

# GOLF COURSE NEWS

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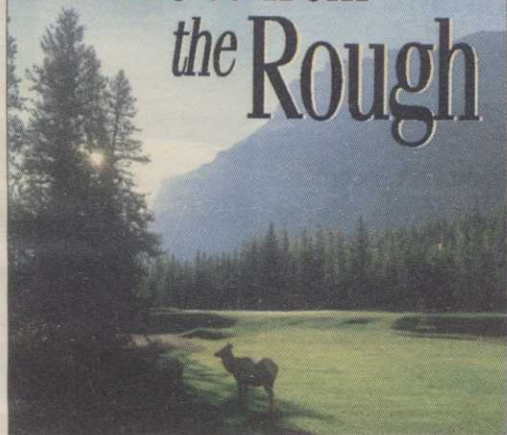
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Ken May/Rolling Greens Photography

## Courses, supers withered by drought

By MARK LESLIE

There are 100-year floods and 100-year droughts. For some, this was a 100-year summer. It was drenching wet in Florida and Ohio. There was record-crunching heat and humidity in Pennsylvania. Dew points went through the roof in Minnesota. Everywhere from Delaware to the Midwest, golf courses got scorched.

"The only guys happy are west of the Rockies," said Golf Course Su-

perintendents Association of America President Gary Grigg after a meeting of chapter representatives in Lawrence, Kan. "It's been drought in the Northeast, heat in the Midwest, rain in the South. [Director] Paul McGinnis said Arizona had a stretch of 47 days when the temperature was over 110 degrees."

"This was the worst summer I've ever seen for growing grass," said Terry Buchen of Double Eagle Club in Galena, Ohio. "We had so much

rain, and the heat and humidity was the worst I've ever seen. The grass just cooked."

Cooked so badly that many golf courses closed down so crews could aerate and reseed. People were hitting balls off bare soil at some facilities.

"If you had new greens with sand-based construction, generally you were fine," said Stan Zontek, director of the U.S. Golf Association Green Section (USGA) Mid-Atlantic Region.

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## Alumni key university development strategy

By MARK LESLIE

COLUMBIA, S.C. — In the Southeastern Conference (SEC), 75,000 to 100,000 fans pack football stadiums every Saturday in the fall. Now a unique concept in golf development, The University Club, aims to pack them in at new golf courses located at those same SEC schools.

Indeed, The University Club at University of South Carolina (USC) boasted a whopping 12,000-plus members when it opened its first 18 holes here on Sept. 15. A second University Club — this one at Louisiana State University — could register similar numbers when it opens in a year or so.

Targeting universities with "a fervent athletic supporter base," this new company, called The University Club, decided to concentrate first on the Southeastern Conference which leads the nation in attendance at football

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### PUBLIC PLAY, OUTSIDE THE BELTWAY

Augustine Golf Club, the Washington, D.C. area's newest golf facility, is open for public play. This 18-hole Rick Jacobson design is the centerpiece of a residential community now under construction in Stafford, Va. For an update on this and other Jacobson projects, see page 30.

## Audubon targets public-access at Golf Course Expo

By MARK LESLIE

ORLANDO, Fla. — Sensing that the vast number of public-access golf course officials are not joining the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary System because they believe it is cost-prohibitive, the Audubon Society of New York (ASNY) will address them in a special session during Golf Course Expo here, Nov. 9-10.

"Our program is not geared towards finding interesting ways for golf courses to spend even more money from an already dwindling budget," said ASNY President Ron Dodson. "But we want superintendents to consider conservation as a mechanism to save money. Generally, our program should be thought of not only as environmental but as cost-efficient as well."

The ASNY is one of several major associations



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## Banc One goes sour on muni financing deals

By PETER BLAIS

Banc One Leasing Corp., a major lending institution that helped finance approximately a dozen municipal golf facilities using municipal lease arrangements, has taken over or is negotiating with municipalities on four of those projects, according to a bank attorney.

The courses are located in Minnesota, Colorado, Iowa and California, said Jeffrey Ayres, senior attorney for Banc One Corp., the holding company for Banc One Leasing.

