

IGM faces lawsuit in N.J.

By ANDREW OVERBECK

EMERSON, N.J. — Meadowbrook Golf's growing contract maintenance division, International Golf Management (IGM) has hit a roadblock in New Jersey, losing five contracts in the state over the last year.



Scott Zakany

While portfolio fluctuations are a normal part of the contract maintenance business, these losses have been punctuated by two lawsuits. Emerson Golf Club's owners United Properties Group (UPG) filed suit against IGM in April seeking damages for lost revenues and reconstruction costs due to deteriorating maintenance conditions. IGM also has filed suit against Battleground Country Club in Tennent for nonpayment of amounts owing.

In the Emerson lawsuit, club officials and lawyers for both sides declined to comment for this story, but the allegations state that IGM "improperly irrigated, fertilized and otherwise improperly maintained Emerson and allowed its condition to deteriorate to such a point that the course was rendered unsuitable for use by golfers."

As a result of the poor conditions at Emerson, UPG decided to close the course in September 2001 and shift play to its sister course, Valley Brook Golf Club in Rivervale. The lawsuit said this situation caused UPG to lose revenues because they were forced to rebook outings at Valley Brook at the reduced fees charged at Emerson. As a result, the owners allege both courses suffered damaged reputations and conditions at Valley Brook suffered from heavy play. Both courses are still charging reduced rates this season to drive play back to the layouts.

According to Scott Zakany, executive vice president for IGM, the poor conditions at Emerson GC were due to poor construction.

"Last summer was a tough summer in New Jersey with heat and rainfall," he said. "We lost three greens because they were 85 to 95 percent Poa annua. The rest of the course was in great shape. These greens don't drain, they are bowls. When they don't drain they stay saturated. When you have saturated cool-season grass baking in the sun with poor drainage, you can't water it.

"They lost greens for several years prior to IGM coming on property, and they lost them again this year after IGM ended the relationship with the course," Zakany added.

P.B. Dye doing his part for affordable golf

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resort, restaurant and marina.

"I was brought in eight years ago to look at the property," said Dye. "Then I got diagnosed with cancer and took a two-year hiatus from the golf world. But we got back going on it in 1999 and I brought Jack Harris in to operate and manage the project."



The sixth green at Buck's Point.

Harris and Davis are major keys to the development of Buck's Point. Both have made five-year commitments to the project and bring valuable experience along with them. Harris, who has been in upper management at steel and paper mills for the past 35 years and is a master machinist, is handling the general manager and mechanic duties and Davis, who has worked with Dye since 1987, is overseeing construction and is the superintendent.

Once the course was approved in July 2000, Harris quit his job in North Carolina and moved to the area to begin construction on the course with Dye. They broke ground in November and the last seed hit the ground a year later. Despite a wet spring, which temporarily flooded the seventh and 11th holes, grow-in is almost complete. All 18 holes are scheduled to open this month.

The wide-open, 7,104-yard course sits on rolling land and offers outstanding views of the lake. The course has Pennlinks bentgrass from tee to green and a mixture of fescue, ryegrass and bluegrass in the roughs.

"I built the best golf course on the piece of land that I could and just kept going," said Dye. "It is a very playable design. But there are a couple of par-3s out there that are tougher than yacht's braid. Once this thing

gets fully-grown in there will be no hay in play. I hate hay. We want to have people find the golf ball and play it. I tried to create as big a playing surface as I could. This is just a good old farm golf course."

Part of the secret of the low development costs were the scaled back construction methods used to build the course. The greens are all topsoil and less than 250,000 cubic yards of earth were moved to form the layout. Dye also brought in his own shapers and equipment from other jobs to piece the construction of the course together.

Other cost cutting measures included using used Rain Bird irrigation heads that were bought for \$5 a piece and buying mostly used equipment.

"We have one brand-new piece of equipment," said Davis. "The rest I have bought used. This winter I found a tine seeder for \$160 and a five-gang pull-behind mower to use during grow-in for \$150. Jack is such a good mechanic that anything I buy, he can fix."

