

# GOLF COURSE NEWS

THE BUSINESS NEWSPAPER FOR THE GOLF COURSE INDUSTRY

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Superintendents Steven Cook and Timothy T. O'Neill debate the merits of changing the GCSAA's articles of incorporation.

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## COUNTERPOINT

## Redstone GC ready for '03 Tour stop

By DEREK RICE

HOUSTON — After a couple false starts due to bad weather in Houston, Redstone Golf Management was finally able to open its



Dick Harmon

first 18-hole course at Redstone Golf Club in early December.

Designed by Jim Hardy and Peter Jacobsen,

the course will host the 2003 Shell Houston Open two weeks after The Masters. A second 18-hole course, designed by Rees Jones, is currently in progress and is expected to open in fall 2004. The Jacobsen/Hardy course will be private, while the Jones course will be open to the public. The Shell Houston Open will move to the Jones course in 2005.

Jacobsen and Hardy turned the existing course at Redstone GC into a 7,508-yard course. Upon completion of the Jones course, the facility, which also includes a 31,000-square-foot teeing area for

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## Audubon sets 50 percent goal for 2007



Audubon International helps create protected natural areas on golf courses, such as this one at Keswick Club in Virginia.

By ANDREW OVERBECK

SELKIRK, N.Y. — Audubon International has unveiled an ambitious membership drive to attain 50 percent participation from the 17,000-plus golf courses in the United States over the next five years.

Currently 13 percent of the courses across the country have joined either the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program or the Audubon Signature Cooperative Sanctuary program. Two percent of all courses in the U.S. have achieved Certified Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary status.

"This is an ambitious effort,"

said Kevin Fletcher, director of programs. "Now is the time to be bold and make this happen."

The plan has five objectives, said Fletcher:

- Make sure that all 17,000-plus courses know the Audubon International program exists.
- Find out why those who know about the program have not joined.
- Do a better job of explaining the benefits of the program to the environment, job satisfaction and overall golf course budget.
- Dispel any myths about the program and its difficulty.
- Work more with the industry

as a whole by communicating more with golf course managers, owners, management companies, developers and suppliers.

### WHY HAVEN'T MORE JOINED?

At the core of the membership initiative is figuring out why

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## GCSAA TO TACKLE LONG LIST OF INITIATIVES

LAWRENCE, Kan. — The last 18 months have been anything but quiet at the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America headquarters here. From introducing an e-commerce venture, to proposing a dues increase, to studying the relocation of its headquarters, the association has kept busy. Budget shortfalls and slipping numbers for the upcoming show in Atlanta have added to the organization's growing to-do list.

Golf Course News recently caught up with GCSAA CEO Stephen F. Mona to discuss the association's list of initiatives and ongoing challenges.



Stephen F. Mona

**Golf Course News:** Where does the GCSAA want to be in five years?

**Mona:** We have five specific goals that we want to achieve by 2007. Number one, we want the superintendent to be viewed as the key to the economic vitality of the golf facility. Second, we want the

superintendent to be viewed as a key to the enjoyment of the game. Third, we want the GCSAA to be viewed as one of golf's leading organizations. If we have high visibility and credibility, than so do superintendents. Fourth, we want to be seen as the authoritative source for information and continued education for the golf course management profession. And finally, we want to be recognized as a leader in helping golf courses make a positive impact on the environment.

**GCN:** How do you respond to the criticism from some members

Continued on page 13

## Gotham Golf merger hits snag in court

By DEREK RICE

NEW YORK — The long-planned and now shareholder-approved merger between First Union Real Estate Equity and Mortgage and Hershey, Pa.-based Gotham Golf Corp. hit a snag in early December when the New York Supreme Court for New York County granted an injunction blocking the transaction.

At issue is compensation for preferred shareholders vs. that for common shareholders. One preferred shareholder, George Kimmel, filed a lawsuit in April seeking class-action status.

Under the original plan, First Union shareholders

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## Irwin designing Minnesota gem

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course designer and three-time U.S. Open champion Hale Irwin.

And then there are two new golf course home-site owners, Minnesota Gov. Jesse Ventura and his wife, Terry. Ventura has announced plans to live at the Jewel sometime after he leaves office in 2003. He did not run for re-election in November.

Greg Matz, director of sales at the Jewel, said he realized what the project meant to the city of 4,500 recently when an elderly gentleman who had lived in Lake City all his life said, "Well, it's finally happened: Lake City has been discovered."

The project has been moving quickly after several years of work to gain city approval. Most of the course shaping, which is being done by Sema Golf of Scottsdale, Ariz., will take place in 2003, with an eye toward a July 2004 opening.

The Jewel is one of several golf courses currently being developed by Hale Irwin Design, a company Irwin founded in 1986.

Mississippi Jewel Land Development Co. is spending \$8 million to build the golf course and \$50 million on infrastructure to develop the land, Matz said. The eventual retail value of the land is expected to be \$250 million to \$300 million.

