

A tale of two projects: North, South, fast-forward & slow-going

By A. JOHN HARVEY

The Robert Trent Jones Cos. — consisting of Mr. Jones, Roger Rulewich and myself — were lead designers for Anglebrook Golf Club in Somers, N.Y., and the 18-course Robert Trent Jones Trail in Alabama. It took half the time (about three years) for our office to design, build and open eighteen, 18-hole courses in Alabama along the Trail as it took to receive the mere approvals for construction of Anglebrook.

The Trail and Anglebrook represent two polar opposites when it comes to planning, approvals and timing. Planning and design of the Somers project evolved slowly due to the number of regulatory agencies involved and negative public perception of the course. Conversely, the Trail involved alliances with local governments and the public for development of what was positively perceived as Alabama's tourism savior.

Yes, there are merits to a formal environmental review process. But much of the outcry against building and managing golf courses is emotional, non-scientific-based subjectivity.

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In September 1988, RTJ helped the partnership of Mitsui Fudosan (New York), Inc., and Kajima International, Inc. evaluate potential golf course properties in Westchester County, N.Y. After an exhaustive search, a 240-acre parcel was chosen for a private, 18-hole course in the town of Somers.

On Sept. 28, 1989, our office was commissioned to design the course for the newly formed partnership, Somers Golf Associates (SGA). As we developed routings in coordination with the client's engineers, Divney Consulting of White Plains, N.Y., we soon learned of the site's environmental sensitivity and how these limitations, in effect, compartmentalized the site into uplands and lowland basins. Uplands were composed mainly of wooded expanses and abandon agricultural fields isolated by rock walls, while lowland basins lay at the bottom of the two major watersheds.

In Alabama, on several occasions our

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office toured a proposed site, met with the owner, public officials, received detailed topo and aerial mapping of property, developed a routing, and started construction all within one month. On a number of sites, our company already had field representatives, shapers and equipment at the job site before a plan was sketched out.

A wetlands consultant, DRU and Associates of Glen Cove, N.Y. was hired on by SGA to assist in analyzing and evaluating the environmental constraints of the site. Initially, DRU flagged three different wetland jurisdictional lines, including U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE), New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) and the town of Somers wetlands, each with their own set of criteria. The most inclusive, restrictive and largest in total site area were the town's approximately 60 acres. Dr. A. Martin Petrovic from Cornell University was retained to prepare a turfgrass management program for maintenance of the course. Leggette Brashears & Graham, Inc., (LBG) of Wilton, Conn. was commissioned to study hydrology and geology, and report their findings to the partnership.

The Trail properties were all large land tracts of varying description, each unique and diverse within themselves. Several included wetlands which required on-site delineations by the ACOE. On many occasions, all such adjustments for golf holes were made directly in the field by our office during the wetland flagging process.

Another site investigation required at the Somers site was an archaeological review and field survey of historic artifacts. An extensive investigation by Ernest A. Wiegand II of Norwalk, Conn. revealed significant man-made features such as a fire pit and numerous hunting and cooking implements. These areas evidently served as a hunting and fishing encampments some 10,000 years ago. In September 1990, after a layout was selected by the partnership and the necessary environmental studies, surveys and tests were completed, and a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) was delivered to the town, which

eventually declared itself lead agency for the project. After an extensive review by the agencies and local citizens, the team assembled all questions concerning the proposal and answered each and every one with a written response or refinement of the plan. The team then submitted the revised layout and documentation in the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) in May 1991.

In general, a correlation can be made between the amount of paperwork required to secure approvals and the speed of construction. The route plan and approval documents for Anglebrook were refined, re-routed and reworked in concept and detail, many times at the will of agencies and the team's consultants, whereas a route plan for the Trail was all that was necessary.

In April of this year SGA received its final construction approvals, three years after submission of the FEIS. During the intervening years, refinement of the Somers plan was primarily due to the extent proposed golf course features were located within the two archaeologically significant sites; restrictions on grading of steep slopes; and grading or tree clearing required in wetland areas. In addition, the town of Somers required the team to prepare a construction phasing program which listed activities in a chronological sequence of operations from clearing to grassing. Together with Divney Consulting, our office devised an extensive erosion-control plan using a series of catchment, diversion and filter treatment devices around the perimeter of wetlands, golf construction corridors and within grading areas as progression of construction warrants. As a condition of the approvals, the town stipulated that construction could disturb less than four acres of wetlands and replace or enhance 14 acres of wetlands within these areas. The town further required SGA to institute an on-site water monitoring program.

