

GOLF COURSE NEWS

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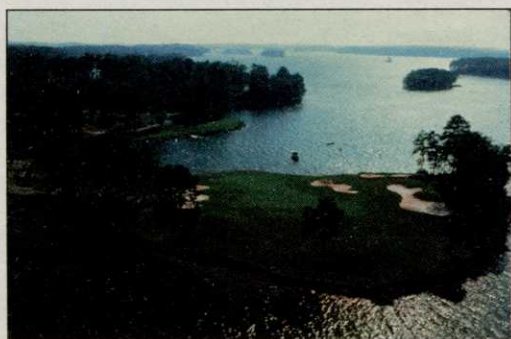
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DEALING WITH CONSOLIDATION

Anthony Williams has been director of golf operations at Renaissance PineIsle Resort in Georgia (the par-3, 250 yard, 15th hole is pictured above) for 14 years. During his tenure he has worked under three different owners, six general managers and three directors of golf. For tips on how to survive ownership changes, see his story on page 7.

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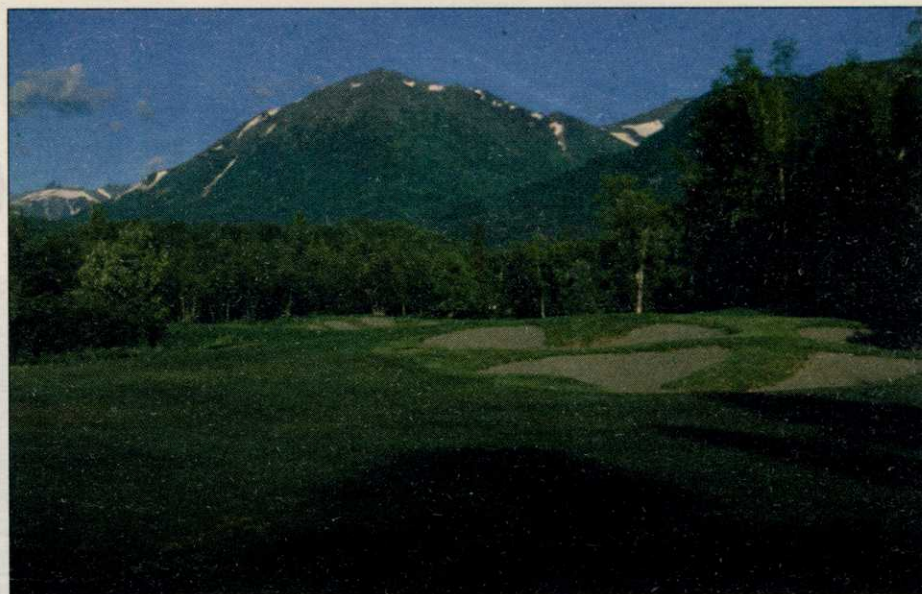
By JAY FINEGAN

HARRISBURG, Pa. — Golf course values are stable or declining. The northern states are the new land of opportunity for companies looking to buy golf properties. And private clubs have pulled even with daily-fee facilities as desirable targets in the course acquisition market.

Those are among the findings of a survey by Golf Property Analysts (GPA) here, which polled course management companies, investors and financial institutions involved in funding golf course real-estate transactions.

According to Laurence A. ("Larry") Hirsh, whose Hirsh Valuation Group owns GPA, the survey signals that the

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The 600-yard 18th hole at Robin Nelson's Moose Run in Alaska

Wild Alaska: Robin Nelson opens course at aptly named Moose Run

By JAY FINEGAN

ANCHORAGE, Alaska — They call Alaska "the last frontier," and the motto seemed right on the money to golf architect Robin Nelson. He recently unveiled his newest creation, the Creek Course at Moose Run, and he's still talking about the bears, wolves, lynx, moose and other critters who took a keen interest in the new layout during construction.

