HMS Golf bulks up portfolio

By ANDREW OVERBECK

ATLANTA — HMS Golf has aggressively entered the golf course management arena, adding six courses to its portfolio in the last 18 months. The company, which began in 1983 as a development and construction company, continues its strong push in November adding two more properties and is looking to sign another five to six facilities in the next two months.

Early in the month, the firm added to its growing stable of Atlanta area courses with the signing of Gold Creek Golf Club in Dawsonville, and it picked up another property in South Carolina at Island West Golf Club in Hilton Head to close out the month.

“We are telling our clients not to build courses right now,” said HMS Golf’s director of business development James Haslam. “The market is not favorable.”

The company’s only construction project this year is the Cider Ridge Golf Club in Oxford, Ala. The semi-private layout, designed by Bill Bergen, will open in March. “It was a tough, hilly piece of property,” said Haslam. “The course is well positioned 45 minutes north of Birmingham and is close to the Robert Trent Jones golf trail.”

Haslam sees a lot of opportunity in expanding into course management. “The worse the golf market is, the better we seem to do,” he said. “We are a cost and profit oriented company. It is easier for us to make money than it is for an individual owner.”

HMS Golf offers cooperative advertising and marketing and runs a reciprocal program for its Atlanta-area courses that Haslam said has been a huge selling point for memberships.

TURN AROUND AT GOLD CREEK

While Haslam reports that existing courses in the portfolio are doing well this year, the firm’s new additions will take some turn around work.

“At Gold Creek we changed out the general manager and superintendent,” he said. “In turn around deals you often have employees that lack leadership. We put in new management and will retrain the workers.”

The new superintendent Eric Daughtry will be charged with improving course conditions and Joe Rullan will take over the general manager reins.

For now, HMS will continue with its strategy of hiring strong on-site managers, but Haslam admitted that they will need to add staff as they expand.

“We have been small enough that we have not had to put in regional managers,” he said. “But we will as we get larger.”

E-Z-GO

E-Z-GO is pinning its 2002 efforts on increasing the market’s awareness of its GPS system that is provided through an alliance with ProLink.

“When you consider that a lot of courses are struggling right now with revenue generation and differentiation, we have shown that ProLink can be a helpful tool to a golf course,” said Ron Skenes, marketing communications coordinator for E-Z-GO.

The system is currently used by more than 200 courses. Skenes said the company expects the increasing popularity of GPS to drive sales.

“Golf car fleets are still revenue generators even in tough economic times,” he said. “We need to educate the market on the value that GPS adds.”

The company is still working on its Eagle adaptive golf car that is expected to be ready for the market this year.

COLUMBIA PAR CAR

Columbia’s newest car with the ACE EPS using permanent magnet technololgy went into production in June and is currently in use on six golf courses across the country. According to president Todd Sauey, the reaction from the marketplace has been positive. He expects the product to sell well during its first full season of availability.

Sauey said the new car is lighter and more efficient than previous cars while offering the same amount of torque as a gasoline model.