



BRIEFS

PALMER GOLF NAMES WISHART GM AT STONE RIDGE

ORLANDO, Fla. — Arnold Palmer Golf Management has promoted Peter Wishart to general manager at Stone Ridge Golf Club, located in Bowling Green, Ohio. Prior to his promotion, Wishart served as food and beverage manager at the Capstone Club in Alabama.

PEBBLE BEACH CO. NAMES PLOTT PRESIDENT, COO

PEBBLE BEACH, Calif. — Pebble Beach Co. has appointed Robert "Cody" Plott as the company's president and chief operating officer. Plott will oversee operations of The Inn at Spanish Bay, The Lodge at Pebble Beach, Casa Palmero and The Spa at Pebble Beach, as well as the Beach and Tennis and Spanish Bay Clubs. Plott fills the position recently vacated by the death of John Chadwell. Prior to joining Pebble Beach, Plott was president of Collier Selley, a Los Angeles-based real estate brokerage firm.

HERNANDEZ TO HEAD MARKETING EFFORTS FOR BRANTON WOODS

HOPEWELL JUNCTION, N.Y. — Phil Hernandez has been named director of marketing for Branton Woods Golf Club, the public course that opened here last fall. Hernandez spent the last four years as regional director of marketing for Back Creek LLC and KL Golf Inc., where he directed marketing efforts for Back Creek Golf Course and Frog Hollow Golf Course, both located in Middletown, Del.

KEMPERSPORTS TO MANAGE CC OF WISCONSIN

NORTHBROOK, Ill. — Kemper Sports Management has been signed to manage the Country Club of Wisconsin, a semi-private facility located just north of Milwaukee. Kemper Golf president Steve Skinner said Wisconsin's growth as a golf destination was behind the company's desire to manage the facility. The CC of Wisconsin, which opened in 1994, features more than 200 acres of rolling hillside, and has been certified as an Audubon Cooperative Golf Course.

Living a million-dollar dream

By JERRY POLING

ST. JAMES, Minn. — In 1992 at age 55, Bob Lewis Jr. had planned to retire early on disability from his job as corporate meeting planner with Minnesota Mutual Life Insurance in St. Paul.

He had a bad back, and after flying up to 150,000 miles a year around the world, he was looking forward to relaxing at his Apple Valley, Minn., home with his wife.

Then came that lunch break at work in April 1992

when he remembered to check his lottery ticket. One by one, all his Powerball numbers matched. He had won \$12.5 million, payable in 20 annual installments of \$625,000 (\$455,000 after taxes). Suddenly he was a millionaire on paper and could laugh at the world: "I tell people I'm on a fixed income: I only get one check a year," Lewis said.

Contrary to what many people might have done, Lewis didn't act like a kid who had just found a \$100 bill at an amusement park. He kept working for another year, as planned. Three years later in 1996, after pondering his options he made an informed decision on how to use some of his windfall: He decided to buy a golf course.

Lewis previously did not have visions of owning a course, unlike many golfers. He

loved the game and was an average player by his own admission, but had quit years earlier because of his back. Except for organizing corporate golf events, the game had slipped out of his life.

So why did he choose a highly competitive and sometimes frustrating business? Lewis said he made a sound business decision and a good investment — and for the second time — had a little "Luck" on his side.

A close family friend, Mike Luckcraft, had become a golf pro in the Minneapolis-St. Paul area and suggested that Lewis look into buying a course. Lewis had been hoping to find a seasonal business that would allow him to work part time.

With Luckcraft as an adviser, Lewis looked at several courses before hearing about a struggling 9-hole course in St. James, Minn. (pop. 5,000) about 75 miles south of the Twin Cities.

They saw many possibilities. The low-budget Watonwan Country Club in St. James wasn't much to look at, but that didn't bother Lewis. First, he saw a nice piece of land. The Watonwan River ran through the course, which had lovely

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Bob Lewis Jr. and Mike Luckcraft, head golf pro at St. James CC.

Teamwork, communication key

By TED HORTON, CGCS

In my busy life as a golf course superintendent, I could seldom find enough time to accomplish half of the many tasks penciled into my daily, weekly, monthly and yearly to-do lists. How then could I be expected to take time to engineer effective relations with members of my golf course's management staff? I found myself asking, "Why should I take time from my busy schedule for this effort?"

The answer is simple: teamwork and harmonious relationships amongst leaders is an expectation of management. No single employee is more important than another at a golf course.

The golf course management team consists of individual professionals who have what Bruce Williams, superintendent at Los Angeles Country Club, refers to as "different roles for similar goals." Communication and respect for one another are their tools for accomplishing the desires of the golfers and the goals of the golf course.

While speaking to students of a class I teach at the Professional Golfers Career College in Temecula, Calif., Williams talked about relationships between the superintendent and the golf professional.

"It's all about relationships — and too often these relationships are adversarial," he said. "A relationship in harmony means putting issues aside for the common good of the organization."

Williams encouraged students to build harmonious relationships with golf course superintendents and offered the following suggestions:

- Hold regular meetings. Lunch or coffee together doesn't deal with the issues. Formalize the meetings. Rotate the site and allow both parties to develop trust and seek solutions for common problems.
- Maintain an open-door/open-mind policy. Listen to each other's perspectives.
- Coordinate a master calendar. Try to

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Ted Horton, CGCS

FGS building on first contract

By DEREK RICE

HERSHEY, Pa. — Freedom Golf Services (FGS), which was founded by former Gotham Golf Group vice president Allen Dupuy in January, has signed its first management contract. FGS will take over day-to-day operations of Crockett's Ridge Golf Club in Kingsport, Tenn. This includes a scheduled closure begun in May to allow for an extensive course renovation to improve playability and turf conditions.

