Course pipeline hot into future

By MARK LESLIE

ARMOUTH, Maine — The pipeline of new golf courses does not show any signs of drying up, according to the vast majority of golf course architects and builders responding to a Golf Course News survey. Answering the questionnaire, 74 percent of the respondents said there is no indication of the reservoir going dry. Fourteen percent felt the number of new courses being built would begin to slow. Twelve percent felt the backlog is indeed diminishing.

More than 350 courses have opened in the United States each year since 1991, and the number topped 400 in 1995. Another 743 are under construction, according to National Golf Foundation statistics.

Asked about the financial marketplace, 62 percent responded that clients are finding it easier to secure financing for golf projects, while 27 percent said financing is not easier to get. The remaining 11 percent felt the situation has not changed.

"I converse with many of our members on a fairly regular basis, and most have not noticed a slowdown," said Bill Kubly, chairman of the GCBA committee that oversaw the survey and resulting 12-page document that will be made available to potential developers. "It's been a need in the industry, and is a plus for the developers more than builders."

"One of the problems is that people get the opinion of what a golf course costs. If you tell a developer it's somewhere between $3 million and $5 million, invariably $3 million ends up in the budget," said W. Tom Sasser, president of Paragon Golf Construction, Inc. in North Palm Beach, Fla., a member of the survey committee. "The purpose of the survey was to allow a prospect to try to understand the variables that affect this process."

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Illuminated alum takes golf to Mississippi State

By MARK LESLIE

STARKVILLE, Miss. — With University Club golf courses taking shape at the University of South Carolina and Louisiana State University, a favorite son of another Southeastern Conference school has broken ground on a new golf course.

Carl Middleton, 31, who owns Dogwood Golf Club and Residential Community on property two miles from campus, agreed with his alma mater, Mississippi State University, a favorite son of another Southeastern Conference school, to develop a new project.

"It is part of ensuring the property values," he said. "We're shooting for one of the top golf courses in the state."

"The character of the course is very different. There are 202 acres where it is links-style. Condos will be built around those holes. In the hills, where the estate lots and

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Survey reveals costs of course construction

By MARK LESLIE

CHAPEL HILL, N.C. — A nationwide survey spelling out ranges of costs for specific elements of golf course construction will be released Feb. 8 by the Golf Course Builders Association of America (GCBA).

"This is a vehicle to help the first-time developer to estimate what his project will cost," said Bill Kubly, chairman of the GCBA committee that oversaw the survey and resulting 12-page document that will be made available to potential developers. "It's been a need in the industry, and is a plus for the developers more than builders."

"One of the problems is that people get the opinion of what a golf course costs. If you tell a developer it's somewhere between $3 million and $5 million, invariably $3 million ends up in the budget," said W. Tom Sasser, president of Paragon Golf Construction, Inc. in North Palm Beach, Fla., a member of the survey committee. "The purpose of the survey was to allow a prospect to try to understand the variables that affect this process."

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The report divides the United States into four geographical zones. In each zone it states the minimum, median and maximum cost of 20 phases of construction—from layout and staking to erosion control, excavation, irrigation and drainage, shaping, cart paths and seeding. A narrative description accompanies each category. A worksheet breaking down these costs is also provided for each region.

The diverse climatic zones of the country impact costs, GCBAA Executive Director Phil Arnold points out in the document's foreword. "These conditions affect the length of the construction process, the grassing dates, and the complexity of certain elements such as irrigation and drainage," he said. "For instance, in areas of mild winters and well-drained soils, the construction schedule may be half of the time necessary for construction in sites with severe winters."

Beyond this, each site has its own characteristics affecting construction—from topography to vegetation, soils and governmental rules and regulations.

Whereas construction costs are site-specific, the GCBAA document allows a developer "to look at the items and their description and apply the ranges [of cost] to the site," Sasser said. "Then they can come up with a rough estimate to start a financial analysis and decide whether the project makes sense. We also hope it helps architects for the same reason."

Generally, Zone 1 — roughly the Mid-Atlantic to the Northeast — is the most expensive region in which to build a golf course, while Zone 2, the South, is the least expensive. But the total construction cost is surprisingly close in all four zones. For instance, some items of construction may be lower in Zone 1 than Zone 3. While the minimum for erosion control is $45,000 in Zone 1 compared to $35,000 in Zone 3, irrigation in Zone 3 carries a minimum $430,000 cost compared to Zone 1's $370,000 minimum.

"You may find that you would use the high side of those ranges in the Northeast more than in the South," Sasser said. "In the Northeast, regulations are much more strict. In Birmingham, with all its rock, you would use high numbers for earthmoving. In Atlanta, which has very strict erosion-control laws, those figures would be high."

Kubly pointed out the figures do not include grow-in costs. They are generally higher in the North because of the region's shorter construction season, and the longer time cool-season grasses take to grow.

Arnold said he expected to release the construction document at the International Golf Course Conference and Show in Orlando, Feb. 8-11.