Buena Vista focusing on total hospitality industry

Florida firm acquires Sun Valley golf resort

By Peter Blais

Tampa, Fla. — "We're not just a golf company" might be the slogan for Buena Vista Golf Holdings (BVGH). The founders of the Tampa-based firm, which recently acquired Elkhorn Golf Club in Sun Valley, Idaho, made their reputation in the resort industry before expanding into the golf market. BVGH's principals have developed and managed such widely known facilities as the 1,038-room Buena Vista Palace Resort & Spa near Walt Disney World in Florida and Seabrook Island Resort in South Carolina.

"We have no qualms about getting involved in a residential/resort golf community, whereas the firms we compete with for golf projects generally want to concentrate on just golf," said Chief Executive Officer Michael Frost. "We are as comfortable with the food and beverage aspects of the business as we are with operating the golf course."

That isn't to say Buena Vista doesn't know beans about golf. University of Florida graduate Larry Webber, a superintendent for 14 years and independent agronomist, has been named director of membership/sponsorship for VGM Golf Inc., a national buying alliance for golf establishments. Webber will continue to be based in Pine Bluff, N.C. Prior to NGCO, he was employed at The Landings in Skidaway Island, Ga.

TRAFTON JOINS VGM

Waterloo, Iowa — Mark Trafton has been named director of membership/sponsorship for VGM Golf Inc., a national buying alliance for golf establishments. Trafton comes to VGM from the National Golf Course Owners Association, where he held the same position for two years. Trafton, 46, will continue to be based in Pine Bluff, N.C. Prior to NGCO, he was employed at The Landings in Skidaway Island, Ga.

ARYA BUYS NJ COURSE

Freehold, N.J. — Arya Golf Properties has purchased Holly Hills Golf Club, an 18-hole layout in Allway Township, AZ Golf Management Corp. will manage the facility. AZ Golf and Arya Golf Properties are partnerships between Ram Arya and former PGA Tour professional Mike Zack. Arya is president of a home-building and land-development company in Freehold. Zach played the PGA Tour from 1977-82 and has 20 years experience in course design, construction and management. Arya Golf Properties is seeking to buy additional courses.

MARRIOTT SIGNS COUPLES/BATES

Chantilly, Va. — Westfields International Conference Center, a Marriott-managed facility, has signed Fred Couples and Gene Bates to design an 18-hole daily-fee course. Nine holes have been cleared and the new facility is scheduled to open in early summer 1998. Niebur Golf of Colorado Springs is the builder. The 238-acre site is located six miles from Westfields, one of the country's leading meeting facilities.

FREE LIGHTNING EXPOSURE ANALYSIS FOR GOLF COURSE FACILITIES

Golf courses can contact Global Atmospheres Inc., owner and operator of the National Lightning Detection Network, for a free lightning exposure analysis which pinpoints and maps all cloud-to-ground lightning strikes detected within a 10-mile radius of their facility for a great length of time. Global markets the Electrical Storm Identification Device (ESID), which is an integral part to a formalized lightning policy at over 240 golf courses internationally. Most recently, Bob O'Link Golf Club (Highland Park, Ill.), Castle Pines Golf Club (Castle Rock, Colo.), The Country Club (Cleveland), and Saint Charles (Ill.) Golf Club have purchased an ESID to protect staff, patrons, and electrical equipment from the damaging effects of lightning.

Management firms mixed bag for superintendents

Should superintendents see the growing influence of management companies as a good or bad thing in terms of career development, professional responsibility, salaries, benefits, etc?

• Josh Lesnik, Marketing Manager, Kemper Sports — In our case it's a good thing. We stress the importance of maintenance, which means a talented superintendent would mean as much or more to us than at a single-course operation. Superintendents are very appreciated (well paid).

Our superintendents are in charge of their individual courses. They may answer to someone in the corporate office who understands what they are talking about. You could compare it to the relationship to a managed health care setting.

• Marc Bergschneider, Chairman, National Fairways Inc. — It's definitely a plus. There are more opportunities for career development by enhancing the services provided at a single course, grow a particular operation, manage multiple courses or go back to school.

Entry-level positions may not be as lucrative [as salaries at non-management company courses]. But that's...
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The Hayter Cup
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summer had made for poor growing conditions on the close cropped fairways. All of these factors suggested the superb West Lanes course would provide a stern enough test, gauntlet or not. View the description "pussycat" in a purely relative sense...

