Desert Challenge facing financial, legal hurdles

By ANDREW OVERBECK

TOLEDO, Ohio — Financial resources have run dry for local developer Jack Sparagowski and his ambitious desert-themed golf course and housing development here in northwestern Ohio. While a desert golf course in an area that gets more than 30 inches of rain a year may have been doomed to failure from the start, Sparagowski and architect Brian Huntley insist the design and concept were sound. The big problem for The Challenge at Desert Village was a lack of financial resources as major golf course lenders fled the golf course market, leaving Sparagowski high and dry. (See related story on page 1).

Sparagowski, whose project has been deserted for the better part of a year, also faces substantial legal obstacles. Genoa Banking Co. filed suit in early September alleging that Sparagowski defaulted on a $200,000 loan issued in August 2001. Jacksonville, Fla.-based golf course builder MacCurrach Golf, which stopped work on the project in August 2000, filed suit in August 2001 against Sparagowski for failing to pay more than $779,404 for construction work and $108,178 in late fees.

ILL-PLEANNED FINANCING

Sparagowski, who used to own a private investigation firm that catered to corporate clients, conceded that the financing plan for the course did not work out as he had hoped. To date he has put $3.2 million of his own money into the project.

"Right from the start, the banker that gave us the mortgage on the property said he would subordinate the golf course portion of the property to a golf course lender," said Sparagowski. "Well, that guy left and went to another bank and the new guy decided that they were not willing to subordinate the golf course property. Then the only way to do it was to find a lender who was going to do both the course and the development and we found there was not such an animal other than the hard-money lenders. There is not a heck of a lot of financing available right now."

According to Alan MacCurrrach, Sparagowski's financial difficulties created significant cash flow difficulties for his firm.

"It was not debilitating in the long-term, but when it happened, we took a cash-flow hit because we had to overcome the substantial expenses in manpower, equipment and materials that we had put into the project," said MacCurrrach. Sparagowski said he refused to pay MacCurrrach because he believed that he had been over billed for the work.

"We surveyed the property and found that the amount of earth MacCurrrach said he moved was not accurate," said Sparagowski. "We came up with a figure of $271,000 that was over billed. They also caused $47,000 worth of damage to construction equipment from Nation's Rent. He wouldn't reduce his charges, so I terminated his contract."

Experience changes firm's approach to golf market

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. — MacCurrach Golf's experience at The Challenge at Desert Village and the subsequent slow down in golf course construction have changed the way MacCurrrach approaches new jobs.

"The error I made was not digging into the background of the ownership," he said. "That's an error I won't make again. In bid meetings it is taboo to stand up and ask how the owners plan on financing the defaulted. Not everyone guys do that, but I do now. If the client is too scared to answer, you might not want to be working there."

According to MacCurrrach, since the financing landscape changed, problems that were usually hurdles for projects are now project killers.

Children's Golf Foundation enjoys inaugural success

By ANDREW OVERBECK

WEST PALM BEACH, Fla. — The Children's Golf Foundation has had a successful first season at its Tarn O'Shanter Teaching facility, dedicated to teaching golf to disabled kids. The facility is named in tribute to a capped kid, we have holes that are 10 yards in length and we can have a hole that is 310 yards in length," Stuhler designed the course and

Stuhler has been working on the golf learning center for handicapped children for the past 12 years. Prior to the construction of the facility, Stuhler and his staff would conduct classes on-site at schools. Now kids come to a 15-acre facility that was designed with them in mind.

The course features a 25,000-square-foot teeing area, an 8,000-square-foot putting green and a 3,000-square-foot clubhouse. The driving range provides four holes of varying length.

"We have progressed from teaching golf at schools to getting the kids out shooting and putting," Stuhler said. "Then we get them to play the course. We can set up the course specific to their abilities. For instance, for a severely handicapped kid, we have holes that are 10 yards in length and we can have a hole that is 310 yards in length." Stuhler designed the course and

The message was simple: golfers can contribute to the health of the golf course by repairing ball marks properly.

"There are a lot more ball marks out there than there are greenkeepers or hours in the day," said Bob Lapic, superintendent at Orrinda Country Club and vice president of the Nor Cal GCSA. "We want to educate golfers that ball marks left by lifting the ball mark turn into a brown spot," he said. "But by lifting it he is tearing the roots and spreading the problem beyond the crater. The perimeter of the ball mark. We give people a card that shows the proper method of turning the tool and pushing the crater of the ball mark toward the center.

The 600 members of the association were on hand at their individual courses to demonstrate the proper method of repairing ball marks. While golfers on the PGA Tour often lift and push up the turf to create a smooth putting surface, Lapic and others will explain why that is the incorrect method. "The professional golfer doesn't care if that ball mark turns into a brown spot," he said. "But by lifting

PGA awards Air Force-related grants

PALM BEACH GARDENS, Fla. — The PGA of America, through its Growth of the Game Grant Program, has awarded two grants to programs that focus on children of men and women who serve in the U.S. Air Force.

Both the Eisenhower Junior Golf Academy, which received $8,000, and the LPGA Urban Youth Golf Program of Delaware, which received $10,400, use golf as a way to teach life skills to children whose parents are often away on active duty for months at a time.

The player development program of the Eisenhower Junior Golf Academy has been so successful that a new player development program has been established to accommodate the parents who have been asking for instruction. The program is also being implemented at Air Force bases around the country, with a goal of helping military families spend more time together through golf.

The LPGA Urban Youth Golf Program of Delaware works with at-risk children. Now in its eighth year, the program recently established a partnership with the Dover Air Force Base. Through this relationship, the program now reaches up to 100 children of Air Force parents annually.

The PGA of America's grants for growth of the game and community outreach have totaled more than $22 million.

Nor Cal GCSA declares war on ball marks

By ANDREW OVERBECK

NAPA, Calif. — The Northern California Golf Course Superintendents Association declared war on ball marks during its "Ball Mark Repair Week" in early October.

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