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 that of the state's hotel and lodging industry, and slightly ahead of trucking and warehousing, personal services, and the paper industry.

"I was surprised, excited and encouraged," said MGA executive director Tom Landry. "I thought we'd be fortunate to be at $1 billion."

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 close to $1 billion, or about two thirds, of the state's total golf-related sales. Acushnet Co. has doubled its Titleist and Pinnacle ball manufacturing facilities in Massachusetts over the past decade, while keeping some of its glove 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 $477 million, while service companies and retailers accounted for another $180 million.

Water shortage in China may threaten golf development

By ANDREW OBERBECK

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 190 are facing serious shortages.

"Water is always a problem," said Mark Hollinger, principal of JMP Golf Design Group. "You have to anticipate problems and conjure up as much water as you can. Every project we have done in China since 1986 has been that way."

Stephen Alexander, who was in charge of building Sand River Golf Course under construction at Nelson and Hansor's Jade Dragon Snow Mountain Golf Course in China.

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

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Golf Property Analysts opens North Carolina office

ARAPAHOE, N.C. — Golf Property Analysts (GPA), a national golf-property consulting and appraisal firm based in Harrisburg, Pa., has established an office here in North Carolina to serve the Southeastern market, according to GPA president Laurence A. “Larry” Hirsh.

“The growth of golf, the Southeast’s burgeoning economy and strong residential and resort development have increased demand for the types of uniquely specialized services we can provide,” said Hirsh. “The office in North Carolina will help us respond more effectively to this regional demand, which we have served in the past. As our practice in the Southeast continues to grow, we plan to establish a Florida office in the not-too-distant future.”

Alan M. “Mac” Harris, a native of Greenville, N.C., now represents GPA from the Arapahoe office. An eight-year associate with the firm, Harris is a certified general real estate appraiser and is licensed as a broker in North Carolina, South Carolina and Pennsylvania.

Established in 1980, GPA’s parent firm — Hirsh Valuation Group — engages in commercial, industrial, investment and recreational real estate property consulting and appraisal. Hirsh Valuation Group offers specialized services relating to golf, aviation and marina real estate properties.

China’s water woes
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Club and Shenzhen Golf Club, agreed. “Water for irrigation in China is a major issue,” he said. “In southern China rainfall is very important during the wet season and storage lakes need to be as large and as well-sealed as possible.”

At JMP’s new course at Yalong Bay on Hainan Island, developers are rebuilding an existing reservoir to store irrigation water. “There are five months out of the year that are dry, so we have a fluctuating lake edge,” said Hollinger. “We had to design a series of terraced paddies alongside the holes that we can grow crops on as the water recedes during the summer.”

Many courses, having been denied access to city water supplies, are now being forced to drill wells. “As the local governments are taking a more active role in the approval process,” said designer Neil Haworth, “[courses] will need to use deep wells to go down into the ground water as a source. Our Snow Mountain course [in Li Jiang] will tap into underground glacier rivers.”

However, elsewhere in China, the government has put restrictions on the use of well water. “We put down water wells at Sand River,” said Alexander. “But the government restricted their use.”

PASPALUM

In response to the government restrictions on well-water use, Alexander was forced to use a mixture of salt water and well water for irrigation purposes. “This is one of the reasons that we chose paspalum,” he said. Paspalum is ideally suited to these situations because it can tolerate salinity.

According to Hollinger, with the water situation worsening paspalum is going to become the turfgrass of choice in China. “It is only going to get worse,” he said. “Not only because you don’t get the quantity you need, but because the condition of the water is just awful. That is why a lot of designers, including ourselves, are going to the paspalums. It tolerates not only the salt from the sea water but also the salts from the polluted water.”

DEVELOPMENT SLOWDOWN?

Whether the growing water crisis in China will lead to a slowdown in golf development in the near term remains to be seen, but it is certain to eventually limit the amount of golf courses the country can sustain.

“I think as time goes by,” said Hollinger, “You are going to find courses half built because the water isn’t there. That will create some upheavals.”

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