



BRIEFS

BARBARON BUILDING TWO BY LAGREE

INVERNESS, Fla. — Barbaron Inc. has been selected to build two Florida golf courses designed by Terry LaGree. The first, Skyview Golf Club, in Citrus Hills, is a nine-hole addition to the existing nine completed by Barbaron in 1998. When finished, the full 18-hole championship course will boast some of the highest green elevations in the state. The second layout, Glen Lakes Golf Club, in Weeki Wachee, will be a new 18-hole championship course. Both projects are expected to be completed next spring.

PALMER OPENS 11TH N.C. LAYOUT

PONTE VEDRA BEACH, Fla. — Palmer Course Design Company, based here, has opened its 11th course in North Carolina and is working on number 12. Company president and CEO Arnold Palmer played nine holes at Brier Creek Country Club when it opened in late September. Brier Creek, developed by Toll Brothers Inc., is a luxury golf course community set on 140 acres along the Noose River Basin in Raleigh; it features spectacular woodlands and wetlands. The 18-hole, 6,945-yard, par-72 layout was designed by Kory Williams, an architect with the Palmer Group. "Brier Creek was designed with the classic, traditional golf courses in mind," he said. "Use the existing terrain and a good, fair but challenging round of golf will follow."

MATTHEWS & NELHIEBEL HIT CANADA

EAST LANSING, Mich. — Golf course architects Matthews & Nelhiebel are headed across the border to expand the semi-private Sutton Creek Golf and Country Club, in Essex, Ontario. Sutton Creek will be the first Canadian project for the firm, which has designed more than 25 courses in Michigan. "We're working on an 18-hole master plan for Sutton Creek that emphasizes strategy and visual impact," said Howard Nauboris, who is heading up the design work under the direction of Bruce Matthews, ASGCA. "The proposed bunkers will be larger and more numerous, adding challenge to the layout. We will be adding additional tee surfaces for flexibility of length and challenge for all skill levels."

Ex-pro Brad Bell opens third course at Coyote Moon

By DOUG SAUNDERS

TRUCKEE, Calif. — Coyote Moon Golf Course, which recently opened in this town in the High Sierras, is the third golf course designed by Brad Bell of Sacramento, Calif. The 18-hole layout is rare in this state as it is a stand-alone project, built strictly for golf, not to sell building lots.

Although the course is located on a ridge 200 feet above Route 80, the main east-west interstate, it feels like it's miles away from anywhere. The layout winds through piney forests and sweeps over valleys, ravines and lakes. The only sounds heard come from birds, the streams, and the wind through the woods.

Golfers are teased to play shots into greens protected by huge rock outcroppings, hit to pins 80 feet below over creeks, and nail drives over tantalizingly long lakes. Throughout the course the challenge of shaping shots to negotiate nature's purest challenges adds to the sheer pleasure of playing on such a unique piece of property.

SIX YEARS IN THE MAKING

It took more than six years and a firm commitment for Bell and his partner Chris



The par-3 13th hole at Coyote Moon in Truckee, Calif.

Steel to complete Coyote Moon.

Steele, whose true profession is high-rise construction, got into the golf course construction business in 1994. Commercial construction had slowed, and Steele — who is not a golfer — had learned of a

golf course shortage in the Sacramento area. He knew he could secure land and financing, but he also needed to secure people who understood golf to make his foray into the field successful.

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An aerial view of Thistle Golf Club on the Myrtle Beach's Grand Strand

Thistle Golf Club adds new nine and provides service with a twist

By JAY FINEGAN

SUNSET BEACH, N.C. — Already recognized along the Myrtle Beach Grand Strand for outstanding course design, conditioning and service, Thistle Golf Club has added another nine holes to the layout, bringing the total to 27. The original 18 went operational in 1999, becoming the 101st golf course to open in the Myrtle Beach area.

The new nine — the South Course — which opened in late summer, nicely compliments the West and North courses. All three were designed by Tim Cate and feature a Scottish links-type feel. "The whole complex is just a

really good, very solid golf course," said Dan Oschmann, head professional and director of golf at the facility.

For the first two nine-hole layouts, Cate was instructed to create a design that is "ferocious, yet fair." Golfers who've had the chance to play the first 18 agree that the architect met the objectives, with wide, rolling fairways, five sets of tees, and large green complexes that permit bump-and-run approaches on most holes.

NEW NINE MORE CHALLENGING

The new South Course possesses a similar look and feel, but plays a bit longer, at 3,351 yards from the Thistle

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Red Sky Ranch to pair Fazio and Norman designs

By JAY FINEGAN

WOLCOTT, Colo. — Vail Resorts Development Company (VRDC) has broken ground on the first of two championship courses here in Wolcott, near Interstate 70 west of Vail and just outside White River National Forest.

