

Casino Beach vies for 1st Tee support

By MICHAEL LEVANS

FORT WORTH, Texas — Steve Champion is getting ready to squeeze an 18-hole grass-surface putting course, a nine-hole pitch-and-putt and a nine-hole executive layout on 54 acres. And if there's any room left, he'd like to build a six-hole whiffle-ball golf course.

Imagine this ambitious project with routing by Michael Hurdzan, a solid junior-golf program and an aggressive business plan, and you just might have a perfectly accessible — and sustainable — golf facility.

That's Champion's plan for Casino Beach Golf Inc. He needs

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First Tee puts Belle Isle back in play

By MATTHEW PHILLIPS

DETROIT — For minorities, the game of golf has historically been an island difficult to reach, so it is fitting that Detroit's Belle Isle Golf Course, Detroit's first public golf course, has been selected as one of the

initial sites to receive funding from The First Tee (see related story).

Sponsored here in concert by the PGA Tour and the Tiger Woods Foundation, and underwritten in part by Ford Motor Co.'s Land Services Corp., the First Tee program

at Belle Isle Golf Club will encompass renovations to the 1,881-yard, nine-hole course as well as provide youth teaching facilities and a related instructional program. Ford has committed dollars to help with the course renovations, but the lion's share of the program's funding is still to be sought.

Rick Smith, teaching pro turned golf course designer, and his company Rick Smith Golf Course Design, will carry out the various Belle Isle course renovations, which will include the addition of a nine-hole pitch-and-putt course, a practice green and a chipping area.

In addition, Smith will develop the curriculum for the youth program which will encompass several facets of golf, including practical instruction, etiquette and actual play.

Belle Isle Park Superintendent Marchel McGehee, who oversees the 980-acre Belle Isle recreational island, sees The First Tee program as "a wonderful opportunity to put minorities and underprivileged youth in touch with a game that has for many years eluded them."

Since announcement of the program in November, McGehee has received several inquiries from interested parties including one from a local school for the deaf. He is anxious to see the momentum continue and looks forward to a program tee off of June 1, 1998.

"We hope to see about 200-300 kids participate the first year," said McGehee.

Refurbishment of the driving range and development of the instructional program will take top priority in order to kick off the program in a timely manner. Next fall, work is planned to begin on the training center, practice green and the nine-hole pitch-and-putt course, "where kids can take what they have learned and apply it first hand," said McGehee.

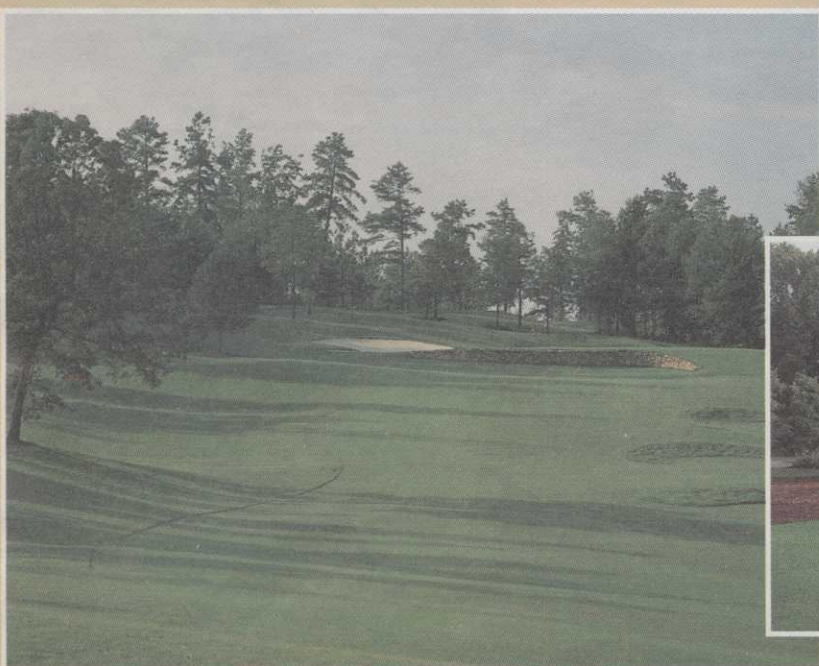
McGehee hopes to have all course renovations complete by 2000.

On McGehee's renovation wish list would be getting the course's lights back in operation for the first time in more than 20 years.

According to McGehee, this would lengthen the playing window for the kids as well as allow the recreation department to generate more course revenue for the program.

The Belle Isle Golf Club opened its doors in 1923.

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