ASGCA’s GOLFCOURSE-1 TO PROVIDE DEVELOPMENT INFORMATION

CHICAGO — The American Society of Golf Course Architects has created GOLFCOURSE-1 to provide those interested in building a new golf course or remodeling an old one with the appropriate planning guidelines and materials. ASGCA president Damian Pascuzzo will head the effort which is meant to grow the interest in golf course development processes for new construction and remodeling. The package will include information on all types of courses, including par-3, executive and 9-hole layouts. The ASGCA already has many of the materials in place and will be distributing them to individual clubs, municipalities and investment groups. The organization will also add a special section to its Web site (www.asgca.org) for GOLFCOURSE-1.

BRIEFS

RTJ II CREATES DALE FURBER EDUCATIONAL TRUST

Palo Alto, Calif. — Robert Trent Jones Jr. has started the Dale Furber Educational Trust for the son of late Robert Trent Jones II colleague Al Furber. RTJ II has made an initial contribution of $25,000 and hopes to raise an additional $10,000 in matching funds. The money will be available to other golf course architects who have developed a reputation in four short years for visually pleasing and strategically challenging course designs and who are in need. The money will be available to architects working with clients willing to build courses for charitable organizations.

KYLE PHILLIPS RETURNS HOME TO CALIFORNIA

Granite Bay, Calif. — For golf architect Kyle Phillips, things have come full circle. Since establishing his own design firm after a fifteen-year association with Robert Trent Jones II Design Group, Phillips has developed a reputation in four short years for visually pleasing and strategically challenging course designs worldwide. Two of his most noteworthy works, Kingsbarns Golf Links just south of St. Andrews, Scotland, and Golf Eichenhein in Kitzbuhel-Aurach, Austria, have drawn attention to the enthusiastic designer. He began 2002 by returning to California to design and build in the state he calls home.

Phillips is in the rough shaping phase of his latest American project, Morgan Creek Golf Club, a private club under construction near Roseville, Calif. After several projects abroad, Phillips is enjoying the opportunity to work close to home because it allows him to be more hands-on as the course takes shape.

"I approach every course differently," said Phillips. "The surrounding area, the landscape, the ownership, and the overall plan for any course are all factors that major lenders for new golf development do not have a great deal of interest," said Frank. "They're primarily cash flow lenders that like historical cash flows that they can project forward, and they take into account the expertise of the operator.

"If there's a choice between putting money into a new project versus something that has a historical track record, lenders are going to go with the history," he continued. "The biggest source for new construction will likely be local banks or private funding in unusual situations."

Real estate related golf projects are expected to remain consistent regardless of demand, according to Frank. "Because they serve an alternative purpose, to sell lots at an increased rate and to increase absorption," he said. "Developers will continue to build real estate related golf projects not so much that they are self-sufficient but as an amenity to the overall project."

New construction, however, will continue despite financial barriers. In tough economic times, development projects with merit will to proceed, according to Jim McLoughlin with the McLoughlin Group in Pleasantville, Ky. "A soft economy tends to weed out weaker projects before they get off the ground," he said. "Projects that are worthy, that are good for the developer and the local community, will continue to be developed."

DEVLOPERS ARE FOCUSING ON SPECIFIC REGIONS

While industry leaders say development depends on location and demographics, there are some hot spots. According to the NGF, some of the top states for projected openings in the top four regions include: Texas, 31 courses; Florida, 20 courses; Michigan, 18 courses; Ohio, 13 courses; and Arizona, 12 courses.

"The top region is expected to be our South Atlantic region that we project to have 62 openings this year," said Frank.

Raymond Hearn: Industry must learn that less is often more

PLYMOUTH, Mich. — The one matter of seemingly universal agreement concerning the aftermath of Sept. 11 is that things will never be the same, and it is difficult to identify an industry that remains unaffected. Golf is no exception. But like many businesses, shifts in the golf industry have been percolating for some time.

Increased competition for green fees and an overabundance of courses in some areas has been with us for some time now, and the construction of new courses has slowed considerably from the record levels of the 1990s. Plymouth, Mich.-based designer Raymond Hearn addresses possible changes facing the industry and the impact on, and of, golf course architecture.

Golf Course News: What do developers need to consider when contemplating construction of a new course?

Raymond Hearn: Like any number of business endeavors during boom times, the emphasis in the recent past has been on "more is better." The results have often been intriguing, but of course the more bells and whistles in a given design, the greater the construction and maintenance costs are likely to be. As in any business, profitability can only be achieved by passing along these costs to the consumer.

GCN: How does this transition late into specific course features?

Hearn: If we listen to golfers across the board, I believe they're telling us what they want. This includes courses that are easier — "more playable" is the current buzzword — as well as more affordable and, wherever possible, less time-consuming to play. This is especially true of golfers new to the game or contemplating taking it up. In general, this means...
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courses that take maximum advantage of the existing landscape. We’ve paid lip service for years to the notion of “taking what the land gives us,” but implementing the concept has frequently been a different matter.

Q&A

Hearn: Our firm has recently completed, or is nearing completion of three courses with construction budgets in the $1.8 million to $2.3 million range. They are quality designs that allow their owners to charge $25 to $45 per round and have quickly developed an enthusiastic following.

GCN: But as a designer, wouldn’t you prefer a large budget? Doesn’t it make the design process more stimulating?

Hearn: Yes and no. First, it’s hard to object to the idea of a client saying, “Just spend as much as you want, including your fee.” But, understandably, that’s not the way the business is going and, for the reasons cited above, this kind of approach to design isn’t what the game of golf really needs today. There’s nothing wrong with an extravagant golf course project, but I’m not concerned about the guy who can spend $400 for a day at the course. My interest is in accommodating all the people who can’t. Second, designing an entertaining layout using primarily existing landforms and including strategic options for players of all abilities is more challenging, not less, than just moving earth and other features whenever the whim suits you.

Tom Harack is a freelance writer based in New York City.

Kyle Phillips

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must be considered. There is no formula that is right for every golf course, and I strive to accentuate each course’s unique traits in order to make each course an individual statement.

The project at Morgan Creek is a joint venture between Olympic Realty Advisors, the investment of the California retirement fund CALPERS, the Stonebridge Group of Utah, and Lakemont Homes. The entire project has been under the direction of David Cook, who was an investment consultant at Granite Bay Country Club, a 1992 project where Phillips was the lead designer.

SIX YEARS IN THE WORKS

Cook has been working for the past six years to bring the expansive Morgan Creek development through mitigation, but knew all along that he would like to work with Phillips again after the experience at Granite Bay.

"Kyle has the ability to respond to both the site and the needs of the entire project. I feel that he really listens to what we are trying to accomplish and then fits the golf course into that concept," Cook explained.

The site at Morgan Creek has subtle movement, so the key for Phillips was to set a routing plan that would create good sight lines that make the course, not the houses, the main focal point.

"Cook wanted to have a course that has a very traditional look and feel to it. After working in Europe for the past few years, I have gained more appreciation for the design work of architects, such as H.S. Colt, who designed around natural mounds and slopes to create the angles and challenges that make their courses so intriguing. I try to create these types of landforms in my designs and make them seem as if they have been there forever. This is the landscaping challenge I enjoy the most," Phillips explained.

While he continues to have more projects under consideration overseas, Phillips is happy to have more work open up here in the States. His recent renovation work at the Robert Trent Jones Country Club in Virginia drew praise during the 2000 edition of the President’s Cup, and he will be doing more work there this summer. He is also completing environmental impact reports on a daily-fee facility for the city of Alameda, Calif., on a recently decommissioned naval base.