

Palmer Management

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Headquartered at the Bay Hill Club here, Arnold Palmer Golf Management came under the leadership of Nanula and Chief Operating Officer Blake Sonne in September. The two formerly owned and operated Pacific Golf and brought with them a \$50 million commitment from Apex Investment Partners, a Chicago venture capital firm, to acquire, lease and manage golf facilities nationwide over the next five to seven years.

Nanula said Palmer will target quality, existing (open at least one year) layouts, although not necessarily signature designs, with annual revenues of \$750,000 or more. A minimum population of 250,000 within a 30-minute drive is needed for serious consideration.

The firm plans to develop those facilities into what Nanula terms "the quality and price leader" in that market. Basically that means Palmer striving to make it the top-conditioned course with the best service in the area, a combination that should also allow it to charge the top greens fees, whether that be \$25 or \$100 per round.

Nanula points to Palmer-designed Spencer T. Olin Community Golf Course in Alton, Ill., near St. Louis as a good example.

"It's considered among the top courses in the Midwest and is being looked at as a possible U.S. Open site. We want courses that can become showplaces for their communities," Nanula said.

Palmer has reviewed many courses since early October and made offers on several, Nanula said. Plans are to acquire or lease three to four in 1994 and increase the yearly number slightly through the 1990s.

What will differentiate a Palmer-managed course from the handful of large firms that, Nanula says, manage basically generic properties?

"They [other major management firms] do a good job of fixing up and then

maintaining a golf course for the customer," the Palmer executive said. "But there is nothing that allows the consumer to differentiate between a ClubCorp, AGC or Fairways facility. They are like the first generation of old hotels that paved the way for the Marriotts, Hiltons and Hyatts.

"The new generation of courses will attract golfers because they are managed by companies that let the golfer know what to expect in terms of course quality and customer service."

"We believe Palmer Management is uniquely positioned to capitalize on golfers' needs to identify with a brand name management company."

What will set a Palmer-managed course apart?

First and foremost will be the quality

of the course, Nanula said. That responsibility will fall primarily on the shoulders of Director of Agronomy James Ellison. Ellison was head superintendent at Bay Hill, Palmer's home course, for 15 years before taking over the director's post.

Ellison heads a staff of Palmer-trained superintendents, many of whom have worked throughout the United States, Europe and Asia. Ellison will retain as much of the existing staff as possible at acquired courses. "There's no substitute for hands-on knowledge of a golf course," Nanula said.

Second will be the presence of Palmer memorabilia. Photos and paintings of The General will line the walls of the pro shop, where Palmer-endorsed products will be sold.

Third will be the level of customer

service.

"We're determined to do any of our competitors one better," Nanula said. "If that means a municipal course having a cart boy meet you in the parking lot and take your bag to the first tee, that's what we'll do. If it means having the pro shop staff wear Arnie blazers, that's what we'll do. But it won't be a cookie cutter approach. It will vary with the market."

Then there is the Palmer mystique, which Nanula said plays right into the growth of public golf.

"Arnold is a great champion and has endorsed many high-end products, from Rolex watches to expensive cars. But he's also a regular guy who has attracted public support—Arnie's Army. That should help in the municipal market," Nanula said.

Good times could be over for Palatine, Ill. golfers

PALATINE, Ill. — Season pass holders at Palatine Hills Golf Course may be getting too good a bargain.

The Palatine Park District is considering elimination of this unlimited play pass which costs \$610.

"It is clearly my recommendation and that of my golf course staff that season passes as we have traditionally offered them not be available in 1994," said park district Executive Director Fred Hall.

Hall cited one particular cardholder, who played 109 rounds of golf this year, saving \$1,146 over what he would have paid at the existing standard resident identification card rate.

Discount cardholders would pay a lower season fee for a golf card that would entitle them to reduced fees on every round of golf, saving money over the course of a year while making it profitable for cardholders to remain loyal to Palatine Hills, Hall said.

Ernie Sakowicz, a member of the Palatine Hills Golf Association, warned that if this year's pass holders can find better deals at other area golf courses in 1994, Palatine Hills could lose some regulars, he said.

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