BRIEFS

QUALITY GRASSING BREAKS GROUND ON RENOVATION

LITHIA, Fla. — Quality Grassing & Services Inc., winner of the 2002 Golf Course News Large Builder of the Year Award, has begun work on a $1.6 million renovation at Point Mallard Golf Course in Decatur, Ala. The renovation began last month and includes rebuilding all 18 greens and completing extensive tee, irrigation, drainage and car path renovations.

Architect John LaFoy is overseeing the work.

HEARN/ALBANESE HIRES MARKETING FIRM

BLOOMFIELD HILLS, Mich. — Raymond Hearn/Paul Albanese Golf Course Designs Inc. has hired Golf Marketing Services to handle its marketing and public relations efforts. Hearn/Albanese hired Golf Marketing Services to handle promotion of several high-profile projects the firm has coming online in the next few years. Among the firm's current projects are Egg Island Golf & Yacht Club in North Eleuthera, Bahamas, and Mill Creek Golf Club in Rochester, New York.

CUPP-DESIGNED OLD ORANGE UNDERWAY

FORT MEYERS, Fla. — Initial development has begun on Old Orange, an 18-hole Bob Cupp-designed golf course at Veranda, the Bonita Bay Group's master-planned community here. The course is scheduled to open later this year. Work began in mid-December and has involved digging lakes, beginning drainage work and moving dirt. Bonita Bay expects to begin grassing the course in March or April.

LUMMI DEVELOPMENT CHANGING NAME

ATLANTA — Lummi Development Inc. will change its name to Signature Horizons Group Inc. in mid-March. Signature Horizons acquired a controlling interest in Lummi in October. The company is also moving toward closing its acquisition of Sea Trail Plantation and Golf Links in Sunset Beach, N.C.

BUNKER RENOVATION PROTECTS PELICAN HILL'S 'FAZIO LOOK'

By Andrew Overbeck

NEWPORT BEACH, Calif. — Work is underway here at Pelican Hill Golf Club to renovate all 125 bunkers and protect Tom Fazio's original design. Director of agronomy Steve Thomas is overseeing the renovation, which began in late January.

"Over the last 12 years the bunkers have lost the 'Fazio look,'" said Thomas. "We wanted to maintain the character of the original design and get back the fat bunker lip. "We will make some architectural changes by expanding some bunkers and making others smaller," he added. "We will also improve drainage and put in a higher-quality sand."

The Irvine Co., which owns and manages the 36-hole club, decided to shut the South Course down entirely and shift play to the North Course while renovation work took place. When the South Course re-opens in March, work will commence on the North Course.

"That is one of the benefits to being 36 holes," said Thomas. "The smaller course made it a good time of year to go ahead and close a course, because it is typically our rainy season when play is lower."

The company brought in two builders, Jessup, Md.-based McDonald & Sons and La Quinta, Calif.-based Peerless Golf Inc.

OPENINGS DECLINE FOR SECOND CONSECUTIVE YEAR

JUPITER, Fla. — For the second consecutive year, golf course openings in the United States slowed, according to the National Golf Foundation's (NGF) Golf Facilities in the U.S. Report. The NGF said the report may signal that construction is coming back in line with demand.

In 2002, approximately 240 golf courses, measured as 18-hole equivalents, opened. This number is down 13 percent over 2001 and down 36 percent from 2000, which was the 15-year peak. However, there is some good news to be gleaned from the report. The NGF predicts development will stabilize in 2003, based on the number of courses already under construction that are expected to open this year.

DEVELOPERS LEARN FROM DARK HORSE EXPERIENCE

By Doug Saunders

AUBURN, Calif. — Last year, the latest entry into the crowded Northern California golf market, Dark Horse Golf Club, opened for play, culminating a 13-year struggle to bring a quality public golf venue to the Sierra foothill region. The developers, Ed Fralick and his son Chad, are heartened to see the tee sheets begin to fill up with players after spending so much time, energy and money wading through permitting meetings, EIRs and mitigation to bring the 7,218-yard Keith Foster-designed layout on line.

The rambling track flows over 420 acres of land that are defined by dramatic elevation changes, a series of natural wetlands and thick stands of mature oak trees.
Pelican Hills GC retains ‘Fazio look’

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To protect the investment in sand, all the bunkers will be partially lined with Sandtrapper. “We have put it on the faces and we will run it down to the drain lines,” said Thomas. “The new sand is supposed to be better at holding on the faces, but with better drainage and the Sandtrapper, I think we will have good luck keeping sand on our faces.”

“Any time we are pulling the edges off to get back to the original paint line and doing a lot of hand work cleaning up roots and contaminated sand. We are loading up our top dressers and putting it out on the same fairway,” Thomas said. “It saves us from having to haul it away.”

According to Thomas’ calculations, there will be enough old bunker sand to put down a quarter-inch layer of topdressing on both courses. Barring any weather delays, Thomas expects all 36 holes to be up and running by April 1 with all new bunkers.

**Development slide**

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over the last five years can be attributed to a slowdown in development of public courses, particularly high-end daily-fee courses. Development of private clubs has remained steady, averaging about 59 per year. However, the NGF said private courses as a percent of supply are expected to continue to gradually decline from 30 percent to 25 percent due to more public courses being built and conversions of private clubs to daily fee.

“The downturn had to come sooner or later,” said Jim Kass, NGF research director. “Simple economies dictate that with demand increasing only about 1.5 percent a year, development could not continue at historic levels. And while some golf course operators are hurting, there are still markets where it’s appropriate to build.”

NGF research shows that from 1986 to 1990, demand outpaced supply, but from 1991 to the present, the opposite occurred. The ratio of golfers to courses today is returning to 1986 levels, about 1,900 golfers per 18-hole equivalent.

The decline in new construction should be good news to many operators who have seen downward pressure on their revenue per round in the face of increased competition, the NGF said. While that pressure is not expected to decrease in the near future, the NGF expects the combination of grow-the-game efforts and a slowdown in new supply to eventually relieve that pressure.

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