

## Sherman Hollow outlook 'optimistic'

BY PETER BLAIS

Sherman Hollow (Vt.) developers have finished presenting their case for a new golf course to local government officials and are "optimistic" they will receive a building permit for the controversial facility by mid- to late-summer, according to principal Paul Truax.

Expert witnesses for the developers of the Huntington, Vt., project concluded their testimony before the District 4 Environmental Commission in March.

Opponents, concerned about logging activities and pesticide contamination of ground water, began testifying April 9. Additional

public hearings were scheduled April 23 and May 29, said Truax.

"The absolute earliest we'd get a permit would be July. But August or September are more likely," said Truax, who has spent hundreds of thousands of dollars over the past five years while navigating his \$22-million project through the Vermont regulatory waters.

"I think we've done more than any course in the country to show we have an environmentally safe golf course. Our witnesses have been good. The opposition found no major holes. We've satisfied all the state agencies. We even have a letter from a water quality agency

praising us for being overly conservative in our approach. I'm optimistic we'll get the permit soon," he said.

The timing of the permit is important. If it comes in July, Truax believes he could begin clearing and grading operations this summer and have the course ready for play in 1992. If it comes later, weather and state law forbidding clearing after a certain date could delay the opening another year.

"We'll do as much as the weather and state permit," said Truax.

Truax believes Act 250, Vermont's main development-control law that opponents have used

to delay the project, needs change.

"Five years is obviously too long to get something like this approved," said Truax. "The Act 250 process needs revision to prevent what's happened to us from happening again.

"A lot of what's been decided here should have been decided at the state rather than the district level. You have the expertise at state agencies. It's mind-boggling that a layperson on a local board can listen to opposing expert witnesses, both with years and years of experience in a particular discipline, and make an informed decision."

## Sharpener

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work on something else for the next 20 minutes while an individual reel is sharpened.

"It can save a mechanic an immense amount of time," said Bell.

And money.

Competitive grinders sell for up to \$12,000, said Bell. The ReelMate will list for \$5,000.

Bell's knowledge springs from practical experience.

The son of an engineer, he serviced golf cars for a year after attending San Jose's Cupertino High School. He spent the next five years as a mechanic at Almaden Golf & Country Club in San Jose, followed by another five at La Rinconada Country Club in Los Gatos.

"I just wasn't making enough money to live in the Silicon Valley, make house payments and bring up four kids," he explained of his decision to open his own business last June.

Bell financed his company with a \$10,000 loan from an uncle and a second mortgage on his own home. Working with his older brother, Tab, who owns a small welding and fabrication company, they began production last August of Bell Turf Equipment's first product, Mower Mate.

The utility trailer for walk-behind, greens mowers, clamps the mower securely in place "so it can't be thrown out of adjustment, no matter how hard the driver drives" from green to green, said Bell.

The trailer allows the mower to be loaded and unloaded without lifting and to be serviced and cleaned while on the trailer.

The 60-pound Mower Mate, which can be customized to the specifications and colors of individual mower companies, was on display at February's Golf Course Superintendents Association of America annual show in Orlando, Fla.

Bell received 145 orders the month following the show and has sold 600 units so far to companies like John Deere, Toro, Jacobsen and Bunton.

Pete plans to buy his brother's manufacturing company in the next few months, retaining the company's five employees and his brother as production manager.

Tab, who opened his company in 1978, and Pete, who has been in the golf course equipment-user end a dozen years, "combine to give our company user and manufacturing knowledge," said Pete.

Although he still has many superintendent and mechanic contacts at San Jose-area courses, Pete Bell said he has considered working part time as a mechanic to keep the creative juices flowing.

"Ideas just seem to click while you're out there turning a wrench," he said.

But Bell said he should be able to put off moonlighting for the next several years since he has "six more ideas on the drawing board."

"We don't want to make me-too products. There are a lot of companies out there doing that. We want to develop our own products, create our own niche. We've got some pretty big goals," he said.

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*Dave Meyer uses a John Deere 3325 Professional Turf Mower to help maintain the Chicago area's Prestbury Golf Club—a course he co-owns.*



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