

Myrtle Beach named top golf destination worldwide

MYRTLE BEACH, S.C. — The International Association of Golf Tour Operators (IAGTO) has named Myrtle Beach as the “established” golf destination of the year. Other nominees included the Algarve, Hilton Head, S.C., Ireland, Normandy (France), northeast Florida, Palm Springs, Calif., and Scotland.

IAGTO’s 95 tour operators from

21 countries were asked to give a satisfaction rating of between one and 100 to each of the golf destinations. Criteria included customer satisfaction, support from suppliers, support from tourist boards, support from airlines, quality of golf courses and accommodations and accessibility to tee times.

“Myrtle Beach has stepped up

to the plate by offering great customer service and southern hospitality,” said Shane Sharp, editor of MyrtlebeachTravel.com and MyrtlebeachGolf.com. “We’re happy to see the Grand Strand get this kind of recognition. We publish tourism sites and publications in 18 destinations and have always known that Myrtle

Beach is a special place.”

The award was accepted by Debra Hesla of Myrtle Beach Golf Holiday at the IAGTO annual conference on December 11 at the Times-Union Theater, in Jacksonville, Fla.

“We’ve been working really hard internationally to get new golfers,” Hesla said. “Everyone

needs new golfers with the golf industry being kind of flat. Globally, more money is spent on golf than any other sport. We have been working the market for the last 10 years, having booths at the British Open and also going to the trade shows for the tour operators. It was a big

Continued on page 59

Acquisition market

Continued from previous page

courses went on the block; it also pulled back. And Arnold Palmer Golf Management, with about 35 courses, also was put up for sale.

“The two Oklahoma guys who won the bid for Palmer couldn’t close it,” Rhodes said. “They couldn’t get the money together on the debt or equity side. It took them nine months and the deal finally fell apart.

Now Golf Trust of America (GTA), with 47 courses, is liquidating, and Rhodes said “I’m not sure they’ll find buyers for everything. We’ve looked at some of the GTA properties, and so have other companies that still have some equity backing them for acquisitions. I know Eagle could buy if they wanted to, and so could Kemper. But everybody is waiting because prices are going down, so why not wait?”

The waiting game is on for Honours Golf, too. “We are well capitalized and are under no pressure to go out and invest the money in a certain time period,” Barrett said. “We can sit back and wait for the best opportunities to come along. They will continue to come and may be even better over the next 18 months.”

GOLF COURSE AS TROPHY WIFE

Below the large golf course management companies come the individual operators, where the action is unpredictable. “There are people who sell one course and buy another one,” Rhodes said. “A lot of families have been in the business for years, buying and selling. When they go to build, they sign personally, and they are often conservative. They range from outstanding operators to your little pro in rural Georgia who’s got a course.

“Your individual buyer is still out there,” Rhodes added. “It might be the rich guy who has always loved the game and wants his own course. It’s like the next Ferrari or trophy wife for him. But now, that guy is probably not as much there, either, because he’s lost a lot of money over the last year in his stock portfolio. But to the extent he is there, he can buy.” ■

GOLF COURSE NEWS

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Diamond Players Club

Continued from page 44

and Wekiva GC, a 6,640-yard track here in Longwood, DPC's headquarters.

According to Stottlemire, the new division will operate nationwide, seeking acquisition and management targets and providing services ranging from design and construction of new layouts to managing all golf and clubhouse operations at existing private or daily-fee facilities.

BURDETTE AND MARTELL

Burdette and Martell both have deep experience in the course management arena.

Certified in golf operations and course maintenance, Burdette has directed land acquisition and development projects. He is a member of the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America (GCSAA) and a retired Class A member of the PGA of America. A former vice president of agronomy and new construction for Granite Golf, he served as senior superintendent at Grand Cypress Resort and as golf professional at Pinehurst.

Martell, formerly director of marketing for Granite Golf, specializes in the development and execution of comprehensive golf course business plans and marketing strategies.

STRATEGIC GROWTH

According to White, the company plans to develop top-caliber golf properties in major league sports cities throughout the country. "We are a branded, sports-minded group," said White. "Tampa and Orlando are our anchors, and we will grow from there."