The massive scale afforded many benefits and economics to the Trail developer, SunBelt Development Corp. All the land and infrastructure required for

you missed them. Please try to be more diligent in the future.

George Dennis
Virginia Beach, Va.

Ed. While we applaud the efforts of The Legends Group, Chesapeake Corp. and Donald Wizeman, as well as Mr. Dennis' unbounded enthusiasm for the Virginia projects, please keep in mind that *Golf Course News* is a business newspaper. We must remain objective in our coverage or we lose credibility with our audience. Mr. Dennis' assertions that Myrtle Beach is "The Golf Capital of the World," and The Legends Group "considered throughout the golf industry to be the very best in daily-fee/resort golf development and operation" are subjective judgments that would be challenged by many other golf destinations, developers and management companies. Such statements are better left to chambers of commerce, advertising agencies, public relations firms and private boosters. We feel the June story accurately reflected the information provided by company representatives; and, incidentally, it did appear on the front page.



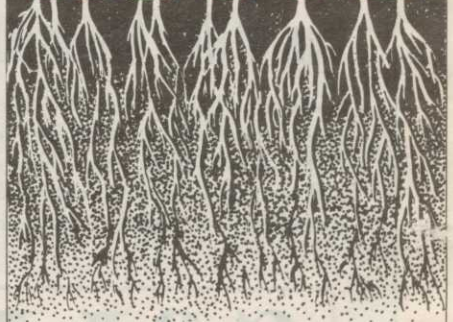
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these courses were given to SunBelt by private landholders, developers or municipalities. A few courses were built along ecologically fragile environments without jeopardizing their landscape value. For example, the Auburn/Opelika course was built on heavily wooded property surrounding Lake Saugahatchee, owned by the Opelika Water Works Board. The surface area of the lake is about 400 acres and was formed to supplement the city's water supply. Today, during the second year of regular maintenance of the golf complex, lake water tests indicate no elevated levels of sediment or turfgrass chemicals as a result of the operation. No wetlands were filled; however, three acres were created.

A full six years after RTJ joined the Somers project, construction at Anglebrook is scheduled to begin this September.

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Dennis letter

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however, what I believe to be critical omissions in his effort. They are:

1. The Legends Group, even though they only own six of the more than 80 golf courses in Myrtle Beach... "The Golf Capital of the World," their courses are the top rated courses there, hosting well over 300,000 golfers each year.

2. The Legends Group is considered, throughout the golf industry, to be the very best in daily-fee/resort golf development and operation. For years they have been courted by virtually every resort community begging them to develop golf courses in their areas. For them to select the Williamsburg area as their first venture outside Myrtle Beach is a major coup for the Williamsburg community.

3. The individual solely responsible for introducing The Legends Group to the Williamsburg area, and in particular, the Chesapeake Corp., was Donald Wizeman, with International Golf Resources in Myrtle Beach. Mr. Wizeman's efforts have made

the Williamsburg Golf Committee's "dream" of golf expansion there a reality in less than eight months. The Fortune 500 Chesapeake Corp. now have the best group as their golf partner. The Legends Group has secured probably the best deal in the recent history of the golf industry, and the Williamsburg tourist economy is assured of becoming "A Major Golf Destination." All thanks to Donald Wizeman.

4. The Counties of New Kent and James City have likewise opened a new, and exciting, chapter in golf development by aggressively pursuing every avenue to expand golf opportunities. They worked long, and hard, "TOGETHER" to make the Legends, and Chesapeake projects a reality. From an initial meeting in early January, to the breaking of ground on two golf courses, in two different municipalities, in July is unheard of in the industry. The staffs at James City County, and New Kent County, are truly innovators with a "can do" attitude that is sadly missing elsewhere in our bureaucratic world.

Obviously, each of these omissions are important stories in and of themselves, and I am very surprised, and disappointed, that