Alaska is by far our largest state, and this is a course to match — 7,324 yards from the back tees, 5,183 from the reds, with two holes running to 600 yards or more, and a slope rating near the top of the charts, at 142. The cart paths alone stretch over five miles and cross two suspension bridges where the course traverses Ship Creek. All fairways are separated by at least 300 feet of towering trees and dense brush — there's no possibility of slicing a drive into an adjacent

fairway. The par-72, 18-hole design features dramatic elevation changes and stunning mountain views all around.

"The Creek Course is hardly your basic golf course," Nelson said. "Every time you come around a corner, there's a different look and feel to the course and its aesthetics. And there are many strategic options as to how to play each hole."

The course is situated on the sprawling Army base at Fort Richardson, next to the old Hill Course at Moose Run, built in 1951. The entire 36-hole complex, owned and operated by the military, is open for public play.

"The people in charge up here are real golf fanatics," Nelson said, referring to the base's top brass and senior civilian officials. "Four years ago they started soliciting bids for a second course. They had 700 acres and we were supposed to

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Despite vandalism and fire, superintendent Szklinski prepares Southern Hills CC for next U.S. Open

By JOHN TORSIELLO

TULSA, Okla. — Golf fans attending next year's U.S. Open at Southern Hills Country Club here will likely marvel at the impeccable and challenging beauty of the Perry Maxwell-designed layout. But few will know of the effort and sacrifice made by golf course superintendent John Szklinski, his staff and the membership at Southern Hills, which made the staging of the prestigious event at the Midwestern venue possible.

The Open is back at Southern Hills after a 42-year hiatus. In 1958, playing in sweltering heat, club-throwing Tommy Bolt won his only Open title here, besting a young South African named Gary Player by four strokes. Bolt's skillful use of his driver on Southern Hills' tree-lined fairways, fringed by gnarly and deep rough, was the deciding factor.



The 13th hole at Southern Hills Country Club

Getting a golf course in shape to host a U.S. Open is a daunting enough task. But the staff and members

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XS Inc. to extend ag model to turf market

By ANDREW OVERBECK

RALEIGH, N.C. — Following the successful launch of its agricultural-input e-commerce venture, XS Inc., based here, is primed to expand into the turf and ornamental marketplace with XSTurf.com, which is set to be introduced by the end of the year.

The company's two-year-old flagship, XSAg.com, has quickly become a market leader, ranking at the top of Promar International's Aug. 3 ranking of agriculture specific e-commerce websites. XSAg brings buyers and sellers together to trade chemicals, seeds and equipment parts.

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Audubon certifies Leatherstocking

COOPERSTOWN, N.Y. – Audubon International has officially designated the Leatherstocking Golf Course at the Otesaga Resort here a Certified Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary under its Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary System (ACSS), a program endorsed by the U.S. Golf Association.

Designed by Devereux Emmet in 1909, the classic 18-hole championship Leatherstocking Golf Course, which sweeps along the western shore of Lake Otesaga, is considered one of the most scenic courses in the nation. It holds a four-diamond rating from *Golf Digest* for its challenging layout and well-protected greens.

Recently renovated at a cost of more than \$1 million, the Leatherstocking Golf Course joined the ACSS program in 1996. Its participation is consistent with the overall commitment of the surrounding Cooperstown community to protecting its natural legacy.

Leatherstocking is one of only 11 courses in New York State to receive the Audubon International honor, along with other such courses as the Winged Foot



Golfer gets a lesson at Leatherstocking

Golf Club in Mamaroneck and the Westchester Country Club in Rye.

“Gaining certification is not a simple process. Course superintendent Bernard Banas and his staff were completely dedicated to this program for four years, and they deserve a lot of credit,” said Eric Straus, president of the Leatherstocking Corp., which owns the course.

“In addition to being one of the prettiest courses you’ll ever play, Leatherstocking is home to a variety of indigenous wildlife, including foxes, deer and the Eastern bluebird,” said Dan Spooner, director of golf. “We are proud that we can maintain a safe sanctuary for the animals while providing an enjoyable and challenging golf experience.”

