

## NEWS

# Company is formed to build

BY PETER BLAIS

Golf course architect P.B. Dye and two Toronto businessmen have formed a new company that plans to build low-cost, municipal courses in an era of spiraling construction costs.

"The idea is to build a course, including land cost and clubhouse, for under \$5 million to \$6 million," said Dye of the firm Brassie Golf. "We just finished a course for the city of Lexington (Ky.), where the golf course and clubhouse were just under \$3 million. We're trying to go for that \$25 greens fee which gives you more than enough cash

flow if your course doesn't cost 12 or 15 million bucks.

"We're going to try to build 80 golf courses over the next 15 to 20 years. We're figuring on six to eight courses a year, maybe finding some older courses, revamping them, getting a good management team in there and setting them up."

The low-cost, municipal course is a niche the West Palm Beach, Fla.-based architect feels is being overlooked. National Golf Foundation figures would seem to back him up.

Seventy percent of the golf played in the United States takes place on

the country's 7,796 (1989 figures) public facilities. Only one-fourth (1,113) of those are municipal. The remaining three-fourths (5,833) are private, daily fee.

Since 1970, 642 new municipal facilities have been built, compared to 1,585 private, daily-fee ones.

"Everybody wants to go for the up-scale, the high-dollar ticket," said Dye. "But a lot of people can't afford \$125 to play a round of golf or a \$50,000 initiation fee. That's more than most people make."

The key to building an affordable, municipal course is finding land that can be donated or pur-

chased very cheaply. In the case of Lexington's Kearney Hills GC, the city donated the land for its eighth municipal course. At Columbia, S.C.'s Northwoods GC, 120 of the 170 acres were purchased for \$100,000, with the remaining 50 given by the state in return for an easement guaranteeing the course will be open to the public at least one day a year.

"The one in Lexington showed that it could be done. The one in Columbia shows we can do it without the city donating the land. There have got to be a lot of possible deals like that," said the son

## Horse farm: From trotters to fairways

Facing prospects of losing money on her long-time horse farm because of tax changes, a Maryland woman has won approval to convert her land in Olney into a golf course.

The county Zoning Board of Appeals gave Helen Polinger approval to turn her 175-acre Polinger Horse Farm into an 18-hole Trotters Glen Golf Course.

Two barns will be converted — one as a clubhouse and the other as a machine shop, Polinger said.

The board ruled the course is allowed under existing zoning and will maintain the open character of the area.

## Palmetto Golf buys Pleasant Pt. Plantation

Palmetto Golf Inc. has bought Pleasant Point Plantation on Ladies Island, S.C., according to Palmetto general partner Will Mann.

The Spartanburg, S.C.-based company plans to build single- and multi-family housing units and golf and tennis villas on the 680-acre plot.

The development features a Russell Breeden-designed golf course. Construction plans call for a new clubhouse, pool and tennis facilities.

## Golf selling condos in NYC

Real estate agent Martin Raynes is using golf to help sell condominiums in the glutted New York City market.

Sales agents for 60-story Three Lincoln Center, where prices range from \$310,000 to more than \$3 million, are offering the services of a golf pro and a computer that simulates famous courses and analyzes a golfer's swing.

The condominium complex will open this fall.

## Del. commission OKs sewage use

The Delaware River Basin Commission recently approved the use of treated sewage water to irrigate Five Ponds Golf Club in Warminster, Pa.

The interstate agency, which regulates the use of the river and its tributaries, approved the Warminster Township Municipal Authority's request to allow 300,000 gallons of treated effluent to be diverted into a stream that runs through the course.

Under the agreement, the 133-acre course can withdraw up to 150,000 gallons a day from the tributary.

Photo taken on hole #5 at Muirfield Village Golf Club



# 'low-cost muni' courses

of legendary architect Pete Dye.

