Openings top 400 mark
Promising project pipeline makes '97 slowdown unlikely

By HAL PHILLIPS

File this one under "Business cycle be damned."

The golf course industry witnessed the arrival of another 442 facilities during 1996, fending off the downswing predicted by optimists and skeptics alike. Openings have climbed a steady parabola since 1990. Despite a slight decline from the record 1995 figure of 468 openings, observers view last year's formidable production with a combination of glee and disbelief. "I continue to be amazed by the boom in new course construction," said Lan- sing, Mich.-based architect Jerry Matthews. "I suppose I say that because I've been in this business for 30 years. It goes in cycles, as other businesses do. History tells us there is going to be a downswing; it's just a question of when."

Not any time soon, it would appear. According to the National Golf Foundation (NGF), more than 800 projects are in the construction phase, meaning any downswing almost certainly will not take

Alternative spikes gain acceptance

By MARK LESLIE

NORTH BARRINGTON, Ill. — In April 1994 when Wynstone Golf Club here banned metal-spiked golf shoes, superintendents nation-wide held their breath, anticipating what reaction from golfers. Three years later, and 45 years after the United States Golf Association (USGA) first called on golfers to forsake their metal spikes for more turf-friendly footwear, the revolution is on. "The latest estimate I've heard is that 1,500 courses have switched to alternative spikes of one sort or another," said USGA Green Section National Director Jim Snow. "I think it's certainly a very popular trend that will have a big impact."

Snow pointed out that in new course construction, according to Lan- sing, Mich.-based architect Jerry Matthews. "I suppose I say that because I've been in this business for 30 years. It goes in cycles, as other businesses do. History tells us there is going to be a downswing; it's just a question of when."

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Ski managers: Golf key to year-round revenues

By PETER BLAIS

Skiing provides the monetary speed, but golf helps smooth out the financial bumps for American Skiing Co. (ASC), a major Northern New England ski operator that is fast becoming one of the region's major golf course owners and operators.

Although it represents just 10 percent of ASC's total revenues, golf helps even out the company's cash flow throughout the year, according to ASC Chief Financial Officer Tom Richardson.

"Golf has been very important at Sugarloaf [USA]," noted Peter Webber, the Carrabassett Valley, Maine, resort's golf director and a member of the commit-tee that coordinates ASC's four golf course operations. "The additional cash flow helps us through the summer. It lets us employ some of our best people on a year-round basis. It keeps the hotel rooms occupied and pulls in other summer business." ASC operates eight ski areas — Sun- day River and Sugarloaf/USA in Maine; Attitash Bear Peak in New Hampshire;