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 nor 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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Cordillera Resort outside Vail.

Player: Keeping busy in Asia & busier in U.S.

JOHANNESBURG, South Africa — After scaling back his group office in Singapore as a result of the economic downturn, Gary Player remains bullish on Asia as well as the growth of the public golf market around the world. GCN recently caught up with the living legend to discuss the Asian situation and the current project in his own backyard.

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?

Gary Player: "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...

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Ault, Clark & others aid Arkansas' first First Tee-endorsed project

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. — The state's first First Tee facility is drawing support from the likes of public officials like Gov. Mike Huckabee and donated help from such golf industry firms as architects Ault, Clark & Associates.

"We feel it is our obligation to the sport for our firm to support this important program that allows all children and beginners the opportunity to learn the great game of golf," said Tom Clark of Ault, Clark. Working with First Tee Executive Director Tod Leiweke, Park Director Bill Bunten and city officials, Ault, Clark has completed a master plan. Construction is planned to start early fall, with opening in late winter or the spring of 1999. Huckabee said of the project: "It not only creates additional recreational opportunities for our youth, but it will do so through a sport that instills honesty, integrity and character."

The existing nine-hole Rock Creek Golf Course will be the site for the renovation project. Plans call for a sheltered 60-station practice range; three practice holes that will play through woodlands including a par-3, -4, and -5; one-half-acre multi-tiered putting course; and chipping complex that includes subtle mounding and multiple sand and grass bunkers as well as a 10,000-square-foot bentgrass putting green.

Whistling Straits raises $500K for The First Tee

KOHLER, Wis. (AP) — Former President George Bush said The First Tee program will teach young people valuable lessons in life as well as how to play golf. "The First Tee program has to do with life," Bush said before teeing off in a fund-raiser to open Whistling Straits, a new Pete Dye-designed course near Kohler. "By giving a kid a shot at the American dream, it has to do with what sports means in a person's makeup. It has a lot to do with the real business of living. It's about giving some kid a shot not just at playing this marvelous game of golf that we all love, but to give them a shot at the true meaning of life. And I mean that seriously."

The First Tee was started last year by the World Golf Foundation to create new facilities and programs to make golf more affordable and accessible for youths. Foursomes paid $30,000 to play July 6 in the grand opening of the new course, raising $500,000 for First Tee in Wisconsin. Whistling Straits

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the Straits Course in the year 2000 will be another Dye design to be called the Creeks Course. Adding another authentic touch to the Straits golf experience, a flock of Scottish black face sheep is planned to wander the property.

Construction of Whistling Straits began in 1995 after Kohler Co. completed a complicated land acquisition from Wisconsin Electric Power Co. (WEPCO), which had held the property for many years as a potential nuclear power plant location. During the 1950s, the site was operated by the U.S. Army as an anti-aircraft training facility, Camp Haven.

Kohler Co. invested considerable initial resources in the environmental clean-up of waste left behind by the abandoned military base, as well as years of phantom illegal dumping on the site.