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## Banc One

Continued from page 1

Voters in North Mankato, Minn., and Fountain, Colo., felt operating the courses were too much of a financial burden on their municipalities and, as was their option under the financial agreement, chose to return the properties to Banc One, Ayres said. The citizens of Carter Lake, Iowa, and Lemoore, Calif., are negotiating with the bank and could follow the same course, he added.

Banc One is no longer negotiating golf course municipal lease arrangements, Ayres said.

"We're still doing municipal leasing for other projects [police cars, fire engines, etc.]," Ayres said. "We're just not doing golf courses. Cities just don't seem interested."

First Golf Corp. of Tempe, Ariz., was the builder on all but the Colorado project, according to First Golf President Bob Neptune.

"We were hired to build the courses," said Neptune. "In each case, we came in on time and on budget for the work we were contracted to do."

• North Links Golf Course in North Mankato, Minn. opened its first nine holes in July 1993, a year later than anticipated because of rainy weather during construction, according to Town Finance Director Wendell Sande. The second nine opened a year later. The entire facility, including a large clubhouse the city chose to add, cost \$6 million. That was roughly \$2 million more than expected, he said.

"We're not unlike any other construction company in that we can't control acts of God," said Neptune in reference to the wet weather during construction. "But the price difference had nothing to do with us in North Mankato."

The city operated North Links for a year and a half. The course hosted 24,000 rounds in 1994, well below the 30,000 projected, according to Town Administrator Bob Ringhofer. Cart rentals were also below estimates, Sande added. Ringhofer said the projections may have been unrealistic to begin with since national rather than Minnesota figures were used in making the projections.

"The caliber of the feasibility work is critical for any golf project," said consultant James McLoughlin of the Pleasantville, N.Y.-based McLoughlin Group. "Too many feasibility study outfits simply say 'yes' to everything. I'd estimate 95 percent of the feasibility work done today simply doesn't pass muster."

As a result of the rain-delayed opening, cost overruns and unfulfilled projections, the city lost \$2 million on the North Links project, Sande said. When told at the end of 1994 that the municipality would have to subsidize the project for another five years before it was self-sustaining, taxpayers voted to return North Links to Banc One.

"If you look 10 to 20 years down the road, the city may regret giving up the course," Ringhofer said this spring. "It needed five years to begin operating properly. Giving it a year just wasn't fair. But the public prevailed."

Banc One, which provided \$4.6 million in financing, hired a management company to operate North Links and opened it late this spring. "Since we took over and put the management company in place, we've been meeting our projections," said Ayres, adding that Banc One will operate the course through the remainder of the year and seek a buyer next season.

• Banc One is negotiating with the suburban Omaha, Neb., city of Carter Lake, Iowa, regarding the troubled Shoreline Golf Course.

Carter Lake borrowed \$3.1 million five years ago to build the 18-hole facility, according to Golf Board Chairman Jay Gundersen. First Golf built the Pat Wyss-designed facility. It has been losing \$200,000 annually since it opened and the city has been unable to make its payments to

*North Mankato and Carter Lake could have been refinanced properly to make both work for their municipalities. I think both will be successful in the long run.'*

— Bob Neptune,  
President First Golf Corp.

Banc One the past two years, Gundersen said.

Floods and heavy rains damaged the course and curtailed play in 1992 and 1993, Gundersen said. But even half-inch rains have forced the course to close for the day, he said.

"I blame First Golf for many of the problems," Gundersen said. "The course is built on sandy soil, so it should drain well. We've had a couple architects tell us it's the poorest building job they've ever seen. We [city] made a lot of mistakes. But accepting the course as built in the first place was probably the biggest one... The city is still operating the course. But I don't know how much longer we can."

Neptune strongly disagreed with Gundersen regarding the quality of his company's construction work. Any problems, he said, may be a result of the city engineer's changing of the architect's plans. First Golf was ordered to go along with those alterations, he added.

"We absolutely did not do a poor job on that golf course," he said. "It was built to the specifications we were told to use. We did what we were hired to do and no one can document otherwise."