Dye is out to prove that quality golf can be built for less.

"I didn't approach this project any differently, but I built it for half the price. We are trying to build a very inexpensive 18-hole golf course," he said. "The market will support low greens fees and we will come in below \$40, including golf cart and range balls. We want people to go out there, beat the ball around and have fun."

With more than 1.2 million people visiting the lake every year, Harris is confident that the course will succeed. "We are less than one hour from Cincinnati and the lake attracts people from Indianapolis and Dayton, Ohio," he said. ■

"Now they are pointing the finger and allege the conditions cost them lost revenue."

IGM assumed maintenance duties for Emerson and Valley Brook in February 2001. Meadowbrook Golf had managed both of the clubs since 1998.

UPG's suit also claims that Meadowbrook was negligent in not imparting "its actual

and imputed knowledge of the agronomic, horticultural and maintenance condition of Emerson and Valley Brook to IGM so that the course could be properly maintained."

The lawsuit is scheduled for arbitration and the court was due to select an arbitrator by the end of August.

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N.Y. course recovers quickly from activists' vandalism

By ANDREW OVERBECK

JERICHO, N.Y. — In a communiqué issued July 31, the Animal Liberation Front (ALF) took responsibility for vandalizing three greens at The Meadow Brook Club, the host of the Senior PGA Tour's Lightpath Long Island Classic, which was held the first weekend in August. The damage, however, did not disrupt the tournament.

The vandals struck sometime during the night of July 29, digging holes with shovels on the second, fourth and fifth greens. The green on the par-3, 195-yard fourth hole suffered the most damage with an 18-inch wide by one-foot deep hole dug around the cup right in the center of the green.

"We found the damage at 5:30 a.m. Tuesday morning," said superintendent John Carlone. "We had holes two and five fixed and back into play that morning but we had to close the fourth green." All 18 holes were ready to go for the tournament by Friday.

On the fourth green, Carlone's crew took sod from the back of the green and placed it over the damaged section. They then patched the back of the green with

sod from their on-site nursery.

As a result of the damage, the tournament's pro-am was shortened to a 17-hole event and the fourth hole was shortened for the competition.

"We reduced the size of the hole so they could hit shorter irons," said PGA Tour media official Dave Senko. "Instead of 195 yards it was 150 yards. Otherwise, we proceeded as normal."

Carlone planned to nurture the turf following the tournament.

"Over the long-term I will grow these patches back in raising the height of cut and doing some light liquid fertilization applications to make sure they heal as quickly as possible," he said.

According to the ALF's communiqué the group targeted The Meadow Brook Club because one of its members has ties to a firm that conducts animal research. The vandals apparently entered the 270-acre property at one of the most remote areas, three-quarters of a mile from the clubhouse and one mile away from the maintenance facility.

The Nassau County Police Department's Special Investigations Unit is handling the case.

Construction down, participation up, according to first Golf 20/20 report

By DEREK RICE

PONTE VEDRA BEACH, Fla. — Gone are the boom days of the 1990s, when new course openings were at an all-time high.

New course openings are becoming fewer and farther between as the industry tries to adjust to new participation levels, according to the first annual Golf Industry Report from Golf 20/20, which takes a look at the state of various aspects of the game.

In fact, the report concludes, fewer courses are being planned and opened now than at any time in the last decade, and an increasingly smaller percentage of those being planned and opened are public-access courses.

The increase in the number of courses in recent years have gone from 3.2 percent in 2000 to 2.1 in 2001 percent. The projected increase this year is only 1.8 percent. However, given no change in rounds played from 2000 to 2001, the average number of rounds per course went from 33,737 in 2000 to 33,000 in 2001.

Last year also saw the closing of 32 courses, five of which are scheduled to reopen in the future. Of the remaining 27,

22 closed for financial reasons, while the others closed for either environmental reasons or because they were designated by a public entity for public use, such as

a highway. Where these courses have closed, the land has been used for everything from schools to housing developments. Twenty-five of these 27 courses were daily-fee and two were municipal.