The range of playing ability was wide, from plus-1 handicap to more than 12. This in mind, the opportunity for some one-sided matches was very real. As this would have been contrary to the spirit of the contest, organizers and team captains agreed to avoid such a scenario by the implementation of one of two devices: First, the matches would be played full handicap; second, the captains would, as near as possible, order their players in roughly ascending handicaps.

As the results show, this was a successful move with only five matches out of 18 being reasonably described as "comfortable victories/uncomfortable defeats."

The morning foursballs were extremely closely contested, four of six went to the 18th, one to the 17th, with only Dean Morrison and George Renault of the Americas cruising to a 6 and 5 victory (see complete scoring results on page 30).

Opening salvos were jocular and generous with 3-foot "gimmes" fairly commonplace. By about hole seven the bonhomie was a good deal diminished - if one letter, being "good, take it away," had been replaced with a calculating silence.

Tension was mounting.

By hole 14, the sole Canadian, Thom Charters, had his shoe off decrying the mercy from the 15th tee. Was this building an early excuse? If the affliction affected his putting, it might have explained his three-putt on the 18th - whereby two was a victory for the game. By his own admission, "The Canadian choked it!"

Charters was not alone in a nervous display on the last. Alex Reid with worst-case scenario of a golfer — heart failure with a lack of oxygen - how much time is required to start immediate first aid, summed trained emergency personnel with equipment, and deliver the golfer to a hospital? Not hours, but minutes.

This scenario required a plan to coordinate all potential participants. Pat Vandersteen is general manager of the golf course. It was appropriate to discuss my concerns with her. She readily agreed from a humanitarian standpoint that I should proceed.

The beginning of the plan required traveling the golf course with paper and pencil viewing the course with an entirely new perspective. Example: The Hagen first hole has water crossing the fairway at 90 degrees halfway between tee and green. The water is crossed by a bridge whose integrity is adequate for golf carts, but surely not for a heavy emergency vehicle. An emergency situation would require the exact location of a golfer needing assistance. Is the golfer between the tee box and the water or is the golfer between the water and the green? This exercise started the creation of many pages of notes. It was now quite apparent a layout of the golf course, along with the adjacent cities, would be needed. A trip to the fire department and the tax office located the needed street layout. The Fire Chief Darly Platt was very enthusiastic about the development of this plan; he offered any needed cooperation by his department.

On one of the layouts the water, macadam paths tee boxes and greens were established and colored. Water was blue, paths were black while tee boxes and greens were green. With the notes gathered prior, access points were established in red on the layout. This was accomplished after many meetings with the fire chief and deputy fire chief. The layout had a total of 12 access points.

The next order of business was to set forth a simple set of instructions for course personnel (see related story). Copies of these instructions and the course layout with the access point were reviewed with Chief Platt for his annual appraisal. The copy was turned over to the police department.

The fire department conducted training sessions with their personnel to familiarize them with it. At no cost to the golf course, Chief Platt offered to run training sessions on CPR and artificial respiration for all golf course personnel — paid and volunteer.

All golf courses should have an emergency evacuation plan. Just because a course has a number of holes that aren't close to public roads with no excuse. There should be a plan in place and personnel familiar with its operation.

Here, this issue has been discussed from the humanitarian standpoint. There is, I believe, a legal side to the question. A player goes down with a heart attack and dies on the course 15 minutes later. The only people in attendance were his fellow players who were untrained. A negligence suit is waiting to happen. An attorney for the deceased's heirs can and would raise many critical questions of the golf course and possibly the local emergency department. My training in risk management I saw a potential problem, but I also saw a practical way to reduce and minimize the problem.

Buena Vista Golf Holdings
Continued from page 51
course management industry; and favorable indicators that the game will enjoy increased participation in nearly all market segments.

"Because of the demographics of the U.S. population, we view golf as a growth business from the demand side," Frost said. "With the increasing financial and environmental roadblocks to building new golf courses, it will be difficult for the supply side to keep up."

Along with its management arrangement for the 36-hole LPGA world headquarters, the company has been named the exclusive development and management company for the LPGA. "We're working on plans to expand the LPGA's golf course identity in other parts of the world," Frost said. "It won't be too dissimilar to the way the PGA Tour has developed the TPC (Tourname Players Club) concept."