PGA, Norman team with new TPC in Atlanta

By MARK LESLIE

ATLANTA — TPC at Sugarloaf, Greg Norman's first design for the PGA, will open here May 5, just in time to host the week's activities for the BellSouth Atlantic Classic.

Built by the PGA Tour in conjunction with Crescent Resources, Inc., the facility features a major homesite component as well as golf, tennis and swimming. A huge clubhouse opened in April, and the recreation center is housed in and around the original show barn used during the era when the property was home to Tennessee walking horses owned by Rollins College patriarch Wayne Rollins.

Future plans call for a Norman-designed par-3 nine-hole layout as well. Winding over very hilly and wooded terrain, and with three creeks meandering through the property, TPC at Sugarloaf will challenge golfers with tight fairways — tree-lined alleys requiring "a lot of great shot-making capabilities," according to one PGA official.

TPC at Sugarloaf provided the opportunity to try Greg Norman Turf, a new GN1 Bermudagrass on the fairways, according to Cal Roth, PGA Tour director of golf course maintenance operations. Zoysiagrass roughs will add diversity and color to the track and the greens will be bentgrass.

"There have been a number of new, big golf course communities built in Atlanta over the last few years," said Roth. "But the growth seems to be there. We're selling lots and homes very quickly. We started selling memberships four months ago and have 175 members already."

The TPC Network now numbers 15 in the United States, and under construction is the Gary Player-designed TPC at Jasna Polana in Princeton, N.J.

Despite obstacles, market in Germany improving

By MARK LESLIE

BERLIN, Germany — Despite the financial drain of German unification and the stiff opposition of a strong environmental lobby, golf course development in this country since the turn of the decade has soared.

While the number of golfers has increased 120 percent, from 124,209 in 1989 to 272,830 in 1996, developers have built 214 golf courses, according to the German Golf Federation. That is an increase of 73 percent, or more than 10 percent a year, over the 293 courses the federation reported in 1989.

"Meticulous but steady" describes the growth. Cabell Robinson, a golf course architect headquartered in Marbella, Spain, said it "very difficult to get planning permission to do anything in what was West Germany," and earth-moving is often highly restricted on what is allowed, said Robinson.

"Germany and the UK are probably the two most difficult areas to receive environmental approvals," said Jeremy Slessor of European Golf Design, which helped design the Nick Faldo course at Sporting Club Berlin and has other projects underway in Germany. "It can be a long process. Four years is not unusual to obtain permits. Whether a project is completed depends on the determination of the developer. Many just give up because of the time and money it takes. But those who stay with it usually get their permits."

Indeed, the golf industry's growth seems to defy its obstacles. Although agreeing "It's pretty hard to get things built in Germany," architect Kyle Phillips of Robert Trent Jones II International said the firm has designed one course that will open this summer 20 minutes southwest of Berlin and is planning another in Frankfurt.

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Golf Course News: Your experience at IMG was broad but fairly anonymous. How do you view your tenure there, in retrospect?

Jim Engh: Because I spent a good deal of time in Europe, when I came back to the States, a lot of people didn't exactly know who I was. So that wasn't very good... But I tell ya', it was... Continued on page 32
German development pushing through obstacles

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The major construction obstacle is a regulation that limits any earthmoving on fairways to one meter up or down. Earth can be moved around greens, tees and bunkers, "but they basically don't want you to change the landscape," said Robinson.

Nevertheless, developers are turning some of the landscape into golf courses.

• RTJ II South Course is part of the private 36-hole Golf und Country Club Seddiner See. The developer, v.Bismarck Grundstuksgesellschaft M.B.H. & Co., opened the North Course, designed by Rainer Preissmann of Deutsche Golf Consult, last fall.

• Hösel Golf Club in Düsseldorf, designed by Brit Simon Gidman, was built in 1996 and will open this year. It is an 18-hole members course developed by DHC Bradford Ltd.

• Deutsche Golf Consult is designing four new courses and adding nine holes at two other 18-hole facilities — all of which it reportedly expects will open this year. The new tracks are the nine-hole Golf Club Michaelsberg in Cleebrom, 18-hole Golf Club Wutzschleife in Hillistett and Golf Club Noitzscher-Höhe in Leipzig, and the 27-hole Golf Club Gleidingen in Laatzen/Hanover. The nine-hole additions are at Golf Club Heilbronn-Hohenlohe in Heilbronn and Golf Club Göggingerhof in Donauwörth.

