By ANDREW OVERBECK

PHOENIX, Ariz. — In a move to lure more members and improve profits at its Anthem Phoenix and Las Vegas Country Club communities, developer Del Webb has turned the management reins over to Troon Golf.

In addition to managing the golf courses, restaurants and club operations, Troon Golf will take over the marketing duties for the two clubs, Del Webb, which is a division of Pulte Homes, had previously managed the Anthem clubs in-house. It will continue to manage its Sun City and Revere branded golf courses.

“We feel the Troon relationship will bring us a potential home buyer market audience and club/user profile that is aligned with our country club products and brands,” said Henry DeLozier, vice president of golf operations for Del Webb.

While DeLozier said the decision was in the works before the economy began to slowdown, he admitted that the two clubs were having profitability problems.

“There were some numbers that we weren’t hitting,” he said. “We have always been patient country club developers and in the past we were willing to subsidize operating deficits. We now have a greater sense of urgency in accelerating the earning power of our country club operations.”

Blinded golfer awarded $2.1 million

By JOSEPH J. DEVANNY

CLARKSTON, Mich. — Golfer Derek Autio, who was blinded in one eye after being struck by a golf ball, was recently awarded $2.1 million by a Michigan jury.

Autio was taking a cart path through the woods towards the 18th hole at Clarkston Creek Golf Club when he was hit by the tee shot of another golfer. He lost an eye in the accident. In his claim, he alleged that the course was negligently designed.

At first glance, a verdict of this magnitude, coupled with the nature of the claim, could leave golf course managers and designers every-where wondering if they are suddenly facing potential and unanticipated claims. It appears, however, that both the facts and the law in the Clarkston Creek case are sufficiently unique.

JURY SAYS ALL THREE ARE TO BLAME

Autio sued both the golf course and the golfer that hit the errant shot. Following a trial, the jury determined that Autio was 40 percent negligent, the club was 55 percent at fault and the other golfer was five percent culpable. The jury also determined that $2.1 million was the value of Autio’s injury, but, with his contributory negligence factored in, the actual amount would be closer to $850,000.

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Ritz-Carlton on the move in Fla.

NAPLES, Fla. — Ritz-Carlton has added to the splendor here in golf-rich Naples with the opening of the Ritz-Carlton Golf Resort. Greg Norman's Tiburon Golf Course surrounds the 295-room resort, which opened Jan. 4. The 18-hole layout was carved out of 800 acres of natural Florida foliage and fast in the links tradition. The fairways are lined with pine straw, stacked sod wall bunkers and coquina sand waste bunkers. The fairways on the course, which is certified as an Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary, are maintained at a height of one half inch. The final nine holes of the project will open in November 2002.

In addition, the resort features a Rick Smith Golf Academy, fitness center, outdoor swimming pool, and four lighted tennis courts. Guests will be able to enjoy dining options at the golf resort or at the nearby Ritz-Carlton, Naples.

A COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Ritz-Carlton has also stepped into golf community development with the construction of its first Ritz-Carlton Golf Club & Spa in Jupiter.

The 285-acre gated community will feature a Jack Nicklaus Signature Golf Course, a clubhouse and spa, and three home ownership options. Members will be able to choose from

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Los Alamitos, Calif. — Environmental Industries has brought in Tom Frost Golf, Inc., to operate three of its California courses while the company tries to sell two of the properties. Environmental Industries is scaling back ownership of golf courses in order to concentrate on agronomy contracts. The firm plans to sell Westridge Golf Course in La Habra and The Links at Riverlakes Ranch in Bakersfield, but will retain ownership of Glen Annie Golf Club in Santa Barbara.

"A great need has emerged for transition management services in the golf industry as owners and developers look to exit golf," said Tom Frost. "Golf courses are not selling at high multiples right now. So in the interim, without committing the owner to a long term deal, we can increase the value of properties until they are in a better position to sell."

Increasing Value

According to Frost, there are more and more owners seeking cost effective ways to manage under-performing golf properties affected by rising energy costs, a weakened economy and flat consumer demand.

"When you are liquidating, you either retain an executive until the properties are sold off, or you bring someone in," said Mike Dingman, senior vice president for Environmental Industries. "I wouldn’t want to offer someone a job that I knew was going away."

Frost, formerly a senior vice president at American Golf, established Tom Frost Golf last year. The company offers a full spectrum of consulting and management services designed to help both individual owners and municipalities meet their business objectives. In addition to its new agreement with Environmental Industries, Frost provides consulting services for the City of Long Beach to develop a strategic plan for the city’s network of public golf courses.