a warm greeting at Sleeping Bear Press in Chelsea, Mich. The result is A View from the Rough, a 144-page testimonial to the positive environmental benefits of golf courses.

“A View from the Rough portrays the diverse efforts of people and institutions dedicated to enhancing the game of golf and the environment,” Hiers wrote. “The courses shown are excellent examples of the ability to maintain some of the greatest holes in the world in a fashion that supports and enhances the surroundings.”

Klemme noted other books touting golf’s positive environmental record are generally written for those already in the industry. A View from the Rough is targeted toward the general populace, which often makes decisions affecting golf courses.

“The idea is that it will provide answers to many of these questions,” the author said.

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First University Club opens

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Turf (CFT) principals Jeff Harstine and Rodney Davis, the firm's mission is to involve the various university athletic booster organizations in developing a string of University Clubs. The affiliation is mutually advantageous. Alumni and others can join the athletic-support group at a university and pay a monthly dues to belong to the private University Club. Meanwhile, the club gives a percentage of its proceeds to the university athletic program and makes the golf course available to the golf teams. "It's got to be a plus for both The University Club and the university," said Davis. "There is nothing that brings the university people together for functions and get-togethers. This brings them together on a golf course. They can wheel and deal on business and university matters, or they can just reminisce." Here, the company approached the alumni-laden Gamecock Club, which has more than 12,000 members paying a yearly minimum contribution of $150 — and some pay many thousands — to support the athletic program. The result is a private club on 500 acres of land that will ultimately include 27 holes of championship-caliber golf, a nine-hole short course, 30-acre practice area, swimming and tennis facilities and resort-style housing. "We will probably have one of the few golf teams [USC] in the country that is operating in a profit mode because of our financial obligations to the athletic department," Espy said. "Plus, we've generated 600 new members for the Gamecock Club." He said The University Club at USC has "created a dues scenario that puts us 40 to 50 percent below the market in terms of monthly dues."

Memberships are set up in geographic categories, with quotas matched by internal Regional Memberships and the statewide Regional Memberships, but no limit on memberships from outside South Carolina. "The chance of a lifetime from California reaching in at the same time is remote," Espy reasoned.

As partners in The University Club, Davis and Harstine have first option to hire Central Florida Turf to building each course, as did South Carolina's. The design work will vary. CFT designed the course here, but architect and LSU alumni Jim Lipe will design that track.

The University Club's agreement at LSU is with Tiger Athletic Foundation, and Espy has contacted several other organizations supporting universities in the Southeastern Conference. While not yet pursuing projects at schools outside the conference, the company will speak with other interested parties that approach it. "Once one course gets in the ground, it makes all the difference in the world," Davis said. "We'll have something for [prospective clients] to look at." That will also influence financing, Espy said. Funding has come with difficulty — from a bank and a few limited partners, he said.

Reluctant bankers, he said "are anxious now because they see this as a real benefit since it reaches so many families. "In future projects, we'll have a bank who will be the main underwriter and they will solicit local institutions based on the experience we've had here [at USC]."

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