Fescue breakthrough

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tolerance,” said Carrow.

For test samples, Duncan collected any tall fescue plants he could find growing within six inches of a paved highway. “That would bring a high heat load to the grass,” Carrow said. “Any tall fescue that survived in conditions like that had to produce enough carbohydrates to do so. With that germ plasm base, plus the strains that survived intensive screening, we had enough to begin crossing.”

The cross-strains went through another boot camp, which killed at least 95 percent of them. Then Duncan took the top one to five percent and started crossing those, subjecting them to even more rigorous conditions.

“To put on even greater stress,” Carrow said, “once he got those initial crosses, he scalped them with a mower to remove all the green tissue, which put a further strain on the carbohydrates. Under these extreme conditions, the heartier plants will turn on their genetic capability to withstand the stresses.”

The scientists also made the grass more frugal. Grass usually drinks all the water it can at one time, growing in spurts that can’t be maintained. With Southeast Tall Fescue, “even though the water is there in the soil, the grass doesn’t use any more than it needs,” Carrow said. ■

Salmon

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for the first time in 70 years,” said Ed Hopper, owner of the resort.

The Wee Burn has always had some coho and steelhead in it, but the best spawning portions, including ponds, were inaccessible to fish. A significant amount of work has been done, including adding wetland and alcoves to slow the stream down, restoring some of the stream’s natural meander, adding shade plants and trees, adding in-stream structures for spawning and resting areas, and building ladders to allow fish access to the upper ponds on the stream. While most of the work is complete, much is still being done by the resort and its partners to improve, maintain and monitor the changes.

“The Wee Burn’s habitat has been improved fourfold, and we expect to see an increase in fish populations in the coming years,” said Forest Service fisheries biologist Chris Rossel. “To bring back fish stocks to a level of being delisted from the federal endangered and threatened species list, fish habitat on private lands has to improve. This project is a great example of private and public entities working together to ensure successful stream restoration on private lands.” ■

Southern Hills

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of Southern Hills overcame unforeseen obstacles that might have led less committed individuals to tell the U.S. Golf Association (USGA) to look elsewhere for a site to stage its premier annual event.

VANDALS SPARKED RESTORATION

Already faced with considerable work in order to bring Southern Hills up to the USGA Open specifications, the workers at the course were dealt a blow when vandals seriously damaged nine greens in June of 1999. The vandalism was such that the putting surfaces had to be closed and regrassed.

“The club’s board of governors saw what happened as an opportunity to undertake extensive restoration work,” said Szklinski, who came to Southern Hills in 1998 from Desert Highlands, in Scottsdale, Ariz.

“My initial reaction to the vandalism was one of anger and disappointment,” he said. “I knew after a week of watching how the greens would react that we would have to go through the process of regrassing. But I said to myself that we were going to look at this as an opportunity.”

In addition to regrassing all the course’s greens, work was done to upgrade the club’s irrigation system, bunkers were rebuilt, the tall oak and pecan trees that form canopies over the sides of many fairways were trimmed, and longer championship tees built. It was decided that to insure the consistency of the course’s putting surfaces the nine greens not affected by the vandalism would also be regrassed.

“The club was established in 1936,” said Szklinski, “and we get some pretty heavy thunderstorms during the summer. Erosion over the years can change the face of bunkers and there can be encroachment toward the greens. It’s

minute, but on an annual basis it adds up. We took this opportunity to restore the course to its original layout.”

Noted golf course architect Keith Foster was hired to assist with the renovations.

“Every time Keith came to the front gate of the club he checked his ego,” Szklinski said. “This is a Maxwell course and we needed to continue to be a pure Maxwell design. Keith did a wonderful job.”