However, all the news in the report was not gloomy. Among the other findings are:

- The number of participants rose from 36 million in 2000 to 37.1 million in 2001, which meets the industry's objective of adding one million participants (defined as someone five or older who has played at least one round of regulation golf or used an alternative facility or golf range in the last 12 months) per year from 2000 to 2020. On the other hand, the number of golfers (someone 18 or older who has played at least one round of regulation golf in the last 12 months) increased only slightly, from 25.4 million to 25.8 million.
- Studies in 2001 indicate an increase in the number of occasional golfers (one to

YEAR	NO. OF COURSES	OPENINGS	% INCREASE
1998	14,444	407	2.9
1999	14,887	443	3.1
2000	15,357	470	3.2
2001	15,709	352	2.3
2002*	15,994	285	1.8

*projected

Source: Golf 20/20

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Marketing focus on the rise

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data and analyzed market trends to determine that the club was best suited for serving corporate golf clients and travel and tour operators. To address these findings, the club hired Don Smith as corporate alliance manager and Kristian Anderson as tour and travel manager. Taking its cue from client suggestions, the club has introduced a corporate play program and a season ticket package, both of which are designed to make it easier for corporate clients to use golf for business purposes.

Once Intrawest has an idea how well the program is doing at South Mountain, it will look at the sales structures at the rest of its nearly 30 golf courses across North America to see if their sales and marketing processes can be adapted to better serve clients.

CAUGHT IN THE WEB

Championsgate, Fla.-based Meadowbrook Golf Inc., like many course owners, managers and operators, has taken to the Internet to draw attention to its course portfolio. Most of the courses were already online, but the Meadowbrook program provides a sense of uniformity and, through partnerships with Scottsdale, Ariz.-based In One Advertising & Design and Edmonds, Wash.-based Cybergolf, provides new marketing opportunities.

"The Internet allows us to further enhance customer profiling characteristics, increase golfer convenience, as well as develop one-to-one marketing programs based on individual behavior," said Mike Kelly, Meadowbrook's vice president of marketing and development.

Kim Allison, president and creative director of In One, saw an opportunity in rounds played data and market saturation. Her firm has developed a cottage industry around helping owners and managers market their courses, which Allison said is based on both a "business and pleasure" approach.

"We understand both the finance and the fun of golf, and have applied that understanding to the production of advertising campaigns and collateral materials that help put our clients on the map in their respective markets," Allison said.

In One also helps courses find low-cost means for promoting non-golf services, which Allison said is something many owners and managers have yet to consider.

"Many golf properties simply do not have the budget to produce high-quality promotional pieces to market their ancillary services, which are becoming increasingly more important to a course's bottom line in a tough economy," Allison said. "While those areas were not always a high priority for

many golf courses, savvy owners and operators will make them a priority in the future."

This isn't simply a case of someone unfamiliar with an industry swooping in to reap the benefits of a down time. Prior to founding In One, Allison was communications and creative director for American Golf Corp. ■

Golf 20/20

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seven rounds per year) and a decrease in the number of core golfers (eight to 24 rounds) and in avid golfers (25 or more rounds). Yet the average number of rounds played per golfer decreased only slightly, from 20.41 to 20.08.

