

Heavy advance work made Fox Brook a quick 'go'

By Bradley S. Klein

Civil engineer Ed Lally believes the only way to get approvals on an environmentally sensitive project is to get the details right — and in advance.

The night his proposed Fox Brook Golf Club and Community came before the Planning and Zoning Commission of Granby, Conn., Lally was even able to show where he planned to put the ball washers. Four bound volumes comprising 693 pages documented everything from storm water management and wetlands delineation to the vertical cross-

section of the eight-foot-wide cart paths and the routes to be taken by bulldozers during construction. In this business, there's no such thing as being over-prepared.

"If you set out to hunt rabbits," Lally said, "you better be ready for bears."

Indeed, these are bearish times, and most people in the Northeast are hibernating when it comes to thinking about golf course development. But when the 46-year-old Lally set out on his odyssey in January 1989, he figured the market would bottom out in a few years and that by this time, the economy would be in recovery.



Ron Garl's routing plan was a painstaking, environmentally challenged undertaking.



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Things didn't work out that way. In 1991 alone, 19 banks closed in Connecticut. Worse yet, the real-estate industry was the downfall of Colonial Realty, a company that had almost single-handedly driven on the bull market in the late 1980s and that has now left behind a trail of hundreds of investors holding virtually worthless notes. The fiasco gave investment syndicates a bad name, and made it difficult to finance even the soundest project.

Despite the chilling of real-estate prices, Lally found that quality new developments were selling. A licensed civil engineer based locally in the north-central Connecticut town of Windsor, he had been chief designer of dozens of successful housing projects. Though he doesn't play golf, he can distinguish between a good and a dull golf course.

"It was obvious golf and quality housing could be made to work together," he said. The trick was not to compromise one at the expense of the other.

A marketing feasibility study indicated that there was a dearth of quality golf courses in the north-central Connecticut, southern New England region.

"We thought about a private course, but realized the market was soft. As for a public facility, there are plenty of them in the area, and it would not have worked financially. But if done right, and if planned as part of a low-density housing developing, a quality semi-private course opened to public play made the most sense," Lally said.

A 336-acre parcel of land was selected in North Granby, about 20 miles northwest of Hartford and equidistant from Springfield, Mass. The rolling, partially wooded site conveys a feel of rural isolation. Yet the Massachusetts Turnpike and Interstate 91 are nearby, and Bradley International Airport is 15 minutes away.

"You wouldn't know it when you're out there," said Lally, "but 800,000 people live in the affluent suburbs within 20 miles of it."

Lally and his partners formed a separate company, Fox Brooks Associates, Inc., to coordinate the development. Lycott Environmental Research, of Southbridge, Mass., did a comprehensive environmental survey, including geology and aquifers.

Certified wildlife biologist Dr. Lee Alexander assessed wetlands habitats, and Dr. Norman Richards of Niantic, Conn., came aboard as environmental consultant, with a strong emphasis on pesticide control.

The soil studies were undertaken by Soil Science and Environmental Services of Cheshire, Conn., and Fred A. Hesketh and Associates of Bloomfield, Conn., completed the traffic analysis.

How did they assemble this team?

Lally said the principle was simple. "We hired the most 'green' people we could find. We weren't interested in political solutions. We wanted to get it done right in the most environmentally sound way possible."

Before there was even the roughest outline of the golf holes, wetlands had to delineated. This is no easy matter, since wetlands classification in Connecticut falls under the simultaneous jurisdiction of both the state's Department of Environmental Protection and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, with each agency following different classification procedures.

The crucial step in the whole process was a color-coded delineation of wetlands. Limnologists from Lycott Environmental Research joined Alexander in examining the site for year-round and intermittent streams, the functional integrity of wetland habitats, and the degree to which the wetlands, as found, had been previously disturbed.

Portions of the parcel had long ago been used for wood-clearing and agriculture, and several of the native wetlands had already been disturbed, including significant siltation.

"It isn't enough to find the wetlands you have prior to construction," observed Lally. "You also need to research what had been there before. It's wrong to presume that golf courses must be built on pristine land. In many cases, the land has already been disturbed."

As a result, the development plan now calls for wetlands enhancement in order to return as large an area as possible to its original condition, before it was disturbed by agriculture and forestry.

