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 Husbands.

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 companies. Meditrust was formed in 1995 to offer ownership in a diversified portfolio of real estate assets, including medical facilities, office buildings, and retail spaces.

Cobblestone Golf Group, Inc., is a Del Mar-based golf course ownership and operating company that owns and operates 27 golf properties in six states.

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ClubLink makes major move into Canadian daily-fee course market

By PETER BLAIS

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 $43 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 undeserved 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

Fuller seized opportunities, made his own

By PETER BLAIS

W illiam “Billy” Fuller, 48, has what many superintendents would consider a dream job.

“You don’t sit back and plan every activity that happens in your career,” Fuller said. “Some of those things just evolve. Opportunities come up and I’ve been very fortunate in that regard.”

Fuller is senior agronomist/associate for Cupp Design, making him responsible for meshing agronomic technology with the golf course architectural firm’s design and construction programs.

His involvement begins with the first day of planning a new course, and includes such items as qualifying turf selections, evaluating equipment

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Billy Fuller
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requirements, designing irrigation systems, selecting qualified golf course superintendents, evaluating overall construction specifications, estimating construction costs, post-construction management and overseeing maintenance operations.

It's fascinating work, but not exactly what he had in mind as an undergraduate at North Carolina State University. After spending three years studying civil engineering at the Raleigh campus, Fuller changed gears and graduated in 1972 with an agronomic degree emphasizing turfgrass management.

"The economy sort of went sideways in the late 1960s," Fuller explained of his move from engineering to turfgrass. "Guys coming out of engineering classes in front of me were getting desk jobs as secretaries, practically."


Fuller became recognized as an expert on creeping bentgrass management in the Southeast. That expertise was in large part responsible for Augusta hiring him to oversee its conversion from Bermudagrass greens to bentgrass. Fuller was the head man at Augusta from 1981 through 1986.

"But his dream was to become part of a major design and development firm. Fuller met Bob Cupp in the late 1970s while they were working on Jack Nicklaus-designed Turtle Point at Kiawah and the two became close friends. Cupp left Nicklaus in 1985 to open his own firm. "During my time at Augusta, Bob and Jack worked with us on projects from a design point of view," Fuller recalled. "When Bob left Jack, he said, 'When my business gets large enough, I'm going to call you and offer you an opportunity to come in with me.'"

Fuller left Augusta in 1986 to accept Cupp's offer to become general manager at a project Cupp was designing, Port Armor in North Carolina. In addition to overseeing the entire Port Armor operation, the position also allowed Fuller time to start his own consulting business, working with designers on post-construction programs related to design and construction at other facilities.

Fuller incorporated himself as William R. Fuller Inc. and consulted on other projects for Cupp and Tom Fazio. Fuller's post-construction expertise involved those items that impact ongoing maintenance — i.e. maintenance facilities, equipment inventory, purchasing schedules, grow-in and course specifications as well as locating superintendents, establishing landscape programs, evaluating irrigation designs and grassing plans.

"The idea was to be an additional entity in the process to carry the owner forward with his program," Fuller said of his consulting business.

In August 1988, Cupp asked Fuller to join him full time. "The unique thing about our firm is that we take an owner from Day 1 through grow-in," Fuller explained. "Most design firms are pretty much done when the contractor demobilizes and the grass is on the ground. The architect usually goes away at that point and just comes back for the grand opening. He may have helped select a superintendent, but then it's up to the superintendent to see that the course grows in."

"But grow-in is not taught in the schools, nor is it something you can read about. It's more an experience thing, although maybe one day I'll write the book... I didn't sit in a classroom and figure any of this out. When I took my first job at Seabrook Island, for all I knew I was going to be there a long time."

But then the phone rang and the guy from Wildwood made an offer. Four years later, the phone rang and the opportunity came to go to a bigger situation [Palmetto Dunes] with different kinds of challenges. Kiawah Island was a chance to be part of a development where they built a new Nicklaus course.

"Design, construction and grow-in were always very intriguing. Every time I moved I was a part of those things. Even at Augusta, do you have any idea how much renovation goes on there every summer? I realized after awhile, that I really wanted to be involved with the design part of the business. Augusta came along and I put my consulting idea on the shelf for awhile. Then Bob came along and here was my chance to take it off again."

Asked about the possibility of superintendents moving into the design field, Fuller noted how few people actually make a living designing courses and the even smaller number of firms offering agronomic services.

"It's just not an easy deal to penetrate," Fuller said. "You may spend 25 years trying to get into a position where someone will give you that money [the millions of dollars required to build a course] and you may or may not have the opportunity... Then you look at the number of people who inherit the opportunity from Dad. You can evolve into the business, but it's tough."

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