

Golfing public again grows

The number of golfers grew by more than 7 percent for the third straight year in 1988, according to a survey done for the National Golf Foundation.

In the survey not yet published, the NGF also reports that 211 new golf courses were opened in 1988.

The survey found that the number of golfers who played at least one round last year rose from 21.7 million to 23.4 million, up 7.8

percent. The number of frequent golfers — those who played 25 or more rounds — grew from 4.86 million to 5.62 million, up 15.6 percent.

The rounds played, which translates into money at the courses, rose from 434 million in 1987 to 487 million in 1988, or a 12.2-percent jump.

The study found that of the 2.21 million new golfers in 1988, 1.3 million were male

and 910,000 were female.

The number of facilities, which in 1987 grew by 110 to a total of 12,407, rose another 161, or 1.4 percent last year.

The NGF also estimated the number of courses under construction in 1988 at 334, up 50 percent from the 223 being built in 1987. It said another 382 courses were being planned, a 32-percent jump from the 290 in 1987.

Rossi happy but warns of obstacles

Golf Course Builders of America Executive Director Don Rossi is supportive but cautious of the call to build 500 new courses over the next 10 years.

"I think it's great," Rossi said from his Florida headquarters. "No question there's a demand for new courses, but people are going to have to start to face reality.

"There's a demand for public golf but

(developers) have the EPA (Environmental Protection Agency) to fight, they have the cost of land to fight, money problems to fight, politics to fight."

Rossi also noted that while there is a call for more public courses, 87 percent of the new courses actually being built are tied into real-estate developments.

Asked if the limited number of golf course

builders could keep up with the 500-course-a-year target set by American Society of Golf Course Architects President Robert Trent Jones Jr., Rossi said he wasn't sure but added, "You have to keep in mind that a nine-hole course is considered a new course and 47 percent of the courses in America are nine-hole courses" which, of course, can be built quicker than 18-holers.

Jones

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demand with more and consistently better work."

Jones noted that environmental groups have targeted golf courses. "Everyone in the golf course design business is an environmentalist," said Jones, once the chairman of the California State Parks and Recreation Commission and the designer of more than 150 golf courses around the world. "But there are others who call themselves environmentalists, who can make a golf course sound like a toxic waste dump or a polluting factory.

"We need those who love the game of golf to unite solidly and loudly proclaim that a golf course is an animal habitat. It is a bird sanctuary. It is open space. It is a greenbelt. It is that most important factor that lessens the density of a new real-estate development."

Jones pointed to the oxygen-renewal process at work through trees on golf courses and added that a golf course is "enjoyed by those who pass by as well as by those who play on the fairways."

Jones called for the architects to join with



Robert Trent Jones Jr.

the NGF, Golf Course Superintendents Association, U.S. Golf Association, Professional Golf Association, the tournament players and the golf media "to proclaim emphatically that we need 5,000 more golf courses in the next 10 years.

"Because up to 70 percent of these new courses should be public rather than private, we especially need them in the cities, suburbs and counties where a town council or board of supervisors holds sway," he

said. "Instead of groundless and blind opposition, we should be finding encouragement and the anticipation of great opportunity."

He added that "in addition to the obvious beauty and recreation it provides, golf is also a great training ground for honor and integrity, and never before have more young people picked up their golf clubs looking for places to play."

Saying that a golf course has "at least a two- to three-year gestation period before it can be played," Jones said, "If we are arbitrarily slowed or stopped by the political process, and therefore unable to meet the rapidly evolving demand, I fear that the game of golf will on a day return to the elitist and expensive sport it once was, and none of us can afford that ... not this organization, not the game itself, and certainly not the precious environment of our sprawling towns and suburbs."

Jones, 49, is the son of Robert Trent Jones Sr., the only living member of the 13 golf course architects who founded the ASGCA in 1947. His father and brother, Rees, have previously served as presidents of ASGCA.



Pete Dye

Dye: Expect busy 1989

Golf course architects can expect the busiest year in a quarter century this year, according to Pete Dye, who in April completed a year as president of the American Society of Golf Course Architects.

Interest in new golf courses and remodeling projects continues to build, Dye said.