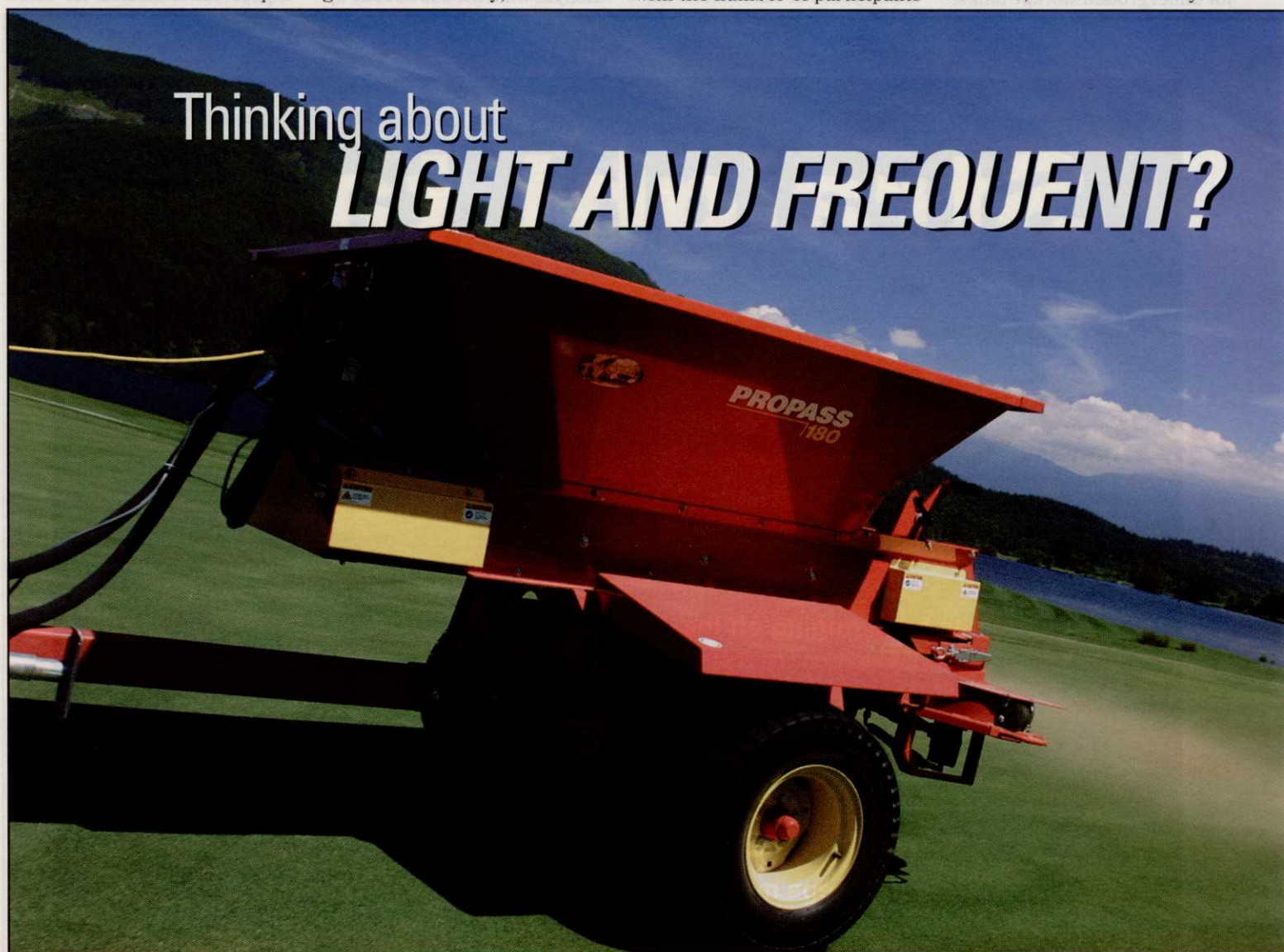
The report concludes that given the economy, the events

of Sept. 11 and particularly poor weather in several key parts of the country, 2001 more than held its own. These factors were also cited in findings from the NGF and the National Golf Course Owners Association as reasons why rounds played were flat in 2001 (GCN Aug. 2002).

Positive notes indicated in the report are that interest in the game continues to grow, along with the number of participants

and the number of golfers. This good news is tempered by the apparent decrease in the number of return golfers on the higher end of the spectrum, which the industry must address.

The report was supposed to be released in May, but the process of gathering data from so many varied sources proved to be more time-consuming than expected. Next year's report, however, will be out in May. ■



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