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.

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 on this suit or 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."

"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.

IGM's suit also claims that Meadowbrook was negligent in not impoting "its actual and imputed knowledge of the agronomic, horticultural and maintenance condition of Emerson and Valley Brook to IGM so that they had at least one round 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 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, recutting 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 main parking lot.

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 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 took 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 and number of registered golfers 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 26 courses, five of which are scheduled to reopen in the future. Of the remaining 22, 20 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 are closed, the land has been used for everything from schools to housing developments. Twenty-five of these 27 courses were daily-fee and five 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 at least one million participants (defined as someone five or older who has played at least one round of regulation golf 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 four rounds per year) by 84,000, including a 9 percent increase in females.

• The cost of golf equipment or the price of a round of golf is not a factor for most players to play less often. However, younger players (ages 18-24) are more inclined to cut back on rounds when cost is a factor.

• More than 80 percent of the 9.6 million casual players who played 13 to 19 rounds in 2000 plan to play the same amount in 2001, while only 10 percent plan to cut back.

• The number of junior golfers has increased from 1.1 million in 2000 to 1.3 million in 2001, with the bulk of the increase in the 18-24 age group.

• The number of junior golfers aged 10-15 years increased to 660,000 from 640,000.

• Less than one percent of all golfers age 50 or older (250,000) have taken a golf lesson in the past year.

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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.