

CCA turns around Ipswich CC fortunes

By PETER BLAIS

IPSWICH, Mass. — Four years ago Ipswich Country Club was in danger of falling below 100 members. Today, the course is within a handful of reaching its 400-member limit.

What happened?

Well, for one, the free-falling New England economy finally showed signs of stabilizing around the time President George Bush left office, although far below the giddy heights attained during the Ronald Reagan years. Eastern Massachusetts residents started feeling sufficiently confident in the future to again consider investing in club memberships and possibly a new house lot at the Robert Trent Jones Sr.-designed course.

But just as important to Ipswich CC's revival was the arrival of Club Corporation of America. Boston-based financier Spencer Alpert, who headed the partnership that bought the bankrupt facility in 1992, and brought in CCA to operate the club in the spring of 1993. A year later CCA bought the property.

"ClubCorp's financial stability and reputation won back a lot of people who deserted Ipswich CC when things weren't going well," said General Manager Robert Diodati.

Shortly after opening in 1988, cracks in the New England economy surfaced at Ipswich. The financially-strapped developer was unable to make the financial commitment to the course he'd envisioned, Diodati said. Aerification and verticutting programs were curtailed, fall overseeding canceled and irrigation problems ignored. Fearful for the club's future, members didn't renew their privileges and home buyers largely ignored the development's 200 lots.

Alpert's group, Ipswich Joint Venture I Limited Partnership, bought the project in January 1992 and invested more than \$500,000 in golf course and clubhouse renovations. CCA invested an additional \$1 million during the first year it operated the course — rebuilding the practice facility, paving cart paths, improving drainage, adding water hazards, and enlarging tees.

"We wanted to bring it up to the world-class standards expected at a Robert Trent Jones Sr.-designed facility," Diodati said.

Since acquiring the property in March of 1994, CCA has spent \$600,000 annually in maintenance and another \$100,000 yearly in capital improvements. One of the first things CCA did was purchase acreage north of the course where it dug a new well.

"Now we can supplement the water we pull out of the pond on the fifth hole to irrigate the

course," the general manager said. "Before, there were times when we simply ran out of irrigation water. With the new well, the pond was always full, even with this summer's dry weather."

Shortly after CCA became involved, local contractor C.P. Berry Construction bought many of the unsold lots and began marketing them aggressively, Diodati said. ClubCorp expects half the 200 house lots to have homes erected on them by mid-1996, he added.

More than 90 percent of homeowners are club members. "That's great, considering the National Golf Foundation says less than 40 percent of those living in a golf community typically belong to the golf club," Diodati noted.

Ipswich is updating its five-year plan. Diodati said it could recommend building an additional nine holes at some future date.

"It's really been quite a turnaround," he said.

Montgomery breaks effluent barrier

MONTGOMERY, N.Y. — The Montgomery Golf Club is the first in the state to use treated wastewater effluent for irrigation and water hazards.

Club Manager John LaFramboise said the course expects to save from \$6,000 to \$8,000 annually on its water bill, using wastewater. The club invested \$30,000 for the setup. The wastewater treatment plant is located next door to the course.

Course superintendent Jim Reiter said the system removes the course's dependence on an always fragile city water supply, especially during droughts and dry periods. He said the course — which can consume up to 246,000 gallons of water per night — will have a steady supply of water as long as Montgomery residents use their bathrooms. He estimates that even at times of maximum need, the golf course will take only one-fifth of the wastewater discharged daily.

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