The golf course will have five

sets of tees, bentgrass throughout and stretch to 7,000 yards. "No two holes will be alike," Irwin said. "We have some dynamic



Work continues at the Jewel, which is scheduled to open in July 2004.

holes and others that may have started out bland but will be very nice."

It will open as a public course and gradually become restricted as more members join, Matz said.

In addition to designing 25 courses, Irwin's company is part owner in three others, including the Jewel.

By buying into the courses it is building, Irwin's company "can add value to the project, and that will help us gain entry into more projects," Meyer said.

By becoming a partner in a project such as the Jewel, Irwin said, "We give investors and owners confidence that we're in for the long haul with them."

Stan Gentry, who has been with Irwin since 1991, is the on-site architect responsible for overseeing Irwin's designs, Meyer said.

"What sets us apart is the owner - Hale's personality," Meyer said.

"The same seriousness and vigor, the way he approaches competitive golf, is the way he approaches his business."

Irwin said he always has felt comfortable with designing courses. "My greatest learning curve has come from knowing the needs of the owner/developer. I didn't know that much about that side," Irwin said.

His philosophy, he said, is to design courses that are enjoyable and challenging for all handicaps. That approach was summed up by Meyer. "At the end of the day, Hale doesn't want people to say 'Who designed this?' but 'That was fun, and, oh, by the way, who was the designer?'" Meyer said. ■

## Redstone readies for Tour stop

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a double-ended practice facility, will encompass 440 yards.

Redstone brought in respected golf instructor Dick Harmon as director of golf in November, in anticipation of the club's opening. Harmon came over from the Redstone-managed Houstonian Golf and Country Club.

"Those who have played this course before will not recognize it," Harmon said. "The course has gone through major improvements and is in beautiful shape right now. It will challenge players very well."

Harmon, who has been named general chairman of the 2003 Tour Championship to be played in Nov. 2003 at Champions Golf Club, will open a second Dick Harmon School of Golf at the course.

Among the improvements Jacobsen and Hardy made to the existing course were the installation of a computerized Toro irrigation system and TifEagle greens and TifSport fairways.

Jacobsen said the course will play with a level of difficulty for everyone, from the pros on down to juniors.

"I think the pros will find it difficult because of the length of the golf course (7,508 yards), but also fun and interesting because of the variation of the holes, he said. "When you need to make a course harder, just make it longer. We also made sure the course is playable in all types of weather, with particular attention given to drainage, given the weather in Houston." ■

## Firm assists owners with renovations

Continued from page 10

This is also the type of challenge that the consulting firm of Professional Golfscape Services is being contacted to deal with.

President Ron Miller and his firm have 20 years of experience in golf construction and maintenance to assist owners and operators with golf course operations. Not surprisingly, his firm has seen an increase in activity in Northern California and the West, as many courses, both private and public, look to retool themselves

in the changing golf market.

"Through the years of working around various landscape projects I felt that there was a need for a firm to help direct courses through the various facets of construction and renovation. This led to the creation of our consulting firm, Professional Golfscape Services," Miller said.

The surge of new golf construction has given golfers more playing options. Older courses feel the need to upgrade their facilities to be competitive with new layouts, and new courses are pressured to hold their market share to pay off their construction expenditures. With a slower economy, the golfing public is careful about where and how much they spend to play golf.

"Here in Northern California there were 27 golf projects that had been planned for over 15 years, but they all were built over the last five years. This influx has changed the region dramatically," Miller said. "What we have begun to realize is that the old business model for golf just doesn't work anymore. Just building a new course does not ensure success. We feel it is important that our clients look at where they want to position themselves for future success when they think of major renovation outlays."

Miller feels the biggest change is how people look at discretionary income. Recreational and leisure activities used to be two sepa-

rate entities. Now these two interests have merged into lifestyle activities, which is why large real estate based developments offer not only golf but swimming, exercise facilities, biking and hiking trails, and restaurants to fill all the lifestyle needs.

"The new developments are aware just golf is not enough to secure success and now offer more. This trend to a different business model is putting pressure on established private clubs, municipal golf courses, and privately owned daily-fee courses," he said. "We help clients work toward a new business model when they consider any renovation project. It is important to have a broad plan that covers the need to reposition themselves in this new business climate."

Miller's firm helps facilities develop a game plan to tackle renovation projects in-house. He assists in permitting, can provide architectural services, and can recommend golf construction firms. Miller focuses on attention to detail so clients won't get bogged down when a project begins.

But as much as the dealing with the nuts and bolts of a construction project, Professional Golfscape Services stresses the need to take a look at the big picture. Miller knows that while large operators and developers can capitalize using global tactics, smaller operators need to develop new alliances to help them thrive.

"I think all golf course operations have to take a strong look at themselves and define what they are in order to know how they will fit into this new business environment. Our contribution has been to help our renovation clients take that hard look in order to thrive in the future," Miller said. ■

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