The 780-acre project, known as Red Sky Ranch, will unfold over rolling Rocky Mountain terrain flush with sagebrush, juniper, aspen and dramatic rock outcroppings. Plans call for some 500 acres to be left in their natural state. The views of the Gore Range to the east and Castle Peak to the west promise to give the complex a stunning visual dimension.

The first of the two 18-hole tracks, a Tom Fazio design, will feature an 800-foot elevation change over the par-72 track. This is a monster layout, measuring 7,305 yards from the back pegs. The front and back nines will return to the Resort Clubhouse, a 20,000-square-foot ranch-style structure that will also house a golf academy. A 40-acre practice facility will sit nearby.

The second course, designed by Greg Norman, is awaiting approval by Eagle County zoning authorities. Christine Richards, a VRDC spokeswoman, said county officials were expected to rule on the project in early October. "We hope to have all of our approvals done this fall," she said.

The Norman layout will be another 18-hole championship course. It will feature a private Members' Clubhouse, another western-style building. The New York firm of Robert Lamb Hart is designing both clubhouses.

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Coyote Moon

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Steele turned to Bell, a former professional golfer with Sacramento roots. After competing for UCLA in 1985, he played a European circuit, then joined the PGA Hogan Tour in 1989, winning the South Texas Open in 1990 earning a spot on the PGA Tour in 1991. By 1995, however, the level of competition on the big tour forced Bell to reassess his future.

"I wasn't making a grand living on the Tour, and I began to look for other ways

to be involved in the golf business," Bell said. "That's when I first met Chris Steele. At the time – 1995 – I was interested in any segment of the golf business. I was ready for anything, from being a club pro to being a playing ambassador. I was fortunate that Chris wanted help in the design and construction phase of golf courses."

Their first project, Teal Bend in Sacramento, was built on a relatively flat piece of ground near the Sacramento River. Steele wanted to build the same way he built high-rise buildings, in control of the

project to keep costs down.

"Chris could have gone the route of hiring an established course designer, but he felt that would be an extra expense," Bell explained. "When I joined him we walked the property and talked about what a golf course should include. Chris liked my ideas and felt that we could do the design on our own. We found out just how challenging course development and construction can be – and very quickly."

The Teal Bend project was begun at a time when golf course construction was coming under intense regulatory scru-

tiny in California. After the challenge of the permit process, it was a relief to get into the field and actually begin work.

As a strong player himself, Bell knew what kind of design features were required to challenge good shooters. Designing for average players was a different matter. And this is where Steele could offer advice.

"Chris was not a golfer and he became my eyes, so to speak, for the average player," Bell said. "He would see things that I wouldn't see. Golfers want to have a good time on a course and not feel like they're getting beat up by the design. Our golf courses are stand-alone facilities – every greens fee is important to our success, so repeat play is critical. We want golfers to be challenged, but we want them to come away feeling that they had some fun."

SNOW COUNTRY CONSTRUCTION

Coyote Moon presented a different set of hurdles.

The course was roughed in on a former logging tract in 1995, following a routing by another designer, but it took until 1998 to secure clearance from water control boards. Meanwhile, Bell walked the site and mentally mapped out adjustments to green sites and tee boxes.

"We learned a lot in building Teal Bend," Bell said, "and knew that building a course up in snow country would have to happen quickly. We needed a plan that could be completed in the six-month building window we had."

Wadsworth Construction rolled in with 80 employees to rush the project through. Head superintendent Joel Blaker handled the grow-in process and added valuable insight for irrigation and drainage needs. Blaker's real test came in September as he tried to plant 95 acres of grass. By October, it was clear that to open the next July more than 65 acres of sod would have to be laid before winter.

"Even this spring we realized that two more holes had to be resodded before our July opening," he said. "But we've made an effort to have heartier grasses, a good irrigation system, and good sunlight that will help to make this course a bit easier to maintain than some of the other mountain courses near here."

FINDING A NICHE

The idea of a challenging golf course that is fun to play shines through at Coyote Moon. With only a six-month playing season, greens fees need to be higher than valley golf courses, making repeat play and strong word of mouth crucial for success. But after just a few months of operation, the course has generated a lot of attention.

The future looks bright for Bell. Suddenly, the former touring pro has found a niche in golf course design. A new track, Empire Ranch, recently broke ground, and several other projects are under discussion. With each step Bell continues to learn a little more.

"A lot of great courses have been built," he said, "but some designers seem to forget who will be playing them – average golfers. I have been lucky in that, in my first designs, I've been able to put in a lot of time on-site to make things right. As we build stand-alone facilities it's important to complete courses on time and within a budget. We're improving on the product we create with each new venture." ■

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