

*'Hot spots', 'golf meccas' ...  
there are a number of towns and regions across the country  
that attract tourists and money — golfers and green fees.  
Number one among them is Naples, Fla.*

## Naples — Where course construction never ends

By Peter Blais

You'd think the No. 1 golf city in the country could afford to rest on its laurels. That's not the case in Naples, Fla.

With one golf hole for every 202 residents, Naples is ranked first among 317 U.S. metropolitan areas, according to the latest National Golf Foundation figures. Compare that to the 150th ranked Dayton/Springfield, Ohio area, for instance, which has 15 times as many people (3,123) per hole.

So there are plenty of courses in Naples and no need for new construction, right? Wrong, bogey breath.

Last spring, Naples had more courses (15) planned, under construction or recently opened than any city in the country. What's going on in this town of just 130,000 people?

"It's incredible," exclaimed Cal Korf, executive director of the Florida State Golf Association. "It's an absolute golf mecca."

The climate, beaches and lifestyle draw the people.

"The climate's nice, especially in the winter," said Ed Rogers, director of golf at Bonita Bay Country Club. "There are decent beaches, which aren't necessarily important to the golfer, but are part of an entire package that entices people to move to this section of Florida. And it's not congested like the East Coast."

The quality of the courses keeps golfers coming back, according to John Carroll, director of golf at The Club at Pelican Bay.

"For years, Naples was a hidden-away little fishing town," remembered Carroll. "But the people who came here in the early years started telling their friends about the weather and golf. And that attracted their friends, who in turn attracted their friends. The list of architects with courses here reads like a Who's Who in Golf Course



A golfer putts out at Naples' Bay Course.

Architecture."

Indeed, the list seems to include everyone except Pete Dye, although Dye is planning a course just up the road in Fort Myers.

Wilderness Country Club, set on 400 acres with about 300 residential units, set the tone for large-scale residential development/golf course projects in the early 1970s, according to Carroll.

The larger Windermere, Quail Creek, Bonita Bay and Pelican Bay complexes raised development to another level in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Pelican Bay and Bonita Bay both had approximately 2,400 acres and more closely resemble miniature cities than golf clubs, said Rogers.

The latest wave includes mega-complexes like Lely Resort, where the Robert Trent Jones, Sr. Flamingo Island Club recently opened. The Gary Player Classics Golf Course is under construction and the Mustang Course is in the planning stage.

ture in the generally flat landscape) at courses like Bonita Bay, Pelican Bay and Pelican's Nest, said Lewis.

"Usually you have to move between 250,000 and 300,000 cubic yards of dirt to get any interesting contours," said Lewis, who has three courses in the planning stages in Naples. "Some courses have moved over a million."

Lewis has encountered environmental permitting difficulties at all three of his courses due to wetlands. At Naples Golf Estates, 550 of the development's 700 acres are categorized as wetlands. At Casa Del Sol, almost the entire 200 acres of the executive course project are wetlands.

"The state wants no net loss of wetlands. But there isn't enough land on-site to build more. You must convince the state agencies that what you want to do is better than what's there now. If we can't we may have to buy and preserve wetlands elsewhere," said Lewis.

Water has also been a problem, especially considering the drought that has gripped southwest Florida the past few years. But most new courses are irrigating with effluent, said Carroll. Effluent is not regulated by the local water district so its use has not been restricted, as has ground and surface water.

Despite environmental and water problems, the number of courses continues to grow. But for how long?

"This is the fastest growth I've ever seen. Of course it's very dependent on interest rates. But right now it looks like it will keep going for a long time," said Carroll.

Added Rogers: "People want to live in the tropics and there's only so much of it in this country, from St. Petersburg south on the West coast and Vero Beach south on the East coast. There's no reason for the growth to stop until we run out of land. There still seems to be plenty available."

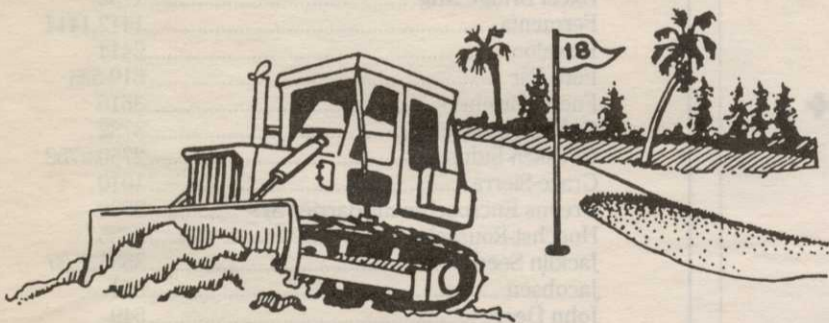
The Flamingo Island and Mustang courses address one of the few problems in Naples, the lack of public courses. Both are daily fee facilities and, along with Ward W. Northrup's Shamrock Golf & Country Club, are the only public courses among the area's 15 newest facilities.

"In recent years, most of the people attracted here have been wealthier individuals who are looking for private courses," said Carroll.

"It's harder to make a good return on your investment with a public course," said architect Gordon G. Lewis. "That makes it harder to get a loan to build in the first place."

From an architect's viewpoint, one of the best things about building in the Naples area is a sandy soil that Lewis said drains very well.

A sand ridge running within a mile of the Gulf Coast has given rise to a number of beautiful oaks, pines and palm trees while providing natural contouring (an unusual fea-



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