

Public-access Poolsbrook a testament to industry growth

By HAL PHILLIPS

KIRKVILLE, N.Y. — “Wow! That’s a lot of golf courses.” That was Ruth Taylor’s reaction when informed that the course her family owns and operates had been recognized as the nation’s 15,000th golf facility. And considering the phenomenal growth of public-access golf in the 1990s, it’s fitting that America’s 15,000th course be a family-run, daily-fee operation catering to the average player.

“We did it ourselves, with our son and son-in-law,” explained Taylor, one of five family members who played a role in the development and operation of Poolsbrook Golf Course, a nine-hole track which opened here, 20 miles east of Syracuse, on April 1.

“My husband, Warren, had been talking about doing this for about 25 years. Last year, he developed some cancer. [The doctors] got it out, so we decided to go for it. We had the land. It’s been in my husband’s family for three generations.

“My husband designed the course. We dug it up, dug the trenches, put the irrigation system in. And we mow it ourselves. We have a small clubhouse with a snack bar. My daughter [Karen Furbeck] and I take care of everything inside, while the boys do everything outside.”

At the urging of *Golf Course News*, the Jupiter, Fla.-based National Golf Founda-



15,000 and counting...

tion (NGF) determined Poolsbrook GC was No. 15,000 after painstakingly poring over its records this spring.

When the first quarter of 1995 came to a close, the NGF determined there were 14,972 operating in the United States. Spring is a busy time for golf course open-

ings and Poolsbrook’s early April opening was perfectly timed.

However, the emergence of Poolsbrook is but one piece of a larger trend in the U.S. golf course industry. While nearly 2,000 courses have opened since 1990 — a record pace — a full 80 percent are daily-fee, municipal or resort. Over the same period, the number of private golf courses has actually declined by more than 7 percent.

Private clubs will never disappear, but developers have realized the demographics of the U.S. golfing population have changed. As Baby Boomers get older, the long-term profit potential at public-access golf courses will become even more pronounced.

The Taylors — as developers and operators of Poolsbrook — have seen it for themselves.

“We have a lot of senior citizens who play it, and they love it because they can walk it,” Taylor explained. “We want to have tournaments to get people to bring their wives, stuff like that. We really want this place to be one where the average golfer and family can come out and play.

“We just built a huge patio and barbecue pit so we can have big picnics. We have four leagues that play here every week. And we have 15 members. You have to start somewhere... Next year I want to start a junior league, for little kids. No teenagers. Just smaller kids. We need to get them started.”

Green fees at Poolsbrook, which boasts views of the Erie Canal, are \$6 for nine holes on weekdays, \$7 on weekends. Business has been good, said Taylor. But this is clearly a labor of love for the Taylors.

Warren and son James Furbeck both work at a local bus service until 3 p.m. each day, then head to the course where they assume their maintenance duties. Warren handles the greens, James cuts the fairways, and son-in-law Chris Meloling mows the tees and rough.

The club was nearly named Deer Run because of the wild deer on the property.

“But we went with Poolsbrook because that’s the name of the road,” Ruth said. “It has worked out well because we’ve had a couple of people show up and tell us they wouldn’t have found us if the street hadn’t been Poolsbrook.”

It could also affect how superintendents interact with members.

“A few years ago, I remember Stuart Leventhal [superintendent at Interlachen Country Club] commenting to me that his members were concerned that the greens had deteriorated and weren’t putting as well as they used to,” Downing stated in his study proposal.

“Obviously they had mutated to an unmanageable level and, no matter what he did, he could not maintain the level of maintenance of past years. Just think how much easier his job would have been if he could utilize DNA results to prove to the membership that there was a variety of grasses on the surfaces and it was now time to think about replanting.”

Penn State University’s Dr. David Huff, a molecular biologist and former turfgrass breeder, will interpret the data from the DNA fingerprinting on a quarterly basis to help steer the program in the proper direction.

The bulk of the money is ticketed for research on putting surfaces, although a portion will also go toward studying fairway Bermudagrass, Downing said.

Certified Bermuda?

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to have quality grass.”

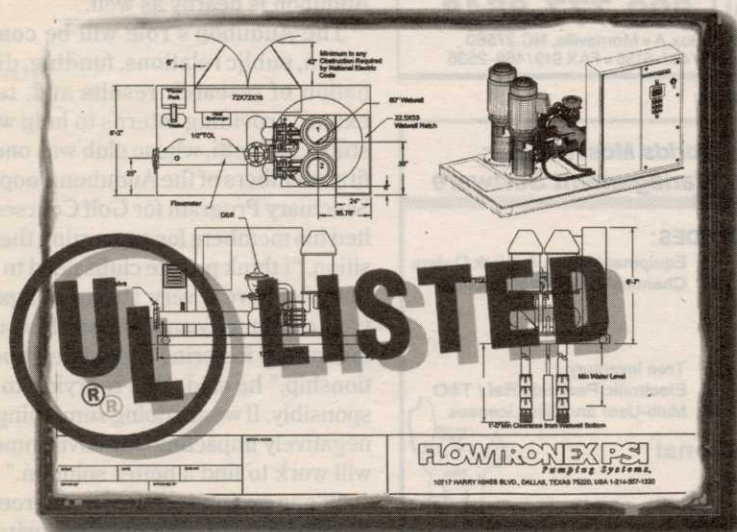
No one knows how off-types infest courses. Some likely originate from contaminated sprig stock when the course was planted, according to the University of Florida researchers who will lead the study, i.e. Charlie Guy, Al Dudeck, Nigel Harrison and Philip Busey. Some off-types may be spontaneous mutations. Undoubtedly, the mutations and common Bermudagrass are redistributed onto greens by golfers’ shoes, golf car tires and mower parts.

How might the research affect how superintendents and suppliers do business? Say a superintendent on a new course helped select a grass before it was planted. He would get a report on the chromosome, morphological and DNA characteristics of the grass before it was put in the ground. Then he could hold back a portion of the cost until the turf was retested after planting to make sure that what he got is what he ordered.

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