UPTPER, Fla. — The surge in construction activity that began eight years ago reached an all-time high in 1995. According to the National Golf Foundation's (NGF) annual report on golf course development in the U.S.

The report, "Golf Facilities in the U.S., 1996 Edition," shows that 468 courses of various lengths and sizes came on line last year. Further, the report indicates that new course construction has more than doubled over the past 10 years.

The outlook for 1996 is strong.

The NGF report shows there were 820 other courses under construction as of Dec. 31, 1995. This means as many as 450 of these could be coming on line this year, according to Rick Norton, NGF's vice president and general manager of Research and Consulting.

The 468 new courses in 1995 brought the five-year total to 1,912. That's an average of 382 courses a year. Ten years ago the nation was averaging just over 150 a year. This not only eclipsed the previous high of 381 set in 1994, it was also the fifth straight year that — in contrast to the leveling off that's occurred in golf participation — golf course development activity has increased.

More than half (56 percent) of the 468 courses coming on line in 1995 were 9-hole layouts. As a result, NGF analysts look at the 468 as 336 18-hole equivalents. In 1994, just more than 60 percent of the 381 courses that opened that year were 9-holers. This produced a total of 262 18-hole equivalents.

There's a message in the numbers, according to Norton. "To my mind, the fact that golf course development has not only held its own, but has increased to the extent that it has, is a great example of the confidence that both developers and lenders continue to have in the health and future of the game," said Norton.

To further illustrate his point, Norton notes the number of facility owners who are expanding their golf courses these days.

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