

# New Company Takes Over Existing Club in Wellington

By Cheryl Jones

**JAMES BRANSTROM, CGCS,  
EXCITED ABOUT NEW OWNERS  
PLANS FOR EXPANSION**

A search for the perfect property took several years. It has culminated in Landmark Land Company, Inc., a California-based real-estate development company, purchasing Palm Beach Polo & Country Club — a posh development which has earned an excellent reputation in our country for its top-notch polo facility. The seller was Gould, Inc. of Rolling Meadows, Illinois. The purchase price for this prized property was reported to be in excess of forty million dollars. Palm Beach Polo & Country Club is located in Wellington, a fast growing area in the western part of Palm Beach County.

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## **LANDMARK'S REPUTATION PRECEDED THEM, AND THE OUTLOOK FOR THE FUTURE OF PALM BEACH POLO & C.C. IS BRIGHT INDEED.**

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Polo is not the only thing that Palm Beach Polo and Country Club does, and does well . . . .

In addition to its 11 polo fields, stadium with seating capacity of 10,000, polo clubhouse and stables, its approximately 1650 acres houses a golf clubhouse and two 18-hole golf courses. One was designed by former TPC and U.S. champ Jerry Pate; the other by noted golf course architect George Fazio. The Pate course was opened in December 1984, and the Fazio course a decade earlier.

Tennis is another important facet in this major development. One can lob a ball around on any of the 17 courts and relax afterwards in the tennis clubhouse. For those preferring a less physically strenuous sport there is a championship caliber croquet field which has hosted NCAA and international matches.

The property currently has about 800 homes and condominiums, and some commercial property.

The acquisition of Palm Beach Polo & Country Club is a bit out of the norm for Landmark. As a rule, the company will build its own developments from open land. The only other established property Landmark has purchased is Mission Hills in Rancho Mirage, California. In both cases, the prime location and extraordinary quality of

the existing facilities were strong selling points.

One benefit that came with the purchase is 260 experienced employees. All former Palm Beach Polo employees stayed with the club and are new employees of Landmark. No heads rolling here. 260 experienced people who already know the ups, downs, ins, and outs of the clubhouses, fields, courts, and courses will negate any need for Landmark to bring in and train a new crew. Staff morale is high and optimistic.

When a new company takes the reins, most people wonder what changes will be made. Though polo is the major focus, the golf end of Palm Beach Polo & Country Club will definitely not fall by the wayside. Landmark is already well-known in the world of golf. Several of their high-quality courses have been sites of major tournament play. These include:

- Oak Tree Golf Club in Edmond, Oklahoma, site of the 1984 U.S. Amateur Championship and future site of the 1988 PGA Championship.
- La Quinta Hotel Golf and Tennis Resort in La Quinta, CA., site of the 1985 World of Golf Cup and '86 PGA Cup Professional Championship.
- Mission Hills Country Club Old Course of Rancho Mirage, CA., site of the 1976 World Cup of Golf and the Davis Cup, and annual hot of the Nabisco-Dinah Shore tournament.
- and of course, PGA West of La Quinta, CA., site of the '86, '87 and '88 Skins Game, the '86 PGA Club Professional Championship and '86 Wilson Cup Professional Classic, the '86 PGA Tour Qualifying School, and future site of the 1990 PGA Cup Matches and 1991 Ryder Cup Matches.

Palm Beach Polo & Country Club seems to be headed in this same direction, as they hope to attract tournament play. Golf course Superintendent James Branstrom, CGCS, says he's excited about the possibilities. Landmark's reputation preceded them, and the outlook for the future is bright indeed. According to Branstrom, one of the first things that Landmark did was to increase his operating budget by a whopping 20%. 1987's budget stands at one million dollars. Among other things, this increase will mean some new equipment for Branstrom's department. In the last two years, the former owners understandably did not want to invest a lot of money in property they were going to sell, and now under new ownership these needs will be met.

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Mr. Branstrom has been the superintendent at Palm Beach Polo & Country Club for nearly six years. With the help of assistants John Littrell and Dave Blasiman, and a crew of 28, he maintains approximately 220 acres of land for 400 members. It has been maintained at championship play quality, and one of Branstrom's (and Landmark's) goals is to bring in a major PGA tournament event. The club has already been the site of the Izod International Pro-Am Tournament and the Palm Beach County Ladies Amateur Tournaments, aside from the regular club championships and club-pro tournaments.

One way this may be achieved is the construction of a new golf course! Big changes are in the cards for Palm Beach Polo & Country Club. Noted architect Pete Dye and his son will oversee the construction of 9 new holes and the remodeling of the front-nine of the Fazio course. Scheduled for completion in late spring 1988, the "Dye 18" will bring to 45 the number of playable holes at this time next year. Plans for the Fazio back-nine are to remain the same this season, but who knows what the future will bring? The enthusiasm level is so high at the club that it would not surprise this writer to learn that it will be considered in the near future for major PGA tournament play. Stay tuned . . .

The golf course maintenance department will be controlled locally by a golf committee consisting of Landmark Corporation of Florida's President Chris Cole and Palm Beach Polo & Country Club executive vice-presidents Steve Braley and John McClure. Between new construction, reconstruction, and daily maintenance, Palm Beach Polo & Country Club will be a busy and exciting place to be this coming year . . . one that James Branstrom, CGCS, and his staff are eagerly looking forward to. Look for BIG things to happen in the future at Palm Beach Polo & Country Club! ■

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