Stormwater runoff battle rages on in Fla.

By J. BARRY MOTHERS
SARASOTA, Fla. — A group of 27 Sarasota golf courses continues to battle the Sarasota County government over stormwater runoff assessment bills that have cost some courses as much as $46,000 per year and in some cases seriously threatened their survival.

The courses, organized as the Suncoast Golf Course Association, say the rates are far too high and unfair when compared to lower rates assessed to other agricultural-related operations in the counties like farms, nurseries and pastures. The group has filed two lawsuits over the stormwater assessment issue which are still pending. One challenges the level of the assessment rate. The other seeks a rebate for what the golf courses contend is excess money they have paid in assessment rates for the past two years.

Stormwater runoff assessments became a hot issue for the Sarasota-area courses starting in 1995 when turf areas became subject to assessments. Prior to that, the courses paid assessments that related only to parking lots and other non-turf areas. The new rates, approved by the county's Board of County Commissioners, became effective Jan. 1, 1995. The courses began paying higher assessments that same month.

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Safety programs too often overlooked in planning

By MARK LESLIE
NEW YORK — A backhoe cracks into a natural gas line and — boom — the town of North Blenheim virtually blows up. A piece of heavy equipment cuts an underground electrical main, shutting down New Jersey's Newark Airport for a day. In cases around the country, laborers are struck by heavy equipment, caught in trench cave-ins, bedridden by Lyme disease contracted from a deer tick on a forested job site.

The "heavy-highway" industry, where these

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TPC ON THE RISE

The Tournament Players Club (TPC) at Scottsdale (Ariz.) above is among the growing stable of Tournament Players Club courses operated by the PGA Tour. See story on new TPC, pg. 23

TCM looks toward '99

By M. LEVANS
BLOOMINGTON, Minn. — The TPC Co. and Pinehurst Resort and Country Club, in cooperation with Pinehurst Championship Management, have inked a multi-year agreement that makes TPC the preferred golf course maintenance equipment and irrigation supplier for the Resorts for Pinehurst in North Carolina.

Under the new agreement, TPC will provide

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Cart-path rule gets its day in court

By ROB SPIWAK
A n incident at Lassing Pointe Golf Course in northern Kentucky may have far reaching implications for the future of "The Cart-Path Rule" around the country. Involving a handicapped golfer, the situation was resolved in October after a year and a half of controversy.

Don Duckworth of Covington, Ky., had a heart attack in 1993. He was not expected to live. Two years later, he had open-heart surgery twice and survived. His doctor told him
Commissioners, were created in part to help pay the costs of capital improvements to the county's stormwater system. But many courses began receiving annual stormwater bills that increased anywhere from seven to 20 times. Foxfire Golf Club, a privately-owned 27-hole daily-fee facility, paid $5,466 in assessments in 1993 but saw its bill jump to $37,840 in 1995. Municipal golf courses are exempt from the assessments.

The Suncoast Golf Courses Association recently won a concession from the county in the ongoing struggle. The county agreed to reduce the annual assessment rate for 1997-98 from .148 to .037, a 75 percent reduction that will mean a combined $250,000 reduction in the amount paid by the courses. But Linda Talbot, vice-president and manager of the Foxfire Golf Club and president of the Suncoast Golf Courses Association, said the .037 rate is still too high. The association would like to see the rate go down to at least .0257, a difference that represents thousands of dollars.

"It's still a slap in the face as far as I'm concerned," said Talbot. "It's outrageous. The figures they are getting are so out of whack compared with what agriculture is paying. They're paying 10 percent less than we are. We still have to continue the fight. We're odd farmers in the purest sense of the word... We're being penalized because we allow people to play on the surface we cultivate."

Talbot said the county's assessment rate, even the recently reduced one, is "not based on scientific facts... it was a politically expedient thing for them to do to send off the litigation..." She also criticized some of the standards used by the county to develop the rate level for golf courses. She said cart paths are factored in, for example, as if they were large-scale parking lots. In developing its original rate, the county also stated that it assumed golf courses irrigated at least 3.5 inches a week and that agricultural concerns did not irrigate, both of which proved to be untrue. J. P. Marchand, the deputy director of transportation for Sarasota County who oversees the county's golf courses, said cart paths are designed to irrigate, both of which are not based on scientific facts. Talbot said even though her group's legal costs are rising, they will continue to fight the county, and if necessary, help golf course owners in other counties.

In Florida, except for certain charter counties, non-ad valorem assessments like the stormwater runoff one may be made by the county without a public vote, which is what happened in Sarasota. The concern of golf courses across the state is that Sarasota County's treatment of privately-owned golf courses could become a pattern in other counties. Talbot said she believes the group's legal costs are rising, they will continue to fight the county, and if necessary, help golf course owners in other counties. Don Hemke, an attorney with the firm of Carlton McKee, said the group's legal costs are rising, they will continue to fight the county, and if necessary, help golf course owners in other counties. Don Hemke, an attorney with the firm of Carlton McKee, said the group's legal costs are rising, they will continue to fight the county, and if necessary, help golf course owners in other counties.