AGC to double learning center commitment

BY PETER BLAIS

SANTA MONICA, Calif. — With rounds, revenues and the economy flagging, a program that expects to create 30,000 new golfers this year is the type of good news the golf industry sorely needs.

"If half the public courses in America achieved half those results, we would easily achieve the goals put forth in the Golf 20/20 initiative to create more than a million new golfers a year," said American Golf Corporation co-CEO David Pillsbury of the management company's Nike Golf Learning Centers. "That would benefit all of us — operators, manufacturers, and others."

AGC is so convinced of the importance of creating new golfers that it is pressing forward with its $3-million Nike Golf Learning Center program in the face of some difficult financial times of its own (see story on page 1)."In a company that wasn’t thinking strategically about its business, I could see a program like the Nike Golf Learning Centers being cut," Pillsbury said. "But we’re actually doubling our investment. We’re spending more in one year [2002] than we did in the previous four."

Nike Golf Learning Centers are operating at 50 American Golf-operated facilities, with another 50 planned to open in the next 12 months.

"They are located where we have our largest concentration of golf courses, major metropolitan areas primarily in the Sun Belt," Pillsbury said. "The new ones will be similarly located. We started out West and the expansion will be primarily into the East and Midwest. The more mature centers are doing very well — a couple in Southern California, a couple in Northern California and one in Chicago. Those are typically larger facilities with a strong population within a 10-mile radius. They are usually connected to a golf course."

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The Learning Centers combine traditional golf fundamentals with a new focus on learning, and are designed to introduce new golfers to the game. "We are not going to try to sell them anything," Pillsbury said. "They are there to experience the game and enjoy it."

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