

BRIEFS



GRANITE APPOINTS NIELSEN CEO

SCOTTSDALE, Ariz. — Gary Nielsen has joined Granite Golf Corp. as chief financial officer. Nielsen will oversee the finance and accounting departments along with information systems. Nielsen has worked the last two years as CFO of Best Western International in Phoenix. Nielsen has also held executive positions with Giant Industries, Inc., Del Webb Corporation and KPMG Peat, Marwick. He has an accounting degree from Arizona State University and holds an Arizona Certified Public Accountant Certificate.



Gary Nielsen

CASPER TAKES OVER DEL. LINKS

VIENNA, Va. — Billy Casper Golf Management, Inc. has been retained to provide professional turnkey management services to The Golf Park at Rehoboth Beach (Del.), which opened for public play in March featuring the mix of an 18-hole executive golf course, nine-hole pitch-and-putt layout, and expansive putting green. BCGM will perform day-to-day functions in the areas of clubhouse operations, turf management, marketing and public relations, food and beverage, merchandising, personnel hiring and training, and financial management.

SCRATCH OPENS HILTON HEAD LAYOUT

HILTON HEAD ISLAND, S.C.—Architect Bobby Weed recently unveiled his new, nine-hole design at Scratch Golf's Hilton Head National Golf Club, bringing the total number of holes to 27. The course is owned and operated by Scratch Golf Company. Based on Hilton Head, Scratch Golf is a golf course development and management company concentrating on the Southeast. With six daily-fee properties stretching along the Atlantic coast from Charleston, S.C. to Ft. Lauderdale, Fla., Scratch Golf owns and operates 135 holes of public golf.

GOTHAM ADDS N.C. FACILITY

MIAMI—Gotham Golf Partners expanded its portfolio by one additional golf course with the acquisition of Sapphire Mountain, a semi-private club in Cashiers, N.C. The latest addition gives GGP a total of 19 courses.

A course a year; that's all they're asking at Wilson

By PETER BLAIS

WHITE BEAR LAKE, Minn. — Wilson Golf Group (WGG) has acquired Turtleback Golf Course in Rice Lake, Wis., giving the White Bear Lake-based management firm seven golf facilities in the Upper Midwest.

Wilson plans to retain the current management staff at the destination resort including General Manager Scott Maanum and Superintendent Todd Severud.

"We're trying to acquire a course per year," said Greg Stang, WGG's director of acquisitions.

WGG courses include four in Minnesota and two in Colorado. The Minnesota facilities are Oak Glen and Applewood Hills in Stillwater, Gem Lake Hills in White Bear Lake and North Links in North Mankato. The Colorado tracks are 15 miles apart on the Western Slope — Adobe Creek in Fruita and Chipeta in Grand Junction. The company also owns a piece of land outside St. Paul that will see construction of course No. 8 within the next 18 months, Stang said.

With four Minnesota courses apiece, WGG, Continental Golf Group and American Golf Corp. are the largest course operators in that Upper Midwest state. "There are a couple others [management firms] that have started up that have one or two on hand," Stang said.

The company's founder, who Stang declined to identify, purchased Gem Lake 10 years ago. A couple years later, through some family contacts, he purchased some land in Colorado and built a course there. He acquired the remaining facilities over the past four years.

"A year ago we decided we needed a little different structure to go after this market," Stang said. "It started as a single owner with a single operation. He's given us the go-ahead to expand and take it where we'd like to."

Each WGG course has an individual management team and that team is free to target a specific market, Stang said. All the facilities are public and range in size from 27-hole



Turtleback Golf Course, Wilson' Golf Group's latest acquisition.

Oak Glen (where Stang is also general manager), to 18-hole regulation facilities at North Hills and Adobe Creek, to 18-hole executive tracks at Gem Hills, Applewood and Chipeta.

"Customer service is one of our major goals," Stang said. "We also want to put the right product out at the right price. We feel we give a very fair value for the price."

WGG is focusing expansion efforts on the Upper Midwest — Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa and Colorado.

