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*Exclusive country club real estate usually is advertised by word of mouth and sold in mahogany-paneled offices. In Florida \$200,000 lots are advertised on billboards and sold out of mobile homes.*

## **Golf in Florida is a \$5 billion business**

**E**ventually, everything and everyone in golf comes to Florida.

And if they don't stay, at least they leave their money.

Golf is such a big part of Florida's economic picture that its Department of Commerce commissioned a study by the National Golf Foundation.

The finding: Golf is a \$5 billion industry in Florida, fully 20 percent of the gross national golf product.

Of that \$5 billion, less than \$400,000 is spent on equipment. The rest is on real estate, green fees, golf course construction and golf-related travel.

Nobody knows for sure exactly how many golf courses Florida has because we're building them as fast as they can pass cut the permits, sometimes faster.

As of Jan. 1, 1989, the NGF had counted 932 courses open for play in Florida. The 1990 data, scheduled for release in mid-to-late February, should show about 50 more. Another 89 were under construction or on the drawing boards as of Dec. 15, 1989 (See page 74).

More than 200 touring professionals call Florida home and, now that the LPGA has decided to give new meaning to Daytona Beach's old slogan "Where the girls are," that number is likely to climb significantly.

If Daytona Beach is where the girls are, Palm Beach is where the golf is. This one county of about 2,000 square miles and fewer than 700,000 inhabitants at the northern end of the Gold Coast supports more than 125 golf courses, all but half a dozen of them in the county's 500 square miles that are within 15 miles of the Atlantic Ocean.

If Palm Beach County were a state, it would have ranked 35th in the number of golf courses at the end of 1988, between Maine (116) and Maryland (143). By the time the 1989 data are published, it's entirely

possible for Palm Beach County to have passed Maryland and a few other states.

Palm Beach County is home to the PGA of America (which has located two and a half of its 43 sections, or chapters, in Florida), the National Golf Foundation, the Golf Course Builders Association and a handful of the world's greatest golf course architects, including one of the most prolific (page 65).

It is also home to Florida's oldest famous golf course, Donald Ross's Seminole.

It's not easy to build a great golf course in Florida, but the state has one of the largest and most varied collections of outstanding golf courses in the world (page 28).

The land is flat and generally uninteresting, the sandy soil won't hold water, which is in short supply (page 22), and the delicate ecosystem already is supporting more people than nature intended. In other words, the environmental laws are tough.

The one thing Florida golf developers have in their favor is OPM — Other People's Money or Older People's Money, take your pick. Florida has lots and lots of that.

The state ranks seventh in total number of golfers and 22nd in participation — only 9.9 percent of the residents play golf — but first in senior golfers. And nobody else is in the Top Ten.

By themselves, Florida golfers raise the national average age of golfers by *two years*.

And when some very talented architects go digging after all that OPM buried in Florida's sand, it is amazing what spectacular golf courses are created by the spoils.

In most parts of the world, exclusive country club real estate is advertised by word of mouth and sold in mahogany-paneled offices.

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