Florida-based golf course architect Ron Garl was then called in to deliver a routing and grading plan.

After on-site visits and a few preliminary drafts, Garl spent four solid days in Lally's office working with environmental consultants, land planners and civil engineers to develop a satisfactory "footprint."

Garl's insistence on a quality course had to be integrated with the concerns of the environmentalists and land planners. The result is a 6,801-yard, par-71 course routed through a low-density residential development, with several small neighborhood clusters rather than lots running boundary line to boundary line. There are to be 97 single homes interspersed among open space and the golf course, with housing lots sized between .75 and 6 acres.

In order to preserve both wetlands and native woods, several longish trips between green and the next tee are required.

But the property lines are set well-back

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Arthur Hills tackles UMichigan renovation, other projects

TOLEDO, Ohio — Arthur Hills, chosen restoration architect for the \$3.1 million University of Michigan Golf Course renovation project, has designed Dunes West, an 18-hole semi-private golf facility on the Wando River 10 miles northeast of Charleston, S.C.

Alister MacKenzie, in collaboration with Perry Maxwell, designed the university course in 1930. Owners plan to restore the course to its original style.

While studying for his degree in

landscape architecture at Michigan in the 1950s, frequent university course player Hills came to appreciate MacKenzie's style with its broad fairways, undulating sloped green and large visible bunkers.

"There will be no Arthur Hills mark on this course," Hills said, adding that consideration must be given the technical advances of modern clubs and balls. "The goal is to make the course better, not necessarily more difficult."

Renovation should be complete

by the spring of 1993. Objectives include renovating bunkers to original sizes, improving internal drainage and sand consistency; larger, stately tee areas; improving green drainage, keeping present surfaces intact, and installing a state-of-the-art double-row irrigation system.

The Dunes West property dates to pre-Civil War days, when it was an expansive working plantation with a mansion, formal gardens, old brick walls and reflecting ponds.

The opening holes have a Pinehurst flavor, playing through corridors of tall pines to slightly-elevated greens.

The longer back nine has a distinctive low country look, playing along marshland.

Its most talked-about feature is its two greens 90 yards apart. When Hills originally routed the course, he planned the 18th as a 370-yarder with a small green tucked against the salt marsh. During construction, he decided

to add a second green with Wagner Creek as the backdrop. This stretched the testing hole to nearly 460 yards.

Scratch Golf of Hilton Head Island owns and operates Dunes West.

Hills' The Golf Club of Georgia, near Atlanta, and Harbour Pointe Golf Course, which he co-designed with Keith Foster near Seattle, were named as Golf Digest's best new private and best new public courses of 1991.

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from the fairways, and half the back nine will be ensconced in woods completely isolated from homes.

The developers have been meticulous in ensuring environmental compatibility.

Three ponds will be dug to serve a variety of purposes, including storm water buffering, irrigation, and as habitat for aquatic life and native plants. The quality of the on-site salmon spawning waters will be rigorously maintained.

A manual outlining the project's operating philosophy also details how both design and maintenance will use sustainable agriculture and integrated pest management to minimize reliance on pesticides and herbicides.

Construction plans already specify areas to be reserved for materials stockpiling.

Because of an important trout stream traversing the fairway on the 380-yard 13th hole, Lally has agreed that no construction equipment will be allowed to move the length of the fairway. Instead, bulldozers and equipment will approach only half of the fairway from the tee side, and then the construction crew will have to travel hundreds of yards around wetlands in order to build the greenside half of the fairway.

Besides the massive volumes of scientific documentation, the permitting application called for exhaustive engineering specifications.

Some 100 detailed blueprints were submitted, showing everything from the installation of culverts under surface roads to the joints of the wooden bridges to be built.

So far, Lally has carried costs of the project on his own. He figures he'll need about another \$3.5 million for course construction, \$2.5 million for the clubhouse and parking lots, and \$4 million for phasing in the housing lots.

Lally's recent progress through the approvals process has now brought Fox Brook Associates to the point where they wish to seek a partner or investor for the project.

And what will Ed Lally, civil engineer, do when Fox Brook is finally built?

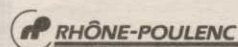
"Well," he said, with a boyish smile, "my mother's an avid golfer, and I promised her she could play the course for life. I also promised I'd play golf with her."

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