GMACCM enters golf lending sector with a bang

By DEREK RICE

RED BANK, N.J.—GMAC Commercial Mortgage (GMACCM) recently entered the golf lending market with a splash—by providing $650 million in financing to the investor group that purchased National Golf Properties (NGP) and American Golf Corp. (AGC), both of Santa Monica, Calif. GMACCM provided the financing to the Capital Partners 2001 and Starwood Capital Group. Pillsbury left AGC in February, after the company was involved with many industry organizations. While the majority of the locations are located in the United States. While this was one of the largest standalone, single-transaction financing deals in the history of the golf industry, GMACCM isn’t resting there, said GMACCM executive vice president Jerry Earnest, who heads the company’s specialty lending and hospitality and golf finance groups.

“We’d like to talk to good players. We’re looking to do portfolio transactions if we can but also if it makes sense to do individual transactions as well. We have an appetite for both,” he said. “We’re active, we’re here to stay and it’s still a relatively competitive market from our perspective.”

While the company is affiliated with former golf lender GMAC, Earnest said because the two are separate entities, this is more of an entry into the market than a return.

“It’s really a first foray. There was a mortgage banker who worked for the company four or... Continued on next page

Forecaddies keep the pace at Bear’s Best

By DEREK RICE

DALLAS — Slow play on golf courses is not only an inconvenience for golfers, but can also be a revenue buster for golf courses. If players aren’t moving around the course in a timely fashion, it affects the number of groups a course can move through on a given day.

Slow play affects players’ perception of the course, and may be a leading factor in their decision not to return on another occasion. At a resort course, like Dallas-based ClubCorp’s Bear’s Best clubs in Atlanta and Las Vegas, where there are few regulars who know the course well, one would expect slow play to be a part of the package. However, ClubCorp has found that an antiquated service instituted at the clubs has helped address this age-old problem. Through forecaddie programs, the courses have been able to maintain average round times that are more than a half-hour shorter than at other area clubs. Continued on page 30

GolfGM adds equipment financing division

By DEREK RICE

SCOTTSDALE, Ariz. — In an effort to give key decision-makers and members of the buying team more flexibility in purchases, golf business solutions provider GolfGM debuted GolfGM Finance in March.

According to GolfGM’s president and CEO Elliot Lewis, industry need drove the creation of the program.

“The golf industry has sorely needed a program like GolfGM Finance,” he said. “The industry’s leading vendors and hundreds of PGA professionals and purchasing managers facilitated the creation of GolfGM Finance. These industry leaders envisioned a financing program that enabled vendors and courses to do more business in a more efficient manner.”

Through the GolfGM Finance program, facilities will be able to finance up to $50,000 in purchases from GolfGM’s participating vendors, which represent more than 40 companies.

In addition, facilities will be able to extend payment terms to up to 150 days.

Lewis said the program will help courses and other facilities from having to make difficult cuts, which are prevalent in this lagging economy. Continued on page 22

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Slow play doesn’t have to be a way of life
Continued from page 19

to that the fact that the real solution plays into every manager’s greatest fear; no wonder this problem has plagued the game for decades.

To solve the slow play problem, I use a “management/player equation.” On one side are all the management operational elements, and on the other side are all the player elements. Until now, most slow play tools and solutions have focused on fixing only the player’s side of the equation, where small improvements could be made but radical and consistent change was impossible. Today, using my Pace Manager Systems approach, we create a partnership in which management and players share the responsibility and the problem can be solved.

First, managers must learn how to properly load the course. Poor loading and overcrowding cause players to slow to a crawl like cars on a congested freeway. Finding the right rhythm for the course maintains a smoother flow onto the course and makes it possible in many cases to accommodate more groups, dispelling a manager’s greatest fear. Secondly, managers must provide and use tools to monitor and manage the flow of play from sunup to sundown, day after day.

When I work with a course, they learn to do just that. Over a decade of helping courses improve their operations, I’ve catalogued all the seemingly hundreds of things that cause slow play into five functional areas. The “Five Cornerstones that Impact the Pace of Play” are: 1) management policies, 2) player behavior, 3) player ability, 4) course maintenance and setup, and 5) course design. My training helps courses define these areas and identify strategies for improvement. We also use a USGA Pace Rating and its eighteen individual hole “time pars” for the course to compare their actual time with the “should take” time to play eighteen holes. Not only does this objective measurement tool bring expectations in line with what the course can actually deliver (dispelling the myth of the four-hour round), but now we can determine which groups really are “slow.” Now management teams can create effective monitoring tools, look for specific problem areas on their course, make changes, and directly quantify the improvement.

I use my computer simulation program to determine the optimum starting interval for each course, one that will allow maximum course loading (without overcrowding) and optimal flow of play on the course. With this in place, average round times plummet even on the busiest of days, while revenue and the player’s experience and perception of value soar. Management teams can now control and deliver a consistent high quality golfing product day in and day out.

Players have a responsibility to themselves and to every other player on the course. When a starting time is issued, a “contract” has been created between management and player: management guarantees a starting time, access to a well-conditioned course, and a smooth uninterrupted pace of play, and the player agrees to arrive in time to check in, warm up and be on the first tee ten minutes prior to starting time. At the best managed courses, a group’s starting time is “the time the group’s first ball is in the air.” When a foursome honors their part of the contract, they help ensure that they tee off exactly when scheduled.

Don’t settle for delivering less than an excellent golf experience. When management teams and players partner to take the lead in the slow play challenge, wonderful things happen. The battle against slow play can be won by any course wanting to do so.

Bill Yates is chairman and CEO of Grey Town LLC and has helped lower round times on more than 90 courses worldwide.