By ANDREW OVERBECK

HUNTSVILLE, Ala. — It was a homecoming of sorts for superintendent Jim Howell when he accepted the grow-in challenge here at The Ledges Country Club. Howell spent seven years in the top job at Hoover Country Club in Birmingham, before leaving to tackle construction work at Country Club of St. Albans outside St. Louis.

"I went up there to finish the Tom Weiskopf/Jay Morrish course and then did the grow-in for the Michael Hurdzan/Dana Fry course," said Howell. "I got to know Michael and Dana really well. Because they knew I had spent time in Alabama and that my wife is from here, they introduced me to the opportunity at The Ledges."

Howell came on board in 1998 and The Ledges opened in April of 2000. The private layout, which is part of The Ledges of Huntsville Mountain real estate development, offers commanding views of downtown Huntsville and the surrounding countryside.

"The course sits at 1,582 feet, the highest point in town," Howell said. "Several holes outline the outside of the mountain. We were fortunate to be able to put the course on the outside of the mountain and put the houses on the inside."

While a number of holes play along cliffs, the layout itself is actually on gently rolling terrain. "The topography fools you," said Howell, "It is fairly flat once you get to the top."