

\$1-billion resort planned in 'sensitive' Fla. area

BY PETER BLAIS

A major resort complex that will feature six signature golf courses is being planned for an environmentally "sensitive" portion of Florida's Osceola and Polk counties.

The \$1 billion project is known as Johnson Island and is located on 8,500 acres 17 miles south of Walt Disney World. In addition to the signature courses, plans call for an equity membership course, par 3 executive course, two-year accredited Golf Academy, multi-training pod facility, 1,500-room hotel and conference center, retail shopping area, marina and retirement village to be built in three

phases over 15 years.

Developer Louis Fischer, chairman of Fischer Associates Inc. of South Miami and Kissimmee, hopes to have all necessary permits in hand by the end of the year and the first course in operation by early 1992.

But there are several environmental hoops through which Fischer must jump before the project becomes reality.

The Johnson Island area is home to many forms of wildlife, including two endangered species - the Southern bald eagle and the American wood stork. This has raised concerns with local officials and

several environmental groups, among them the Audubon Society and Sierra Club.

"It's a beautiful piece of property. And a lot of people are saying it's one of the best proposed developments they've ever seen," said Fischer, who is hoping to allay those fears by developing just 32 percent of the total parcel. He may also sell some of the environmentally-sensitive land to other developers who would preserve it in exchange for being able to develop wetlands elsewhere as state law allows.

"It has some potential," commented Jack Shannin, development director of Osceola County. "It's

the first project I've seen with that much open space. They've done a good job of looking out for the environment.

"I don't see the golf courses as a problem, but the size of the whole project. It's a rural area, but there's no real infrastructure out there. He might have to cut back some."

Fischer applied in December for a regional development review with the East Central Florida Regional Planning Council and the Central Florida Regional Development Council. Because of its size, the project is considered a Development of Regional Impact, and must be reviewed by the two councils to

determine its effect on local community services.

There are also a number of local, state and federal permits needed before construction can begin. Fischer said he plans to begin the permit application process in March and hopes to have final approval from the counties by December.

That would allow him to begin the first phase, which would include two golf courses and 500 hotel rooms. The first course should open 12 to 15 months later. Fischer foresees all six courses eventually beginning and ending next to a common clubhouse.

Australia

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worldwide economic depression, it was 1931.

The building of the course was left entirely to Royal Melbourne's greens superintendent, Claude Crockford; the execution of MacKenzie's plan was handed over to former Australian Open golf champion Alex Russell. Thus Crockford and Russell actually worked the land that became the two courses at Royal Melbourne. They followed MacKenzie's plan on the West Course, Russell's on the East.

Most of Australia's courses were designed by native golfers turned architects. Besides Russell and Soutar, Sydney-based pro James H. Scott was among Australia's busiest.

In the mid-1960s, the great Australian golfer Peter Thomson joined forces with Michael Wolveridge to create perhaps the most notable of all local design firms. Their work brought them not only many jobs in Australia but throughout Asia as well.

Aerators

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three to five years."

Gillen added that greenkeepers have compounded their problems with sand topdressing over the last 25 to 30 years, so that now they have to get down through those layers of the topdressing, or rebuild the green. He said that sand topdressing, if it is not high-grade sand that is similar in particle size, creates an area that inhibits water movement.

"This is why the universities are saying that unless you get in and deep-aerify you'll have to rebuild your greens or suffer with what you've got," he said. "And there's probably only 10 percent of courses that can afford to rebuild their greens."

Penn show set

The Western Pennsylvania Turf Conference and Trade Show will be held Feb. 20-22 at the Pittsburgh Expo Mart/Radisson Hotel in Monroeville, Pa.

Co-sponsored by the Pennsylvania Turf Council and Pennsylvania State University, it offers sessions on pesticide regulation and use, turf diseases and more.

Interested people may contact the Pennsylvania Turf Council, P.O. Box 417, Bellefonte, Pa.

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