

Weed's rustic Olde Farm golf course 'designed itself'

By JOHN TORSIELLO

BRISTOL, Va. — It sounds too easy. But golf course architect Bobby Weed claims The Olde Farm golf course, located just outside of Bristol, Va., basically designed itself.

"The course was already there," said Weed. "The land was so well suited for a golf course that all it needed was a routing."

The private layout, which opened last year, took only four months to build, said Weed. The course has 160 members and will ultimately top off at 200.

"We went there, looked at the site, grabbed some stakes and a hammer and went about routing the course," Weed said. "We didn't use a surveyor and you could say we laid the course out from the trunk of a car."

Weed said the soil (the course sits on a former working farm) was extremely fertile, perfect for growing the bentgrass fairways, greens and tees.

"The area has great air circulation, and the soil is ideal for growing and maintaining grasses. We put a little bit of bluegrass and fescue in the rough and blended it into the native environment," he said.

Scratch Golf, a subsidiary of The United Company, developed and owns The Olde Farm. The course and its amenities were built for around \$10 million.

The par-71 course, which plays 6,870 yards from the tips, was selected by *Golf Digest* as the best new private course of 2000.

RUSTIC CHARM

Great care was taken to imbue The Olde Farm with a rustic character. A historic log cabin was turned into a caddy shack and a tobacco barn now serves as a rain shelter, restroom facility and half-way house. Another barn between the 10th and 11th holes was renovated and serves as a dining hall for major functions, such as the club's annual Blue-Gray matches. A new building, which serves as a clubhouse and locker room, was modeled after a design by Thomas Jefferson.

The Olde Farm's design has a distinct old-world flavor. Free-form bunkers with sodwall faces rimmed with grass that grow tall and gnarly in the summer dot the course. The layout is open and most greens admit bump and run shots, again reminiscent of Scottish-style courses. A stream, called Sinking Creek, rolls through the course and comes into play on several holes.

Weed said he designed a fair test of golf into The Olde Farm.

"You had better come out of the chute with your 'A' game," he said. The course starts with a long par-5, two long par-4s, and a par-3 that measures 240 yards from the back tee. But there is a driveable par-4, reachable par-5s, and modest length par-3s that follow.

NICKLAUS AND PALMER ARE MEMBERS

Make no mistake about it, The Olde Farm is a golf course made for golfers. Its members, who come from all parts of the country, giving the club a truly "national" flare, include Jack Nicklaus, Arnold Palmer, Blockbuster Video magnate Wayne Huizenga, Wendy's restaurant

chain owner Dave Thomas, and sports personalities Don Shula, Joe Gibbs and Bob Griese. They joined the club for the challenge, intimacy and natural beauty of the land upon which the course was built, said Jim McGlothlin, co-owner of The United Company. There is an initiation fee of \$100,000 with no annual dues or assessments.

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Weed's The Olde Farm

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Norman course

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the McDowell Mountains.

DOUBLING THE COST

To fit Mirabel's new requirements, Discovery brought in Tom Fazio to design a new course. The cost is estimated to be nearly double the amount spent on the original layout. Discovery Land and Fazio have teamed up before on Iron Horse, Estancia and three other projects.

"It's not that we thought Greg Norman couldn't come in and make the changes," Lomax said. "It's just that we had a lot of confidence in Fazio. He recently opened a Scottsdale office, so working with his group would be very convenient." And as Meldman put it, "We need a fresh perspective on the entire project."

Landscapes Unlimited, builder of Stonehaven, has been called back to deconstruct its original work and sculpt out the 7,200-yard Mirabel track. Sprinkler heads and other in-ground hardware are being removed in preparation for the earthmoving.

"Bulldozing the golf course is not a big deal," said Lomax. "There's a lot of stuff there – the pumps and lakes – that we can reuse, so it's not a total throwaway. But we do have to till up the turf that's there and so on."

Fazio will be tasked with designing a more forgiving course than the one Norman produced.

"There are 37 forced carries on the Norman course. We don't think that's appropriate for member-friendly play," Lomax explained. "We'll have ways for

high handicappers to reach the greens without having to fly over bunkers. We'll also have nice wide fairways with bigger landing areas and contouring that will allow the balls to stay in play. Right now, if you miss it slightly, the ball kicks into the desert.

"Just like we did at Estancia," he added, "we'll have a course that can be challenging from the

back tees. But with multiple tees, if you want to fire from a little further forward, it will be enjoyable for golfers of all levels."

