

A tale of two cities: KC and St. Louis

Divergent approaches to golf growth

By Peter Blais

Kansas City is the smooth-talking salesman with his foot in the front doorway to the ever-changing West.

St. Louis is the banker in the three-piece suit guarding the back door of the Eastern establishment.

That may be an over-simplification of the difference between Missouri's two largest cities. But it helps explain how the two have approached the growth of the golf industry.

Kansas City has ridden the crest of the golf wave the past few years. K.C. is ranked 177th among 319 major metropolitan areas in terms of golf holes per capita, according to NGF's 1989 figure.

"We should move up a lot this year," predicts Kansas City Golf Association Executive Director Robert Reid.

Reid's optimism springs from the five new K.C.-area courses opened the past two years and the two scheduled to come on line in 1991.

Opening in 1989-90 were Tom Fazio's Halbrook Country Club in Leawood, Kan., which holds the country's second-highest slope rating; Robert T. Jones Jr.'s Deer Creek Golf Course in Oberland Park, Kan., which hosted a Hogan Tour event last August; Jay Moorish/Tom Weiskopf/Tom Watson's Shadow Glen Golf Course in Olathe, Kan., Golf Digest's Best New Private Course in 1989; and Donald Sechrest's Heritage Park in Olathe and Loch Lloyd Country Club in Belton, which will host a Senior Tour event June 28-30.

Sechrest's Tiffany Springs and Jones's Heritage Greens Country Club, both in North Kansas City, are expected to open in 1991.

The city's oldest course, A.W. Tillinghast's Swope Park Golf Club, re-opened last summer after a year's re-design work that included renovations and the additions of 55 bunkers and four greens.

The recent construction boom is an abrupt reversal of the last 10 years, when virtually no new courses were built, said Reid.

"I think that (the lack of building) was a hangover from tennis," he said. "Golf has just been catching on stronger every year. It also has a lot to do with the Kansas City area. We're right on the Missouri-Kansas border and draw people from both states. Johnson County in Kansas is something like the second most affluent county in the country next to Westchester (New York)."

2nd nine would double revenues, city officials told

DUXBURY, Mass. — Annual income from the town-owned North Hill Golf Course within five years would be doubled to nearly \$700,000 with addition of a second nine, said the North Hill advisory committee.

Expansion project costs range from an estimated \$750,000 to \$1 million.

The course now generates \$300,000 in revenue a year, exclusive of costs.

Concerning expansion financing, fiscal advisory committee chairman Jim Murphy said, "It's a good idea for the town no matter how you structure it."

Although St. Louis (2.5 million people) has nearly a million more residents than Kansas City (1.6 million), it has fewer golf holes (1,125) than its cross-state rival (1,161). St. Louis is ranked a lowly 289th among U.S. metropolitan areas in the per capita supply of golf holes.

"I don't know why that is," said William Wells, executive secretary of the Missouri Golf Association. "There just doesn't seem to be the interest in St. Louis that there is in Kansas City."

St. Louis District Golf Association Executive Director Larry Etkorn believes the conservative nature of his city's investors

dampens the enthusiasm of developers.

"Kansas City has been more progressive in the past decade," said Etkorn. "St. Louis is more of a follower."

"The bankers control the money here. They like to wait and see what happens elsewhere before trying something. In Kansas City it's more of a 'Let's Go' attitude. You may stumble occasionally with that attitude, but you get more done, too."

A high local tax rate that supports what Etkorn characterizes as a "Triple AAA" St. Louis County school system also discourages some developers, he added.

Consequently, most new courses are be-

ing built on the city's outskirts, said Etkorn. Among them, he said, are Boone Valley in Augusta, Whitmore Hills in St. Charles County, The Country Club at the Legends in Eureka, Deer Creek and Raintree in Jefferson County, and two new courses in St. Albans that members of Cherry Hills Country Club are receiving from a developer in exchange for their course. Eagle Springs and Spirit of St. Louis are two St. Louis County courses in the planning stages.

"We need golf courses," said Etkorn. "A lot of people are looking to build. You need starting times everywhere, just like Chicago. Any new course would probably go."

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