"Most of Minnesota's market is around the Twin Cities," Stang said. "Courses within an hour's drive seem to be doing very well. We're getting close to saturation, but they continue to build golf courses. Brainerd is the other big area, about 1 1/2 hours north of the Twin Cities."

Stang said he isn't surprised by recent NGF figures showing declining participation rates among golfers. "You're getting to the point that courses that are well run and put out a good product will continue to increase [business]. Some that aren't up to snuff could take a step back."

"The whole key is defining your market. Here at Oak Glen, a lot of our business is corporate related. There aren't a lot of facilities here in the city that go after that market. We're as busy Monday through Thursday as we are Friday through Sunday. That's the key. You have to fill your soft times. That's where people may be seeing a dropoff, probably because of the number of new golf courses coming on board."

Family Golf buys SkateNation for \$29M

MELVILLE, N.Y. — Family Golf Centers Inc. said it agreed to buy ice rink operator SkateNation Inc. for \$29 million as it seeks to offset the seasonal nature of its core golf course business.

Family Golf Centers, which runs more than 110 golf and recreation centers in the United States and Canada, will acquire all of the capital stock of SkateNation for \$17 million in cash and \$12 million in debt. SkateNation, a unit of Toronto-based TrizecHahn Corp., owns or manages 23 ice rinks and recreation centers in 11 U.S. states. TrizecHahn is one of North America's largest real estate companies.

Family Golf, which has traditionally focused on golf courses, plans to buy and develop ice rinks and recreation centers to strengthen its year-round revenue.

The Eagle has landed: On Normandie

ST. LOUIS — Eagle Golf Properties, Inc., a golf course investment company, has signed a long-term lease for Normandie Golf Club, an 18-hole facility located in St. Louis. The course opened in 1901 and is reportedly the oldest course west of the Mississippi. The course will be managed by Eagle Golf Services, LLC.



ACQUISITIONS

Richard J. Stahlhuth, managing director of Eagle Golf Services, LLC, said, "significant improvements will be commenced immediately to facilitate the return of Normandie Golf Club to prominence in the golf community as one of the first-class courses in St. Louis."

Eagle Golf Services, LLC, currently manages Quail Creek Golf Club and Lakewood Golf Club in St. Louis, Cottonwood Golf Club in DeSoto, Mo., and The Cape Golf and Racquet Club in Wilmington, N.C.

Meadowbrook acquires Orlando facility

KISSIMMEE, Fla.—Meadowbrook Golf Group, Inc. has acquired Ekana Golf Club, an 18-hole, par-72 course in Oviedo, Fla., approximately 20 minutes from downtown Orlando. Ekana is an upscale semi-private club designed by architect Joe Lee. Ekana Golf Club is situated on the Econlockhatchee River and is an Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Member. The acquisition is part of Meadowbrook's plan of acquiring \$100 million of golf course properties.

Matrix adds two to its growing portfolio

CRANBURY, N.J.—Matrix Golf & Hospitality has two new acquisitions: Meadowbrook Country Club (CC) in Clayton, Ohio, and Woodlake CC in Lakewood, N.J.

Meadowbrook CC will celebrate its 75th anniversary this year. Acquisition of the club, 20 minutes from downtown Dayton, marks Matrix's entrance in the Miami Valley.

Meadowbrook is a regulation-length, 18-hole facility founded in 1924 when Nipper Campbell designed its first nine holes. The second nine was added in 1960. Matrix, which will lease and operate Meadowbrook, plans improvements to the golf course, and will promote increased membership sales and utilization of the banquet spaces at the clubhouse.

Woodlake was built in 1972 by architect Edward Lawrence Packard and offers a championship length of 6,800 yards with water coming into play on 14 holes. The club operates as a semi-private facility, although Matrix is planning a three-year transition to a fully private country club. Woodlake has a 35,000-square-foot clubhouse, driving range, putting green, swimming pool and four tennis courts.

Matrix is planning substantial renovations at the Woodlake clubhouse to modernize it and increase its appeal to the banquet market. Improvements will also be made to the golf course.