Gundersen added that Banc One hasn't been very supportive. "They wanted us to issue some junk bonds to fix up the course, but they wanted First Golf to do the work. They [First Golf] were the problem in the first place" he said.

Ayres said he couldn't comment on the Carter Lake situation since Banc One was still negotiating with the city.

"North Mankato and Carter Lake could have been refinanced properly to make both work for their municipalities," Neptune said. "I think both will be successful in the long run."

• In the early 1990s, Banc One financed an additional nine holes and a sprucing up of the abandoned Appletree Golf Course in Fountain, Colo., to the tune of \$2 million, Ayres said.

The city and local investors operated Appletree for four years before taxpayers voted to turn it back over to the bank in January 1994, said City Finance Director Bill Clark.

"It just wasn't meeting its debt obligation," Clark said. "The city ran it alone for a year, but it became clear it just wasn't going to happen for us."

Appletree never came close to reaching the 50,000 to 60,000 rounds projected in "overly optimistic" feasibility studies, Clark said. He blamed the course's relatively isolated location, far from the main road and a dozen miles outside Colorado Springs, for the lack of play.

Ayres said Banc One is actively seeking a buyer for the course. "We've had a professional management company in there for the past two years and it's doing quite well," he said. "There are so many municipalities that are having to make tough decisions about how to spend their money. Taxpayers often view golf as a luxury item and are likely to cut that before schools, police departments and other things."

• The city of Lemoore, Calif., will likely refinance its municipal course with Banc One, according to City Manager Allen Goodman. Banc One provided financing to upgrade and expand the facility from nine to 18 holes.

The new nine opened 30 months ago. Total revenues have been less than projected largely because greens fees have been held artificially low, Goodman said.

## Phillips comment

Continued from page 8

simply made applications impossible. Meanwhile, in the upper Midwest, the combination of oppressive heat and skyrocketing dew points made for fungus heaven. Indeed, manufacturers could barely ship the fungicide fast enough.

Of course, it matters not what the adverse weather conditions might be — the superintendent faces the music without exception. That's why Mark Leslie's column (turn back to page 8) is so insightful this month. Go ahead: Give it a read... I can wait.

Apologies are due the Jacobsen Division of Textron, which was inadvertently left out of September's report on the first International Hong Kong & China Golf Exhibition and Conference (page 39). Jacobsen will exhibit during the November show. Indeed, Jake

has been involved in the venture from the outset.

Speaking of Asia-Pacific, expect a homecoming of sorts over the next few years, as American architects who've made their marks in the Pacific Rim look to secure more domestic contracts.

Many U.S. designers find it easier to cut their teeth abroad, where the pool of qualified native architects is, frankly, rather limited. Yet the call of America's lucrative design market, not to mention the "luxury" of doing business closer to home and family, is beginning to pull them back. Examples? Ron Fream, Nelson Wright Haworth, Perry Dye and J. Michael Poellot.

Domestic golf course developers would be remiss if they failed to consider these four, and others like them, for U.S. design jobs. They're experienced, innovative and, perhaps most important, they're hungry.

## USTs & banks

Continued from page 35

security interest. The lender would not be liable for cleanup costs from a contaminated property provided it does not engage in petroleum production; refining and marketing; participate in the management or operation of the UST; or store petroleum in the UST after foreclosure.

"It's the right thing to do," Rhodes said. "The old rule was excessive environmental protection. It hurt everyone from golf courses to gas station owners. This gives lenders the safe harbor they need to make loans."

The rule specifies a range of activities, including foreclosure, which lenders can under-

take to manage and protect their collateral without being held responsible for compliance.

The rule also describes circumstances under which a financial institution would be considered to be participating in the management of any UST property and therefore responsible for UST cleanup costs.

Lenders will be allowed to regularly monitor or investigate borrowers' collateral, business condition and financial health. The lender may also require that the property be maintained in an environmentally sound manner as well as provide financial, administrative or other specific or general advice to clean up the property if contaminated.



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