Continuity leads to consistency during club's reconstruction

Editor's note: This article is the first in a series that addresses the long-range planning and implementation of a reconstruction program at Willoughby Golf Club in Stuart, Fla. The course is an 18-hole residential facility that was owned and operated by a development company and then turned over to the membership after 10 years. The membership has now operated the facility for more than four years but the long-range planning began a few years prior to the takeover. Kevin Downing, CGCS, has been the golf course and landscape manager since the inception of the project and provides valuable insight into initiating their long-range plans.

By KEVIN DOWNING

STUART, Fla. — As Willoughby Golf Club embarks in a full-scale renovation project that will involve closing the course for the next six months, proper long-range planning has been a key organizational advantage. I have headed up the renovation planning process which began in 1998. Since I have been at the club from the beginning, I have been able to easily identify what steps need to be taken to improve the layout because I understand the course's mission.

In the late 1980s the developers of Willoughby set out to create golf course that focused on the needs of the average golfer. They wanted to create a stimulating round of golf, but realized that most of the buyers were high-handicap golfers.

The developers originally chose the Arthur Hills design firm because of their ability to work with environmentally sensitive property and because they understood the diverse needs of the eventual homeowners and club membership. I worked closely with their firm and the housing configuration to ensure that the course hit the targeted market. The result was a 6,000-yard course that still challenged all levels of golfers.

As courses mature, the design characteristics and landscape materials can alter the playing conditions of the best golf courses is dependent on the sanctity of par,” he said. “Rather than the sanctity of par, why don’t we just create shots. Suddenly the land requirement is about a third. That was the basis of the Golf Trail concept.”

Golf Trail is the combination of a golf course and a practice facility. Golfers use standard equipment to hit operator-supplied balls to target greens and fairways. Players can add a competitive component to both golfers and home-owners.

**Course to open on donated land**

By DEREK RICE

BATON ROUGE, La. — Thanks to a donation of 200 acres of land and a property tax levy that raised $3.2 million, the East Baton Rouge Parish Recreation and Parks Commission (BREC) will soon open a new flagship golf course, its seventh in the area.

Although there is no set date for the opening of Beaver Creek, Bill Palmer, BREC director, said conditions should dictate a summer opening.

“We don’t have a target date except for somewhere around July or August,” he said. “It’s growing in and doing very well. It’s been a kind of work and the grass really looks good.”

A group of landowners donated the land in 1995, keeping 322 acres for a residential community that is also under construction.

“The land is worth about 2.5 million. That’s a very significant donation,” Palmer said.

Because BREC and the developers have worked together from the start, the two projects will avoid many of the issues encountered by such close neighbors, Palmer said.

“We eliminated a lot of the potential problems by working together in the be-