KSL Recreation ventures into Southeastern resort market

GAINESVILLE, Ga. — KSL Recreation Corp., a major recreation and resort management company whose portfolio includes the likes of La Quinta Resort, PGA West and Doral, has assumed management of Lake Lanier Islands, a 1,100-acre resort that is one of the most popular recreational complexes in Georgia.

In a recent meeting, the Lake Lanier Islands Development Authority, which had operated the property since the 1970s, voted to unanimously award the California-based KSL a management agreement. That vote represented a significant step in the privatization of the property, which has been a goal of Georgia Gov. Zell Miller.

Lake Lanier Islands has two 18-hole golf courses, the 18-hole course at the Lake Lanier Islands Hilton Resort, designed by Joe Lee, and the 18-hole Stouffer Pine Isle Resort, built in 1975 and designed by Gary Player and Ron Kirby Associates. There are also two hotels, beachfront parks, fishing, sailing, horseback riding and other facilities at the resort.

The terms of the pending lease call for KSL to pay the state $9 million up front for the property and a minimum lease payment of $3.1 million per year for 41 years, according to KSL officials.

"We're going to take a good thing — Lake Lanier Islands — and make it even better," said Michael Shannon, chief executive officer of KSL recreation. "Our goal is to make this transition as smooth as possible for all our employees and guests."

KSL has offered every former manager at Lake Lanier a position and left all other hiring decisions up to those managers, who were formerly employees for the state of Georgia.

KSL said it wants to target not only golfers as potential guests, but also entire families. KSL is developing plans to provide more family entertainment, a larger variety of outdoor activities and additional dining and lodging options.