10-MONTH COURSE SHUTDOWN

In addition to the course maintenance staff, Landscapes Unlimited, of Lincoln, Neb., was hired to help undertake the work. Szklinski maintains a staff of around 35, but as many as 80 to 90 people were working on the restoration project on a daily basis.

The course had to be closed for 10 months, a big sacrifice by the members. “They deserve enormous amounts of praise,” Szklinski said. “It was a hard deal for them to give up their club for 10 months to allow the work to be done. They were the ones who endured the most inconvenience.”

Szklinski and the Southern Hills staff was thrown another curve ball when the club’s maintenance shed was destroyed by an electrical fire in January of this year. A new building had to be constructed. “Once again the club rose to the occasion after the fire, and now we have a new building, which serves all our needs,” he said.

Tim Moraghan of the USGA’s rules and competition committee, which oversees the preparing of a golf course for a major championship and issues a set of guidelines for clubs to follow to that end, said there was never a thought of moving the 2001 Open.

“We were out there for three or four days after the vandalism, reviewing our options,” said Moraghan. “We assured them that the Open was going to be

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Great Southwest GC closes for regrassing

ARLINGTON, Tex. – Great Southwest Golf Club, in Grand Prairie, in the Dallas-Ft. Worth area, will be closed for a several months to install new grasses expected to better withstand Texas weather, the *Arlington Morning News* reported. Plans call for installation of Tifway 419 bermudagrass on the fairways, officials said. The rye grass had

been dying out.

Members are upset and, at the same time, understanding. "I sympathize with the members. But this is a big commitment by the company to spend \$1 million and make this one of the best courses in Texas," said club pro and general manager Chip Graham.

Club members were notified

about the closure in a letter earlier this summer. It described how the management team was going to handle the conversion of the current bentgrass greens to a hybrid bermudagrass.

The change was deemed necessary because the humidity and rains had caused *pythium* to attack the greens.

Great Southwest members will be able to play other courses in the ownership group, including Diamond Oaks, Woodhaven, Oakridge, Eldorado, Los Rios and Thorntree.

"Bentgrass is a superb putting surface," club member Lou Duran said. "But they've had a lot of trouble with it [keeping it growing in the Texas heat]. The Champions or Tif Eagle is

a positive way to go. Great Southwest could be a Colonial-type course. It's that kind of layout. I'm looking at this as a positive."

Longtime member Mo Lambert said the club should have made the move a year earlier. "For me, I don't know if it's just getting older or what, but the summers keep getting hotter and dryer every year," he said.

Southern Hills

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played at Southern Hills and they stepped up to the plate. What we want is not only for a course to be in top shape for the Open, but also that any work done will benefit the members 15 to 20 years down the road."

The USGA's course preparation memo covers a wide range of issues, from turfgrass conditions and the length of the rough to the placements of grandstands and wiring. There is little flexibility in the USGA's edicts, save for the speed of the greens.

"The course preparation memo is firm," said Moraghan. "We say this is how we want the course set up for the national championship. The only issue that is flexible is green speed. It's very difficult to set a prescribed number because you don't know until the week of the event what the weather conditions will be. I'll ask John what he thinks he can give us, and we'll settle on a number."

PRE-TOURNAMENT PREP

Moraghan said the USGA was impressed with the facelift at Southern Hills.

"The golf course superintendent is the most underrated player in the whole picture," he said. "John was new to Southern Hills and had to get the course ready on short notice. Throw in the vandalism to the greens and losing his maintenance building and he had to do a remarkable job. It's going to be a great Open."

The summer weather in the Tulsa area is usually hot and dry, which demands that Southern Hills be extensively watered. The new irrigation system will be instrumental in keeping the course in top condition throughout the summer.

Prior to the Open and throughout the tournament, Szklinski will add part-time staff and will welcome volunteers to help with course maintenance.

"Once we get close to the Open there will be a very high sense of urgency and intensity," he said. "I'm sure I'll have some butterflies. But I feel what we've been through has been a pretty good preparation for what we need to be like during the tournament." ■

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