

By MARK LESLIE

It is getting easier to procure financing for golf course projects, but the permitting process is generally longer, according to a survey of golf course architects in the United States.

In a *Golf Course News* poll of architects, more than nine out of 10 also said more environmental planning is being done before permits are sought.

Sixty-two percent of those surveyed said financing is found more easily today than in the past. Brian Curley, in fact,

## Survey: Permitting more involved, say architects

responded: "Absolutely!" But 32 percent of the respondents disagreed, saying it is not easier to obtain, and 2 percent felt the situation is unchanged.

Sam Sakocius, president of golf course builder Sajo Construction, said, "It seems there are more sources for financing but those sources are more restrictive."

A full 92.5 percent of those responding said more environmental planning is be-

ing done before the permitting process begins. But despite this advance work, 64 percent reported that it is taking developers longer to get projects approved. Only 13 percent said permitting is being completed more quickly than in the past.

Roger Rulewicz of the Golf Group in Bernardston, Mass., who has courses under construction or in planning in six states, balanced the two opinions, saying

the permitting process is "shorter but with more litigation."

Gary Linn of Robert Trent Jones II International in Palo Alto, Calif., credited reports and studies that are mandated by regulations with lengthening the process.

John Sanford of Jupiter, Fla., spoke for some who said the answer to the question depends entirely on the site and state.

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## New take on the golf/real estate combo

By MARK LESLIE

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — Mixing two everyday ideas, a pitch-and-putt golf course and multi-family apartment community, a small golf course operator here feels he has a prize possession — one that should "go national."

"I'm excited about the potential it has for the golf business," said Del Ratcliffe of his concept. "If we have a number of these all over the country, we'll attract a lot of people who have never picked up a club to play on them. It's simple, inexpensive and a great way to learn the game."

Ratcliffe Golf Services opened its Paradise Valley Par-3 here in November in conjunction with a 300-unit apartment complex built by Summit Properties, a local developer.

The has already proven extremely successful, said Ratcliffe, who also operates the 18-hole Sunset Hills and a practice range in the area. "We certainly feel it can be done on a very profitable basis."

Call it "a poor man's country club," he said.

While Paradise Valley and the Summit Green apartment community are under separate ownership, Ratcliffe said: "The ideal situation is to have a fully integrated project, with a single owner, where the par-3 becomes a simple amenity to the project. We want to fully integrate the concept to go to the semi-private golf community where you gain golf privileges when you become a tenant in the apartments."

"The concept is so good," he said, that it should be incorporated in developments around the country. "The golf course benefits from having a lot of people next door to it. The apartments can charge a higher rental and have a much more marketable product than the guy down the street. Most apartment complexes are updated with the better stoves or refrigerators — bells and whistles in the apartment. But the [competition] down the street can't refurbish

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**RATCLIFFE ON LINE**

To learn more about Ratcliffe Golf Services' Paradise Valley Par-3 and Sunset Hills Public Golf Course, people can visit their web sites: <http://www.paradisegolf.com> and <http://www.sunsethills.com>

**Paradise Valley**

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his apartments to compete with your golf course."

Developers could also take advantage of the green space requirements that many communities have, since a par-3, or chip-and-putt layout needs very little land.

Paradise Valley Par-3, with an average-length hole of 70 yards, is situated on 15 acres — 13 for the course and two for the clubhouse, parking lot and miniature golf course.

The Summit Green apartments sit on about 20 acres. They are already about 90 percent full, Ratcliffe said, and a lot of those apartment-dwellers are using the Paradise Valley facilities. "Many are non-golfers," he said, "but the project appealed to them because they wanted the aesthetics of living on a golf course. Roughly 60 percent of the units front on the course."

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Part of Ratcliffe Golf Services' marketing objective is to target the approximately 85 to 90 percent of the population who are not active golfers.

Citing the "intimidation factor" of learning golf on a regulation course, he said his firm has positioned itself to get beginners into the game.

