COLORADO GOLF BOOM KEEPS ON TICKING

By ALLEN BEST

In 1992 Fred Green wanted to build a membership-driven golf course about 15 miles west of Vail, Colo., the nation's largest ski area. As a hedge, he drafted plans to first excavate the rich gravel deposits.

Green started selling memberships at $50,000, quickly upped it to $80,000 and, soon, greens overlaid the gravel. The membership roster is full at 250, with invitation-only membership fees now believed to cost well in excess of $100,000.

Presence of a railroad track bisecting the course never hampered sales. There is no associated housing or hotel.

That course, Eagle Springs, is among the most startling success stories in a valley exploding with golf courses. Five courses were built in the first 30 years after the Vail Ski Area opened in 1962. Five more (including a short course) have opened in just the last four years. But at least 10 others are planned, or double the number already built, in this valley of 30,000 people where it has snowed twice on the Fourth of July during the 1990s.

A parallel boom is occurring nearby in the 42-mile-long Roaring Fork Valley, home to the Aspen and Snowmass ski areas. The first two courses opened in the 1970s, and weren't followed until the Maroon Creek Club opened in 1994; memberships cost $150,000. Today's 117 holes of golf in that valley could grow to 176 by the next millennium.

Summit County, another enclave of ski resorts along the Interstate 70 corridor, has three courses that will be supplemented by two and possibly more. Elevation there is 8,000 to 9,000 feet, frosty in all months save for July.

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WHISTLING STRAITS EVEN STUNS DYE

KOHLER, Wis. - "In my lifetime I've never seen anything like this. Anyplace. Period." Speaking "with some degree of modesty," architect Pete Dye was describing his Whistling Straits, a links-type course on the shores of Lake Michigan which opened for public play on July 7.

Stretching along two miles of Great Lakes shoreline, the 18-hole facility pays homage to the origins of golf by stressing that it is a walking course only and will have caddies. The PGA of America has already selected Whistling Straits as host site for the 1999 Club Pro Championship, a national title tournament.

Whistling Straits is the latest addition to the resort complex owned by Kohler Co. and centered in the Village of Kohler that already includes Dye's Blackwolf Run, and the AAA Five Diamond resort hotel The American Club. Blackwolf Run hosted the U.S. Women's Open Championship in July.

Offering a view of the Great Lake from each of its 18 holes, Whistling Straits has fescue fairways and massive sand bunkers. It weaves 14 holes in nearly uninterrupted sequence along the two miles of lakeshore. Eight holes hug the shoreline where the Straits Course plays from just above beach level, then rises nearly 80 feet to bluffs and elevated berms that provide panoramic views of the watery horizon.

The par-72 Straits Course plays to 7,288 yards from the championship tees. Each hole has five tee placements. Occupying a 560-acre site, Whistling Straits will eventually offer two 18-hole courses.

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Golf Course News: Now that you've scaled back the group office in Singapore, where do you see your position in the Asian market?

Gary Player: "We're still very positive about Singapore. It's a very important part of our presence in Asia. As things come back to normal there's no doubt that we'll return in full force. I continue to make my visits and I refuse to disregard the market just because they're having a few problems. As far as the market stands now, we still have projects going and we're optimistic. But that's life, isn't it, trials and errors."

GCN: How will the Asian golf market get back on its feet?

GP: I think public golf for every market, not just Asia, is going to be key. A man like Tiger Woods has had a great influence. It's so terribly important that a young man like Tiger, who's in such an important role, visit Asia as well as South Africa and other re-