Any city with a franchise from the National Football League, the National Basketball Association or Major League Baseball appears to be fair game. "The primary focus is to get to 30 or 35 courses, and 50 at the outside,"

White said. "Strategically, that might take five to 10 years, but our overall goal is to have a golf presence in every major league city."

White added that DPC's preference is to build courses rather than buy existing clubs. He hopes to forge partnerships with developers to help fund the projects. "The financial partnerships will vary by relationship," he said. "Certainly there are some big builders doing creative arrangements. If they buy into the concept, there could be joint ventures under negotiable terms. It would allow us an entry into that market and develop a form of collateral for us."

SPORTS ATMOSPHERE

Accentuating the company's sports theme, it has trademarked its Box Seat Sports Bar and Grille. "We'll have one of these at each of our properties," White said. "They have sports memorabilia, including World Series trophies. Seven satellite feeds and 20 television monitors will show golf tournaments live around the world as well as any other sports you might want to watch."

White sees an opportunity for the company in tournament play. "A lot of athletes have charitable causes," he said. "One of our niches is charity tournaments, where we'll bring celebrity players out and hold auctions."

"The whole company has been well thought out," White added. "Right now it's just a matter of growing the concept."

DPC was formed four years ago by Stottlemire and Florida PGA professional Gregg Gagliardi, the company's CEO. A number of current and former pro athletes are partners in DPC, including pitching greats Mel Stottlemire Sr. and "Sudden Sam" McDowell. Steve Jones, a former U.S. Open winner now on the PGA Tour, is also on board. ■

Myrtle Beach top golf resort worldwide

Continued from page 47

thrill to come out on top, against Scotland and Ireland, the Algarve, and so on."

Since its inception in 1998, IAGTO has attracted nearly 300 operators and suppliers from 50 different countries. It is now recognized as the global trade association for the golf tourism industry.

"Every day, people from all over the world rave about how pleasant the merchants and the golf pros treat visitors," said Sharp. "Myrtle Beach is not just a golf destination but a family destination that offers something for everyone."

Myrtle Beach Golf Holiday is a marketing organization comprised of 88 accommodations and 96 golf course members.

Broadly recognized as the most successful golf-marketing cooperative in the world, Myrtle Beach Golf Holiday also operates several golf events, including the DuPont CoolMax World Amateur Handicap Championship, the Myrtle Beach Summer Family Golf Tournaments, and the Veterans Golf Classic.

MyrtlebeachTravel.com and MyrtlebeachGolf.com are the official travel and golf online publications of Myrtle Beach. Both publications are affiliated with TravelGolf.com, golf's most highly read chain of online golf and tourism publications.

TravelGolf.com includes such sites as GolfCalifornia.com; GolfFlorida.com; EuropeGolf.com; ScotlandGolf.com; and BadGolfMonthly.com.

The Myrtle Beach area has 115 golf courses. ■

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Marriott Golf and Shadow Ridge Golf Club

Continued from page 45

reward and encourage a variety of approach shots. Miss the putting surfaces here and your ball will invariably roll into a tightly mown collection area - requiring a deft touch to recover - or into a greenside bunker."

Shadow Ridge Golf Club will also feature a Faldo Golf Institute by Marriott, the third such school in the company's portfolio, along with Marriott's Grande Vista in Orlando, Fla., and the Marriott Seaview Resort in Absecon, N.J.

FALDO GOLF INSTITUTE ON SITE

Set to open in early 2001, the Faldo Golf Institute by Marriott will feature one of the largest, most unique practice facilities in the world. Faldo-certified teaching professionals will be on staff, offering programs for the novice golfer up to the accomplished player.

Faldo, known as one of the greatest players in

the game and a true student of the golf swing, has developed a curriculum for the Institute, which will embody his personal philosophy and teaching techniques.

"I'm confident that Marriott's Shadow Ridge will inspire golfers of all levels to improve their game," he said. "Most of all, my hope is that everyone who plays the course will be enchanted and thrilled by a unique golfing experience."

Marriott Golf currently manages 26 courses in the United States, Central America, Europe and the Middle East through its two arms: Marriott Resort Golf and Marriott Golf Management Services. Each year more than one million rounds of golf are played on Marriott courses.

Marriott Golf is a division of Marriott International, a leading worldwide hospitality company with over 2,000 operating units in the United States and 57 other countries and territories. ■

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