"There is a lack of facilities to

bridge the 'learning gap' between the local driving range and the full-scale, 18-hole golf course," Ratcliffe said. "I believe we have hit upon a means to not only provide such facilities, but make them profit centers in themselves.

"To bridge the gap between banging balls at a range and being a knowledgeable, accomplished golfer, there is no other way but the par-3 golf course. We have a driving range with a discount shop. We can provide them with equipment and range time, graduate them to the par-3 to learn techniques and etiquette, then graduate them to an 18-hole facility — our Sunset Hills Public Golf Course.

Ratcliffe hopes to take the idea to other areas. "I want to go in and be involved in the design," he said. "We have the experience now of having done it. The potential for my company is as a developer and builder and then offering management services on a contract basis."

The cost? Paradise Valley Par-3 cost \$600,000 to build — although Ratcliffe said he would typically want to budget \$800,000 to \$1 million — and the accompanying apartments cost approximately \$18 million, he said.

The course was the first design by local architect and land planner Ken Andrews, an avid golfer.



Of the 268 acres at the Palmer-designed Lost Key GC in Perdido Key, Fla., more than 100 were left in their natural state.

**Palmer unveils two Fla. tracks: Legacy & Lost Key**

SARASOTA, Fla. — Arnold Palmer dedicated his newest Florida golf course, The Legacy at Lakewood Ranch, here in March. The 7,000-yard daily-fee course, designed by Palmer Course Design Company, is a hallmark of "environmental enhancement."

Accompanied by his partner, Ed Seay, and Vicki Martz, project architect on The Legacy, Palmer reviewed the course in March and conducted a golf clinic on the practice range.

Meanwhile, across the Gulf of Mexico on the barrier island of Perdido Key near Pensacola, the Palmer-designed Lost Key Golf Club has

opened for play. It will be managed by Western Golf Properties of Scottsdale, Ariz. Lost Key is an 18-hole daily-fee course within the new community of Lost Key on Perdido Key. Of the 268 acres allocated for the course, 100 have been designated wetlands and been left in their natural state. This commitment has earned the club designation as an Audubon Sanctuary Course.

Western Golf appointed two of its staff from the Falcon's Fire Golf Club in Kissimmee, Fla., to lead Lost Key. Shane Trice is the new director of golf, while Scott Scamehorn is head golf course superintendent.

**Ault Clark, ClubCorp team in Northern Virginia**

By MARK LESLIE

LEESBURG, Va. — Loudoun County's population is exploding, and ClubCorp of America is taking advantage of the situation, using a prime property edging the Potomac River.

The 18-hole River Creek Golf on the Potomac, designed by

Ault Clark and Associates of Kensington, Md., "will be spectacular," said Tom Clark.

Battling the wettest year in history in 1996, Wadsworth Golf Construction Co. expects to complete its work by June 1 and have the course ready to open in September.

Responding to a continued population growth in Loudoun County, golf course developers have brought in Tom Fazio, Jack Nicklaus and Arnold Palmer to design other courses in the area.

The all-bentgrass River Creek will feature five holes along the Potomac, Clark said. Years ago, he said, the river scoured the area and "we have 70-foot-high cliffs" on the site.

Meanwhile, Goose Creek runs perpendicular to the Potomac and through two holes. Elevation change on the layout is dramatic. From the flood plain to the highest point is well over 100 feet, Clark explained.

"The rest of the holes meander over open areas and we let them take on a links look for the first few years until homes are built," he said. "It's a 900-acre property, so homes won't bother the course."

The track will play from 5,100 to more than 7,000 yards on four sets of tees.

ClubCorp bought then-River Creek Golf and Country Club from project developer River Creek L.L.C., an entity owned by the Abramson family and Marcus W. Montgomery.

The project will encompass a gate-guarded community, four tennis courts, a six-lane lap pool, toddler pool and clubhouse.

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