• European Golf Design, a joint venture design company of the PGA European Tour and International Management Group, is planning three separate 18-hole courses in association with Golf Projekt Management GmbH in the Frankfurt area, as well as a 72-hole project near Berlin, with teaching academy and practice holes. The Berlin project will be developed in conjunction with three hotels and 500 houses and apartments.

• von Hagge Design has a contract with a group of people to design a course in Frankfurt. The group has found a new property for the project, following a public outcry against the original site.

Phillips described RTJ II's South Course as "a great golf course — a home run all the way around."

Golf und Country Club Seddiner See has housing, but it's only adjacent to three of the 36 holes.

And designers were allowed the latitude to be able to create some lakes and streams that take on a natural look," Phillips said. "It was a flat site and we sculpted the dirt into nice flowing lines that blend into the surroundings."

The RTJ II project in Frankfurt, called Golfpark Romerbrunnen, has opened a practice facility but is awaiting funding for the rest of the course, Phillips said. The developer, Hu.M, Golfplatz Grundstücks- u.Berwaltungs-GmbH, will sell some form of memberships, "as they all do here," he said. Eighteen holes, it will play to a par 72 over 6,400 meters.

The doubling of golfers over the last seven years bodes well for these and other developments under consideration.

"Germany," said European Golf Design's Slessor, "is where France was 10 years ago in terms of the explosion in golf interest. But while projects dried up quickly in France, I don't think that will happen in Germany. There was never a solid base of players in France. People started playing, but their interest died off. It was really a fad.

"In Germany you have a solid base of players. You may be able to afford the $5,000, $10,000, or $20,000 fee to join a course. But they won't let you play until you can pass a written and playing test and get your playing license."

While German consolidation

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Lakeland, Fla. — Steve Smyers has been named Architect of the Year for 1996 by iGOLF, an internet online golf site. This second annual award was given to recognize golf's most outstanding golf course architect of the year.

At 43, Smyers follows 1995 recipient Rees Jones.

"It's become clear," said Brad Klein, architectural writer for iGOLF, "that Smyers is skilled at translating classical design themes into a modern idiom in a way that allows daily-fee golfers as well as private club members a chance to experience traditional shot-making. He's technically high-level skilled and has seen an awful lot of the old courses — and that shows."

Klein cites three Smyers designs that have received "the kind of notice that assures Smyers will be a force to be reckoned with as a champion of traditionalist golf design" — Wolf Run in Indianapolis, Southern Dunes outside Orlando, Fl., and Chart Hills in Kent, England, which was recognized recently by Following the Fairways as the No.1 inland course in the British Isles — ahead of such famed courses as Sunningdale, Wentworth and Gleneagles' King and Monarch courses.

Recently, Smyers was also honored with an environmental design excellence award for his work on an 18-hole Tampa, Fl., project for the founders of Outback Steakhouse. The award presented by the Southwest Florida Water Management District is given for resource regulation, design excellence and superior cooperation and innovation demonstrated during the permitting of the Tampa project currently under construction.

Smyers' design on the Tampa site minimized the acreage of turf grasses requiring intense maintenance and thus required a decreased water supply. Instead, native grasses are used which not only require less maintenance, but also provide wildlife corridors and habitat areas while bringing contrast, definition and strategy to the golf holes.

"This type of positive and innovative approach to economic development and water resource management," said Deputy Executive Director Richard McLean, "represents a model for public and private interaction and can yield results that are beneficial to all concerned."

Flint, Mich., signs up Childs

Sylvan Lake, Mich. — The city of Flint has awarded Don Childs Associates the contract for master planning and design services for its four municipal golf courses.

This relationship is designed to address improvements in playability, enhancement of maintenance procedures and overall course maintainability, liability concerns from current design standards, and improved shot values and the quality of the golfing experience.

Germany

Continued from previous page hasn't helped the economy and "fewer speculative projects have gotten off the ground lately," Slessor said, "solid projects with good studies can find financing."

And Robinson added that although the environmental movement remains powerful, "Like in the States, they are coming to grips with the fact golf is not all bad."

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