"The cost of the land is the biggie. You can control the construction costs. Sure you can't build a \$3 million course on a swamp two feet below sea level in Jacksonville (Fla.), or on a rock pile for that amount. But given a fair piece of land, and by trying to keep your earth moving to a minimum, you can easily build a golf course for \$2-1/2 million. And you can build a good, functional clubhouse for \$500,000.

"Then, at \$25 a clip, if you play 40,000 rounds a year, that's \$1 million. You spend \$400,000 or

\$500,000 on maintenance and the thing makes a half-million per year. And you haven't sold your first sandwiches or Budweiser, yet."

Dye's \$250,000 fee is modest compared to many architects (Jack Nicklaus charges \$1 million for instance) and considering the family name.

"I think I can build a golf course cheaper than most people. And I can do it because I don't have plans. I don't do drawings. I'll use conceptual routing plans. And I'll do whatever needs to be done for the county and local agencies. After that, the people I work with are all

golfers. They all have degrees in agronomy. And we go out there and build a course that's easy to maintain. We're not trying to build a PGA West. But we're not out there building 18 bowling alleys either. We're out there to build 18 good golf holes."

With computers, high-tech equipment, specialized golf construction companies and a staff of various experts becoming the norm at many architectural firms, Dye is a throwback to another era.

"Nobody enjoys building a course more than I do. Working with the bulldozer operators, it's

just great. The engineers and land planners are a pain-in-the-butt. But the people actually on site building them, we have fun. I'm taking 20 people over to Scotland this year, all bulldozer operators, or golfers who happen to run bulldozers I should say. All they'll do is come back with more ideas. It will benefit me," he said.

"My talent lies with a bulldozer. I was raised on a bulldozer. I started on a bulldozer when I was 8 and now I'm 34. And I really know how to work with the people running the heavy equipment.

"Those are the people that get

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the work done. All the pencil pushers in the world, and engineers and all that stuff, aren't worth two beans unless you have the cooperation of that guy with the diesel all over his shirt. That computer doesn't build that golf course. When the bulldozer guy out there in the woods comes up on a magnificent 150-year-old oak, he (hopefully) says 'Maybe I should go around this thing and ask somebody.' Well if it's on a computer readout, that tree is gone. The human element is what makes the Dye difference."

Dye also keeps his costs low by maintaining a small staff and using mostly local rather than imported labor.

"I don't have any payroll," said Dye, who shares an office with a part-time secretary. "I built eight courses last year at an average of \$4 million each. That's \$32 million and I didn't have any payroll.

"Whenever I go some place, whoever is building the course pays for everything. I charge a flat fee and the work just gets done. The main reason is we use local help. I don't have a construction company I take from Florida to North Carolina to Chicago. I just go out there, put one person on the job and hire local people.

"The first thing I do is find a farmer who moves dirt and talk to him. I'm not going to bring up a person from Florida because he's going to have to sit there and learn something that someone who's been working up there 20 years already knows," Dye said.

"And you always end up somehow getting some great talent. The on-site supervisor is the whole key. Those are the people I haul over to Scotland. Those are the people I send to the job site. When you just bring in one or two guys to do the shaping and hire the rest local, it just works out better.

"But a lot of guys will sub the job to established golf course builders. Those guys will bring in 60 percent of the crew and hire just 40 percent, where I'll do 98 percent local and just two percent foreigners. It's kept me out of hock."

## Land change OK'd for course

The Harmony Township, Pa., Planning Board has approved an ordinance allowing land used for a public golf course to fulfill open-space requirements in a proposed 434-acre development.

Buttonwood Country Club Inc. of Harmony sought the ordinance. The board told Buttonwood it must build the development on a minimum of 250 acres, with a minimum of 110 acres for the 18-hole golf course.

The town's planner, John Madden, told officials the course would be an ideal way to preserve open space.

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\*September 1989 *Golf Magazine* rated the three best conditioned courses in the world as Augusta National, Muirfield Village and Scioto.



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