

## Ala. Retirement system may build eighth golf facility

By Peter Blais

ORANGE BEACH, Ala. — This coastal community will likely be the site of the eighth golf complex financed by the Retirement Systems of Alabama.

A land swap between the town and state Department of Conservation and Natural Resources is paving the way for the 36- or possibly 54-hole facility.

The newest project means the Retirement System and developer Sunbelt Golf Corp. will add at least 360 new golf holes to the state, all designed by Robert Trent Jones, Sr. The first course opened last month in Oxmoor Valley, south of Birmingham.

All the courses are being built on donated land, which was a problem at Orange Beach.

Retirement System Executive Director David Bronner wanted the Conservation Department to provide land at nearby Gulf Shores State Park for the Retirement System's eighth and final project.

Conservation Department officials were hesitant to give the land away without something in return. Agency officials also feared for the site's many wetlands.

But Bronner believed in the property and reportedly suggested he'd build the course across the border in Florida if the land wasn't made available.

Wanting the economic boost the course could provide, local officials offered to trade 588 acres of town-owned land for the state-owned property.

The Conservation Department finally agreed to lease 585 acres of state land to the city, which Orange Beach will in turn lease to the developers.

"We're evaluating the land now," Sunbelt Vice President Bob Barrett said. "There are more wetlands than we thought and some endangered species involved. We might have to get more adjacent land. We want to do a minimum of 36 holes. If we can't, we won't do the project."

Barrett said he believes details can be worked out and the project will get underway this summer. Starting the Orange Beach facility soon is important since Philips & Jordan's (Knoxville, Tenn.) heavy earth-moving equipment and Jones' shaping crews are still in the state working on the other projects, he added.

"We benefit from economies of scale," Barrett said. "Once they move out, relocating them back here again would present problems. We have more strength now than we would later."

All eight projects have progressed pretty much according to plan, Barrett said. Wetland concerns in Mobile and Huntsville slowed construction, as did water quality issues in Opelika regarding a neighboring 600-acre lake that is the region's major drinking water source.

The first 18 at 54-hole Oxmoor Valley opened May 8. Huntsville, Opelika, Auburn, Mobile and Dothan will have parts or all of their facilities opening in 1992 with Greenville and Calhoun coming on line in 1993.

## Sandridge Golf Course attorneys hope for quick legal resolution

VERO BEACH, Fla. — Attorneys hope for quick court action even though no hearing date has been set on a lawsuit linked to expansion of the local Sandridge Golf Course from 18 to 36 holes.

Prince Contracting Co. of Palmetto is suing the Indian River County Commission, Commissioner Doug Scurlock and Guettler & Sons of Ft. Pierce over the commission's 3-2 vote Feb. 18 to award Guettler the \$1.95 million project.

Prince, through Tallahassee attorney F. Alan Cummings, alleges the vote was illegal because Scurlock failed to discuss his business relationship with Guettler.

"It amounted to a hometown decision," charged Cummings. He contends that Prince, the low bidder by about \$50,000, was "very highly qualified to do the job and worked hard to be the low bidder. It was a political decision."

He bases that charge on Scurlock's association with Guettler last summer on a golf course project in Ocoee. Scurlock said he wasn't paid for his part in the project, and denied associating with Guettler on any other project.

Several county officials have testified Scurlock was paid, and that he was involved in other projects.

In addition to voiding the contract, Prince seeks to be declared the lowest responsible bidder and awarded the contract.

Guettler, through attorney Gene O'Neill, has joined defendants asking the lawsuit be dismissed. Prince alleges no wrongdoing by Guettler, and its complaint states no cause of action against the firm, O'Neill noted.

O'Neill said Prince is trying to cast doubt on the contract by alleging a conflict of interest and asking the court to "simply pass judgment in its favor."

Circuit Judge Charles Smith in mid-March denied a temporary injunction to halt construction of the second 18 holes.



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