

Marketing Idea of the Month

Here's a switch: Memberships selling homesites

By PETER BLAIS

PRAIRIE GROVE, Ill. — Granite Builders is using golf to help the Chicago area break out of the real estate building slump.

As an incentive to buy a home in its Green Valley of McHenry subdivision, the developer is offering free, two-year family memberships at company-owned Prairie View Golf Course, being built eight miles away and scheduled to open next summer.

In an otherwise dead real estate market, Granite Builders managed to sell six homes, ranging from \$160,000 to \$220,000, during the month of July, according to Green Val-

ley Sales Manager Dennis Birmingham.

"And that's normally a very slow month," Birmingham said.

Granite Builders is extending the offer, with an additional one to four years of free golf, to potential homebuyers at Crystal Woods Estates Community — three years for a lot, six years for lot and home. Crystal Woods surrounds the golf course with homes selling from \$350,000 to \$500,000.

"We look at this as a win-win situation," said Chris Newkirk, president of E.M. Melahn Construction, Granite Builders' parent company.

"The homebuyer gets an additional perk, a free membership, for buying a lot from us. And since the course won't be full the first four to five years anyway, it gets us good exposure. And maybe the free member will invite three [paying] friends along."

Newkirk said the offer has not resulted in any additional sales at the more expensive Crystal Woods development, yet. But with grass being planted in early August, and with the sight of Green Valley homeowners strolling the course next summer, Newkirk expects the added incentive to pay dividends at Crystal Woods, too.

"We expect the biggest impact to eventually be in the Crystal Woods area," Newkirk said.

The free membership includes unlimited play for all family members. At a public fee rate of \$35 to \$40 per round, including cart, the avid golfer could realize a considerable savings.

But with 12 courses in the immediate area, Newkirk doesn't expect Prairie Isle to receive too much play for the first five to six years.

"We might have 50 families there that play for nothing the first five to six years. We could give away 50 rounds per day, I suppose. But it's more likely to be something like 50 rounds a week," Newkirk said.

The idea of offering free memberships for buying a house lot woke Newkirk from a sound sleep.

"I wake up in the middle of the night a lot of times. I seem to get a lot of my best ideas then," he said.

Newkirk's company is primarily an earthmoving and construction firm. His first experience in the golf industry, he said, came inadvertently when he and his partners were awarded the financially troubled Lakewood Golf Club. They sold the club in October 1991 and began building Prairie Isle a year later.

"The course [Prairie Isle] is a definite marketing tool. Our goal is to sell 20 to 25 lots per year," he said.

It can do more damage than a 36 handicapper.



Leaf spot

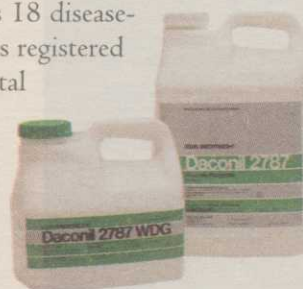
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CIRCLE#125

Course owners win Canadian bridge suit

Continued from page 3

was not reasonably safe for several reasons: There were no railings on the sides of the bridge; the space between the rubber belting and the two-by-four edging was too narrow for golfers wearing spikeless shoes to walk on the wood instead of on the rubber; and the gaps between the planks were too wide — they should be only half an inch, he claimed.

Evidence was presented by the defendants that the need for railings on small bridges can be compared to the need for golfers to wear suits of armour to protect themselves from being injured if hit by a golf ball. The likelihood of a golfer being hit by a ball is far greater than falling off a bridge for lack of a railing, they argued.

It was related that, at the Board of Trade West course, where there are twelve bridges without hand railings, there had been no incidents of fall in more than 20 years. Based on 40,000 rounds of golf per season there had been almost 10 million crossings without an accident.

In his summation on June 4, 1993, Justice Wright noted that "golf courses cater mainly to members of the public who are interested in golfing and are not public areas where all members of the public are invited, including the elderly, disabled and others who have difficulty negotiating walking areas." The judge found that there are no legislated standards or other guidelines governing bridges on golf courses in the province of Ontario. He found "in all circumstances of the case, the defendants [the golf course owners] took such care as was reasonable to see that the plaintiff was reasonably safe while on the golf course." The Justice dismissed the plaintiff's action "with costs to the defendants, if demanded."

Gerry Marcuz, who is the pro/manager at Brookside, expressed satisfaction that the court had ruled in the club's favour. "At least our cost of liability insurance won't go up for awhile," said Marcus.