The deal, Dupuy said, is the first of what could be many that FGS closes this year.

"We have an additional three to five properties with whom we are having discussions," Dupuy said. "Our goal over the next 12 months is to acquire three or four properties of any combination of management, lease or purchase."

Dupuy said the service FGS is seeing the most demand for is its golf course consulting or full-service management, which he said is understandable.

"We feel [this demand] can be directly attributed to the fluctuations in the nation's economy," Dupuy said.

That's not to say there aren't lease or purchase options out there for FGS, Dupuy said.

"We've received as well, albeit to a lesser degree, inquiries from parties seeking to lease or sell their respective courses," he said.

The economy, Dupuy said, was one of the main factors that led him to found FGS. He said he saw an opportunity to get involved with some good properties at good prices.

At Crockett's Ridge, FGS hired Chris Waller as general manager and Raymond Perez superintendent, both of whom have a long relationship with Dupuy and Dan Stonionis, FGS' executive vice president and also a former Gotham vice president.

Going forward, Dupuy said FGS has some clear objectives in mind as it grows.

"The vision for FGS is not to become the largest management firm or course operator in the nation," he said. "We simply try to operate each of our golf properties as if they were our own private venture, and therefore we never lose sight of the primary objective — driving bottom-line net cash flow while being cognizant not to injure customer service."



Troon unveils management system

SCOTTSDALE, Ariz. — Troon Golf has developed and introduced a revenue management system that allows each Troon facility to manage tee time inventory and maximize revenues.

The Troon Golf Revenue Management Program incorporates a proprietary demand-pricing process for each available tee time. The company says it expects investment in this system to translate to greater value and more opportunities for golfers at all of its facilities.

The system was developed in consul-

tation with Sherri Kimes, professor at the Cornell University School of Hotel Management. Kimes' research suggests golf facilities adopt yield-management philosophies similar to the hospitality industry. A pilot at one of Troon's daily fee facilities showed what the company called a significant increase in revenue.

Guy Sugden will serve as Troon's revenue manager and will work directly with reservation agents and operations officers at each of the company's facilities to implement the system.

Lottery winner

Continued from previous page

rolling terrain and a mix of open and wooded tracts.

Second, he analyzed the market. There were 19 nine-hole courses within 30 miles but no other 18-hole facilities. Third, he made sure more land was available because he wanted – and knew that golfers wanted – an 18-hole

course. He found out he could buy 76 adjoining acres from farmers.

In October 1996, Lewis plunked down about half of one annual lottery check – \$212,000 – to buy the course. In 1998, \$1 million later, he opened the vastly improved St. James Country Club. Architect Joel Goldstrand built 11 new holes, 13 new greens and revamped the remaining old holes. A tee-to-green irrigation

system was installed, most of the 62 bunkers, cement cart paths and a driving range.

At 6,832 yards from the back tees and with a slope rating of 136, St. James now is considered one of the best courses in southern Minnesota.

With luck and hard work, Lewis had achieved his first goal: building a quality golf course for south central Minnesota.

He's still working on his second goal, making a profit, but he said he's getting closer and has the financial staying power to succeed.

Lewis hired Luckcraft as his PGA pro and general manager. They have marketed the course to cities within a 40-mile radius and are beginning to see results. "I can see light at the end of the tunnel, and I'm pretty sure it's not a freight train coming the

other way," Lewis said in late May, a few days before collecting his annual Powerball payout, which he refers to as "high holy day."

Life as a millionaire golf course owner hasn't been utopia. In 2001, the Watonwan River flooded his course three times. St. James didn't open until May 9, more than a month behind schedule and after losing potentially thousands of dollars in greens fees.

Lewis, who is on the board of the Midwest Golf Course Owners Association, has no plans to buy another course and tries to keep his avocation as simple as possible. The course and 10,000-square-foot clubhouse close every year Nov. 1. Lewis then heads to Arizona for the winter.

He has four full-time employees, including course superintendent Bruce Leivermann. "I have two dynamite guys. Hopefully I stay out of their way," Lewis said.

Yet Lewis, now 65, still is the boss, driving the 100 miles from his home to St. James at least once a week. He's enjoying his newfound power, unlike the old days when he was a rung on the corporate ladder. Now he chairs his own company meetings, often at a local coffee shop.

Lewis even got his way when the course was redesigned: He ordered Goldstrand to build a square green as a marketing tool. The 185-yard seventh hole has one big postage-stamp green — 70 feet wide, 70 feet deep. "I make sure they mow it square," he said. It's the only square green in Minnesota and maybe in the country, he said.

With luck, vision and hard work, Bob Lewis Jr. has put his stamp on golf in southern Minnesota. ■



BUNKER RENOVATION: CASE STUDY #27

Jack used to struggle with his maintenance budget.

He always looked for ways to control costs yet deliver results.

Over the years, he implemented many new methods and routines.

His bunkers always eluded him.

After most storms, he would spend \$1,800 to \$2,500 on labor,

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his bunker problem and found a solution that works.

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AGC case

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members are allowed to leave.

Doyle also asked the judge to place his \$24,000 membership deposit in escrow because, as he said, if AGC declares bankruptcy, that money – and the money from members of AGC-operated courses across the country – will be lost. Dixon said he was not permitted by law to do that, but, according to the *Daily Herald* (Arlington Heights, Ill.), he did order a hearing to consider extenuating circumstances and determine if AGC is likely to lose its lawsuit and then reconsider freezing the deposit.

AGC is in the midst of a merger with National Golf Properties (NGP), which owns many of the courses AGC manages. The *Los Angeles Times* has indicated that NGP has hinted at bankruptcy in quarterly reports.

Doyle declined to discuss the specifics of the suits at press time, saying that a deal may be in the works. Representatives of AGC did not return calls seeking comment for this story. ■