Casper appoints Mauragas

VIENNA, Va. — Billy Casper Golf Management, Inc. appointed Robert Mauragas to the position of Regional Golf Operations Manager, a capacity in which he will direct the implementation of myriad programs for several Mid-Atlantic region golf properties under the company’s operation. Mauragas will work with on-site, golf course personnel in managing projects related to golf operations, customer service, capital improvements, turf management, equipment/supplies, MIS, financial and activities reporting, training food and beverage, and merchandising.

Since 1988, Mauragas, a PGA member, was head golf professional at Fiddler’s Elbow Country Club, an exclusive 54-hole private facility in Far Hills, N.J. He also participated in Fiddler’s Elbow’s development and construction of 18 new holes designed by Rees Jones.

Cobblestone acquires two new properties

DEL MAR, Calif. — Cobblestone Golf Group, Inc., the Del Mar-based golf course ownership and operating company recently acquired by Meditrust, has purchased Sabal Point Country Club in Longwood, Fla., near Orlando and The Champion’s Club of Apalachee Farms near Atlanta.

Sabal Point is an 18-hole semi-private club. The purchase from American Skiing Company, which operates numerous ski resorts and affiliated golf courses throughout the country, represents Cobblestone’s third acquisition in Florida.

The Champion’s Club of Apalachee Farms is also an 18-hole semi-private club. It was purchased from Fairway Properties, L.P. and is Cobblestone’s second holding in the Atlanta area.

The two acquisitions expand Cobblestone’s portfolio to 27 golf properties in six states.

“We are very excited about the purchase of both Sabal Point Country Club and The Champion’s Club of Apalachee Farms and expanding our portfolio of golf courses in the Southeast Region,” said Cobblestone President Bob Housand.

In January, Cobblestone Holdings, Inc., parent of Cobblestone Golf Group, Inc., reached an agreement to be acquired by Meditrust Companies. Meditrust is a paired shared real estate investment trust and among the nation’s largest health-care providers.

ClubLink makes major move into Canadian daily-fee course market

KING CITY, Ontario, Canada — ClubLink Corporation has acquired 10 public courses and 450 neighboring acres of developable land in the Greater Toronto Area. The new facilities nearly double ClubLink’s holdings to 22 courses and substantially increase the course operator’s presence in Canada’s daily-fee market.

The acquisitions totaled $45 million, which will be paid from existing cash, debt and $3.5 million in ClubLink shares, noted Bruce Simmonds, president and chief executive officer of ClubLink.

The new ClubLink properties include:

• Blue Springs Golf Club (27 holes) located near ClubLink’s existing Greystone Golf Club and RattleSnake Point Golf Club on Toronto’s west side. Strategically it is important to us because the west end is an explosive growth area,” Simmonds said. “Presently that market is underserved by high-end, daily-fee courses. ClubLink is also building an upscale, 45-hole facility in [nearby] Oakville called RattleSnake Point that will open in early 1999. We’re now far and away the dominant player in western Toronto with 120 holes once RattleSnake opens.”

• Georgetown Golf Club (18 holes) and Bolton Golf Club (27 holes) are also

Assumption of risk still a dicey issue

By Edward Everett Vaill

For years, participants in potentially dangerous sporting activities accepted that their pastimes were protected by the legal doctrine of “assumption of risk,” which held that if the participant knowingly or implicitly assumed the risk and was injured, there was no liability. That isn’t entirely true anymore. In the wake of some of California’s recent legal rulings, it is apparent that assumption of risk is a complex legal area in which the stakes for potential liability to sports operators can be very high. The point is, the provider is never automatically absolved of responsibility in participant injuries.

Two interesting California cases demonstrate the gamut of interpretations of this law and serve to reinforce the need for recreational operators to identify and prevent safety problems, and for participants to use common sense. In some instances that isn’t enough, and the issue of fault must be decided in the courts, often at a daunting cost to defendant and plaintiff.

In one troubling 1995 lawsuit, the plaintiff was hit on the head by a golf ball and sued the golf course operator for negligence. A frequent golfer on this particular course, the plaintiff claimed he was injured near the 5th tee, because the operator had removed a diseased pine tree that had protected the plaintiff in the past from balls flying from the 4th tee. The appellate
ClubLink
Continued from page 61

near Greystone and RattleSnake Point. The same family owned the two courses for the past 25 years. Georgetown has an additional 125 acres that could be developed into housing, more golf holes or both.

• Gormley Green Golf Club (36 holes) and Rolling Hills Golf Club (54 holes) are located near ClubLink's Emerald Hills Golf Club and DiamondBack Golf Club. Situated on 650 acres, Simmonds said the combined Gormley Green and Rolling Hills facilities represent the largest golf operation on one piece of land in Canada. ClubLink plans upgrades to at least two of the courses within the next 10 years.

ClubLink, in partnership with GolfSouth, operates another 24 courses in the Southeast and Midwest United States. "All in all, the political and financial prospects, so we're not too inclined to go elsewhere until we've built a bigger base here."

ClubLink operates private, daily-fee and resort facilities. Over the next five years in Ontario, Simmonds said, the company would like to expand its 10 private facilities to somewhere around 20; its 12 daily-fee operations to roughly 30; and its two resort properties to five. "All together, we'll be looking at 50 to 60 golf courses in Ontario in the next five years," he predicted.

As for other areas of the country the company may consider, ClubLink's president said: "The areas we'd look at would have a strong corporate community. That's our target market, especially on the private side. Golf is exploding in Canada as a means of corporate entertaining and charitable fundraising. We're tapping into the strength of that market."

"Montreal and Calgary are probably the next areas we'd consider," the ClubLink executive said. "Vancouver is a bit of a funny market. It's had an overheated real-estate market for some time. And, frankly, we don't like the politics of British Columbia at the moment. They have a socialist government and they are also somewhat susceptible to the problems of Asia because of the influence of Asia on their economy."

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