

# Even Korean DMZ is a golf project site

By Curt Sampson

As the worldwide golf boom collided with rapidly changing world politics, one result has been golf course construction in some unlikely places. Today you can tee it up in current or former communist enclaves like China, Czechoslovakia and Russia. Thailand, in the center of Southeast Asia, the most troubled region on Earth 20 years ago, is a wash in new golf resorts.

South Korea is another country with an unexpectedly vibrant golf economy. Korea and Germany virtually defined Cold War, two countries that were torn in half after World War II. Although Korea has not reunited as did Germany in 1991, golf entrepreneurs there charge ahead. There are about 60 golf courses in the Land of the Morning Calm and another 120 under construction or in the final planning stages. All these facilities are in the South. Communist North Korea

has not yet discovered golf.

South Korea's rising prosperity and growing middle class fuel the expansion, but an equally important factor is Japan. The golf-hungry Japanese are short on places to play and room to build in their own country. But they are not short of money, and Korea is only a one- to two-hour flight from anywhere in the country.

Practically all Korean golf courses are located well south of Seoul, even though most of the country's popula-

tion and its most interesting potential golf course sites are in the north. Developers have avoided the region because of the Demilitarized Zone.

The DMZ scares people. The 600-mile-long, 2-1/2-mile-wide buffer between North and South Korea was put in place at the conclusion of the Korean War in 1953, and has been the most unfriendly, most heavily defended border on Earth ever since.

No one has thought to build a golf course anywhere near the DMZ —

until now.

In perhaps the purest expression of Korean optimism about golf and the future, Dong Woo Co., Ltd., of Seoul is building a monumental 36-hole golf/tennis resort just 14 kilometers from the border. It will be called Long Lake Hill Country Club, after a nearby lake (San Jong Hosoo) of the same name.

It could be the most expensive golf course ever built, possibly reaching \$130 million. It also could be among the most spectacular new courses in the world. Long Lake Hill covers 800 acres of rugged hilltops adjacent to Myung Sung Mountain. The breathtaking views are reminiscent of the French Alps or Canadian Rockies.

The sheer scale of the project is staggering. When construction began in August 1990, a 60-man dynamite crew worked around the clock for weeks, blasting out granite outcroppings and bedrock.

An unheard-of 25 million cubic yards of dirt were cut, filled and pushed to form the course's basic form.

Although golf course architects in Japan are moving more and more earth nowadays on the unfarmable tracts they are given to work with, rarely does the amount exceed 3 million cubic yards. It costs about US\$3 to move a cubic yard of dirt — thus Long Lake Hill's great expense.

Then there are the hundreds of Surak Mountain pines that are being trucked in to transplant, at about US\$5,000 apiece; the miles of six-foot-diameter box culvert buried under the course to handle the runoff from melting mountain snow; and the cable car that will run from the 18th green to the clubhouse.

"It's the greatest feat of golf course engineering ever attempted," said American golf course critic John Strawn.

"The goal is to build the world's first great mountain golf course," said Desmond Muirhead, who designed Long Lake Hill. Only time will tell if the goal is achieved, but Muirhead has built immortal golf courses before — New St. Andrews, Wakagi and Shinyo in Japan and Mission Hills and Muirfield Village in the United States.

The mastermind of this project is Jong Shin Kim, president of Dong Woo. He conceived the project in 1988, recruited the other main owners (Baek Sung Kwan, Hwang Jin Chul and Kim Yun Dong), bought the land, and hired Muirhead and construction manager Yung Mok Choi.

Kim, 50, was born in North Korea but fled to the south with his family at age 9. He was twice the All-Korea taekwondo heavyweight champion and is a combat veteran of the war in Vietnam. Like his partners in Dong Woo, Kim made his fortune in the construction industry.

He is used to taking chances and winning. With a recent dramatic thaw in the relationship between North and South Korea, his idea of locating a golf resort near the border may be genius.

But would he do it again?

"No-o-o," he says, with a weary smile. "That is like asking a pregnant woman if she will have another baby."

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