The state of Rhode Island owned this astounding.

A flower cross memorial marked the spot Rhode Island departments for surplus. Mauro gouged 26 acres and had despaired of having it kicked his heel into it and walked on. The abandoned gravel pit plunges 35 feet below adjacent property. It is perfect for Mauro's vision of a golf course that would be accessible to urban youngsters, with a short game. The idea for a short course was born in Summit, N.J., at Municipal Golf Course, a par-3 of less than a 1,000 yards that is used by young and senior golfers, women, golfers working on their short game. The property had several advantages, according to Mauro. It is close to the urban areas of Providence, and it is on the edge of an undisturbed section of Rhode Island on a beautiful river. The bike path of the city's Woonasquatucket River Greenway Project will come next to the property. "You have a $13-million government project, a beautiful bike path, that will come all the way from Providence right by our site, and go around Button Hole. It is the most unusual site for an inner-city golf course in America," Mauro said. Several details needed to be ironed out, but Mauro was astonished at the cooperation between the public and private sectors to begin the project. The state leased the Button Hole property at $1 a year. The owners of the adjacent property are leasing a corner of their land to Button Hole for $1 a year, provided the property remains as a golf course. Help has come from both in and out of the golf industry. The U.S. Golf Association kicked everything off with a $50,000 pledge, and then added another $50,000 from its Foundation Grants program. 'We have 25,000 kids within three miles of this place, and I think that the program will be astounding.' — Ed Mauro
DESIGN & DEVELOPMENT

Button Hole ‘Providential’
Continued from previous page

To kick things off, the USGA Foundation Grants program donated $50,000, and has since doubled that amount.

The design was created with the cooperation of two golf course architects, Ron Pritchard and P.B. Dye. “I knew Ron Pritchard from the restoration work he did on the club I belong to,” Mauro said. “He did the initial layout of the course, and I took this layout to the Dominican Republic, where I visit in the winter. Pete Dye is a friend of mine. I was staying at a home that was next door to the Dye’s home there, and I was hoping that Pete or Alice would be there. As it turned out, P.B. Dye [a son] was home, and I asked him to look over the plan. P.B. said that plan was good, but he had some ideas, and he reworked it, getting up at 5 in the morning so he could do the sketches and still catch a plane out. When I showed Ron the routing P.B. had done, he said it looked great and we went with the plan.” Mauro added that both golf course architects donated their time.

When Button Hole is completed, it will contain a nine-hole short course, with holes ranging from 73 to 187 yards in length. There will be a full-size driving range, an oversized putting green, clubhouse and a couple of ponds where there will be ice skating in the winter.

The site has been a challenge from the beginning, Mauro said. “There’s a big hill on one side of the pit, and underneath the hill was toxic waste, so we couldn’t grade down the hill as much as we wanted to do. We graded it as much as we could, and the contractor, Izzo Construction, brought in fill, since we had the hill on one side and the rest was flat as a pancake and we needed a lot of fill to go from zero feet to 20 feet over a stretch of 270 yards.”

In addition, Mauro said, some of the greens are in the buffer zone between the property and the Woonasquatucket River, and after a dry spell, the area had a monsoon, which dumped several inches of rainwater into the site.

The result? Dirt from the construction area ran into the nearby wetlands, and the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management halted work in the buffer zone until the situation could be corrected.

But as 1999 drew to a close, there had been progress. “We’ve sodded the nine holes,” Mauro said, “with the exception of the 1st tee area, which we aren’t sodding until we complete the adjacent clubhouse. We decided to sod, rather that seed the course because we had elected to sod the steep slope of the hill, and it looked so nice that we decided to sod the rest of the course. We had a tremendous cooperation from LIUNA [Laborers International Union of America], which not only pledged $25,000 toward the project, but also offered to provide any labor we needed to sod the course. As part of this pledge, members of LIUNA have begun to lay the sod.

“We have only seeded three greens, and the big putting green,” Mauro continued. “Some of these greens are in the buffer zone so it deterred us from completing the contouring of these greens, and in other cases, we ran out of time to seed the greens before winter came. However, some work will be done over the winter. We’ll be completing the driving range, shaping the practice area and building the target greens.” Mauro projected that the driving range will open in June, and with any luck, the course will be playable by August.

“Since we are continuing to sod the first of April, everything would have to happen right to make this date,” he said. “We aren’t going to push to get on the golf course if it means we jeopardize the condition of the course. We do anticipate that by the fall you’ll be able to play the course, but it will probably be too cold.”

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