REAL ESTATE COMPONENT

Discovery plans to sell 375 memberships and offer some 310 custom homesites, ranging up to three acres and priced anywhere from \$250,000 to \$600,000. Forty-five golf villas also will be built close to the "desert-lodge"

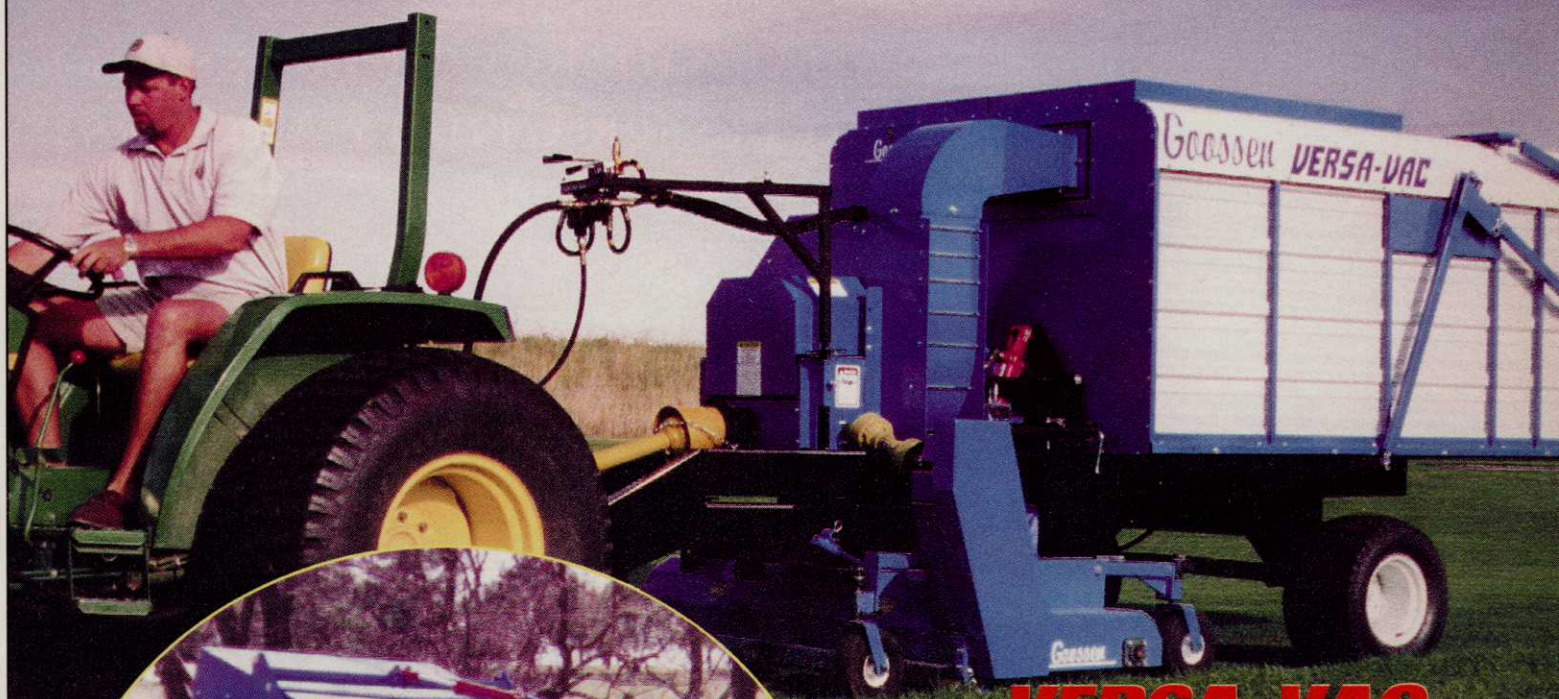
style clubhouse and other amenities, such as tennis courts and swimming pools.

Initiation fees will run \$85,000, according to Lomax, with monthly golf dues in the \$650 range and social dues yet to be established.

Discovery officials predict a strong demand for the club. "There are a lot of people coming to Scottsdale who want to

buy a second home," Lomax said. "And there's a certain demographic that wants a smaller, more intimate facility – a place where they know all the members, where the staff knows them, and where they'll be well taken care of. It's hard to do that at Desert Mountain, with 2,500 members. We're positioning this the same way as Estancia, which is now sold out." ■

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Olde Farm

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"We wanted to build a club that is true golf," said McGlothlin on the genesis of The Olde Farm. "We wanted an upscale place for the person who loves golf, its history and tradition. The Olde Farm is totally private—no homes, no development. We have several members of Augusta National and Pine Valley who are members here."

McGlothlin said the fact that The Olde Farm is not the primary club for its members and the decision to limit the number of members enhances the feeling of exclusivity and privacy at The Olde Farm. Last year the course averaged about 19 rounds a day.

The course is already working to exceed expectations.

"We hope to keep improving and make the top 100 courses in America," said the club's general manager, Bill Miller. "Everything went like clockwork with this course. We've got a strong staff. Our head pro [Rob McKenzie] and superintendent [Mark Eubanks] and the people who work for them are very dedicated." ■

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