"Our members report an increasing number of inquiries for all types of projects," he said, "and society members project that 1989 will be the most active year in golf course construction and remodeling that they have seen in the past 25 years."

A recent ASGCA survey indicated that 305 new courses and 268 remodeling projects are in progress.

Dye said that while most new courses are still being built as part of residential developments and resorts, more municipal and public courses are on the drawing boards.

"Our members are working diligently with municipalities and individuals interested in building good public courses to come up with cost-effective designs that will attract golfers and provide a long-term recreational benefit to the communities involved."

Dye added that well-designed and maintained public courses, if properly managed, will generate substantial profits for municipalities and owners.

Moscow

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develop with CCI (ClubCorp. International) something that would be a nice facility which would be comparable to nice facilities here in this country where Americans could when they're in that country — whether it's for a week, a month or a year — and be able to do some of the things they do here at home; and golf is one of those things. We would like to also have tennis, and swimming and other things like that that are all part of the facility."

Pellizi added, "The idea is not to have a facility just for people with Dialogue. The idea is to put a hotel there as well as have it kind of a resort complex which would incorporate a hotel, living accommodations and a club facility, so that Americans or Westerners who are going there to do business could stay there and have a place to work and live."

JV Dialogue is now building the first unit for manufacturing computer software and hardware as well as housing units for the Russian and American workers.

ClubCorp. International Chairman Richard Poole is cautious about the project. "This kind of thing at this early stage is always iffy," he said. "You pay your money

and take your chances, and I don't want to blow any horns about the fact that it is a fait accompli or anything else. I've been down this road in many countries, and it's a time-consuming, slow process. So I don't want to be ... saying we're doing this exact thing on this date, until I've actually got a dozer out there moving a couple hundred thousand yards of material."

But Poole, the point man for CCI President Jim Hinckley in developing golf facilities worldwide, said the Russians and Americans involved are serious about the project and its feasibility.

"The Russians," Poole said, "are trying to emulate the West. The Americans also said this would help give stimulus to the area for (them) and would have some obvious advantage for our people as well as for others. And if we're going to do a conference center as part and parcel of our village development then this would give it some unique cache."

The 7,000-acre collective is "anxious to expand its income sources, so is selling or leasing land for extra housing for both Russians and expatriates," Poole said, adding that the Russian head of JV Dialogue, Pyotr Zrellov, asked CCI to work with the company to develop a golf course.

"Would the land be suitable, how much land does it take, how should it be designed and built, that's how our discussions have been going," Poole said. "We would manage and/or own the property to the extent that anybody owns property in the Soviet Union."

Poole said the region could have golfing six months a year at best; then the complex would feature three or four months of cross-country skiing.

A 'catchy deal'

"It's kind of a catchy deal but I wouldn't say that's the most optimum place to put a golf course if I were starting out to do it," Poole said. "The other side of it is that the relatively large population (of Americans) in Moscow is expected to grow — the best estimate is that it's now 30,000 and it's expected to double in the next three years. There is a fairly high demand, particularly among the expatriates living there, not necessarily the tourists coming in.

"It's not particularly a conducive environment for American style of living; you have to find something to spend your time doing," he added. "They are captive there, if you will, with no facilities that we have in the United States. And there will be

some Soviets who will become involved but that's a lesser number."

The golf facility will include 40,000 square feet of clubhouse and conference rooms. CCI would add to that bedroom accommodations, based just purely on what the demand will be at the time, Poole said.

Poole said "at the very best we could be pushing dirt next spring."

The major holdup is the 26 or 27 different agencies' signatures needed to get land use.

"It's just slightly more severe than passing the Southern California tests of the environmentalists ... It's hard," Poole said.

Poole said CCI will probably use 160 acres for the course. "It's good land. It's timbered land with enough roll and trees that it's a highly desirable setting," he said.

CCI hasn't chosen an architect yet, and will wait until it gets further along in the bureaucratic process.

That lengthy process may explain why other courses are not built in Russia yet. Robert Trent Jones Jr. has been chosen to build one course close to Moscow.

"There's a lot of talk, but I haven't seen anybody with ... (equipment) sitting on the land clearing the site, or anything else," Poole said.