Study finds golf a $1.6-billion industry in Massachusetts, second only to California

By JOHN F. LAUERMAN

BOSTON — Golf officials and business owners from around Massachusetts are trumpeting the results of a recent survey that places the golf industry among the top money-makers in the Commonwealth.

The analysis, commissioned by the Massachusetts Golf Association (MGA) and the Association of Massachusetts Golf Organizations (AMGO) counts the sport’s gross revenues at $1.6 billion, equal to one-third of the state’s hotel and lodging industry.

According to economic analyst Rick Norton of the National Golf Foundation (NGF), who conducted the study, Massachusetts comes in a surprising second in total golf output, trailing only California.

Cold little Massachusetts a golf hub? Here’s why: manufacturing accounts for a close to $1 billion, or about two thirds of the state’s total golf-related sales. Acushnet Co. has doubled its Titleist and Footjoy shoe plants here. Acushnet and Spalding Sports Worldwide, headquartered in Chicopee, Mass., account for close to 3,000 of Massachusetts’ 9,000 full-time golf employees.

But just as important has been the game’s growing popularity among people of all ages and incomes levels. The survey showed that 11 percent of Massachusetts’ estimated 700,000 golfers come from households with annual incomes of less than $25,000 and 13 percent of the state’s golfers are under 19.

According to the study, golf courses and ranges took in $474 million in gross receipts. And, Gowan pointed out, golf is frequently an important money maker for municipalities. In the Cape Cod town of Dennis, two golf courses annually net close to $900,000 for the town on $2.6 million in gross receipts.

“We hope the state realizes they have a hidden jewel here,” said James Craigie, president and CEO of Spalding Worldwide. “When you rack up the total benefits, the major sports teams only help the eastern part of the state, but golf’s benefits are statewide. We don’t have a team, like the Red Sox or the Patriots, but we do have one heck of a business, and we’ve all seen how big it can be.”

Holes 10, 11 and an irrigation lake, fed by underground glacier rivers, just under construction at Nelson and Hanover’s Jade Dragon Snow Mountain Golf Course in China.

Water shortage in China may threaten golf development

By ANDREW OVERBECK

BEIJING — Nowhere else in the world is the concern over the global water shortage hitting home harder than in China. The northeastern part of the country is experiencing its fourth consecutive year of drought and Beijing’s per capita water resources have dropped to 300 cubic meters, about one eighth of the national average. According to the June 26 issue of Outlook magazine, some 400 of China’s 688 cities are facing water shortages — of that 400 more than 100 are facing serious shortages.

Golf is the fourth biggest industry in Arizona. Gowans said, and a large part of the state’s real estate marketing efforts. Golf is a home-seller in Massachusetts, too. According to the MGA/AMGO study, golf course frontage increased in home values by 15 to 30 percent in comparison with similar properties away from courses.

According to the MGA executive director Tom Landry, “I thought we’d be fortunate to be at $1 billion.”

“We’d like to educate some of the lawmakers and regulators that golf is big business and a big component of the state’s economy,” said the MGA’s Landry. “Another hope is that with 230 daily-fee, resort and municipal facilities, the state might allocate money to the Massachusetts Office of Travel and Tourism to help promote the game.”

The positive economic effects of golf have not always been recognized. Arizona Golf Association executive director Ed Gowen recalls that in the late 1980s, the state’s farm industry tried to show that golf courses were an economic liability.

“In fact, the study showed that golf and four or five times the economic benefit per acre compared to any kind of subsidized farming,” Gowen said. “Golf is not a one-time sale; it’s an economic engine that builds on itself.”

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