

Casinos still driving golf

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makes for such a good package," said Landmark's Brian Curley, whose firm has opened one Pete Dye design outside Las Vegas on the Paiute Reservation. Three more courses are planned for the site.

"The second course is under construction right now — about halfway done," he said. "All but two or three holes are shaped. That means about six holes are ready to plant. It should open late summer/early fall.

"I've been contacted on a couple other projects in Arizona where they have a casino already," said Curley. "We've talked with a bunch of different Indian groups. There's the Pima reservation. They'll do something with someone here pretty soon. There's another reservation, Fort McDowell, where the Indians are looking to develop."

Markets like Las Vegas have long lacked the golf holes to accommodate its vast tourist base. Here, Indian reservation lands have expedited long-needed efforts to diversify the city's attractions. ["The gambling aspect in Vegas is not the reason golf development is occurring there. It's purely a land issue," said Curley.]

Along the same lines, Prima Donna casinos have commissioned Tom Fazio to design 36 holes in State Line, Nev. There is no Native American business interest here, so the golf courses will be situated across the border in California.

"That's where the water is," Fazio explained. "We have 36 planned, 18 under construction and 75 percent of the earth is moved. We'll be into shaping, drainage, irrigation, greens construction through March, with grassing this summer. We should open this fall.

"I see [casino-based golf development] as no different from resort development. And golf courses are a natural for it, especially because hotel construction has fallen off for so long. If you look back to the mid-'80s, the resorts were the only new hotels being built. I look at these casino courses and it's really resort development. That's what it has replaced."

Because Nevada allows legalized gambling, the state will continue to be a gaming hotbed. And while riverboat gambling operations are mushrooming up and down the Mississippi, Indian-owned casinos represent the fastest-growing segment of the gaming market outside Nevada (see related story).

Despite their freedom from regulatory rigor, reservation golf courses are not free from the specter of politics, as intra-tribe disputes have on occasion proved no less sticky than local conservation commissions or state departments of natural re-

sources. One example is Foxwoods Casino in Ledyard, Conn., the largest casino in the country, whose plans for 36 holes — one 18 designed by Rees Jones, another by his father's firm — have been on hold for more than two years.

"We still have a design agreement, but we haven't moved forward with the construction phase," said Matt McDonald, vice president at Robert Trent Jones Sr. "There is a little internal politics going on, deciding

on which land will be made available to us.

"We've done some route planning but they're not ready to go forward. We're checking in periodically to see where they stand. But they're just not ready."

Further, because Indian reservations are federal trust land, no tribe can actually deliver a title; a fact that has spooked a number of banks. Basically, if a tribe backs out in the middle of a project, developers have no recourse via the U.S. court system. Developers do have the option of seeking an impairment of contract agreement which,

once signed by all parties, allows an investor recourse in tribal court. But that prospect has, up to now, provided little comfort.

As with any development, there are hurdles. But there's no doubt the peculiar alliance between golf, Indians and casinos will continue to bear fruit through the decade.

And there's more to recommend it: stability.

"I don't claim to know that much about the gaming business," said Fazio. "But you don't hear too often about casinos going under."

TEXAS TOWN TARGETS TOURISTS

EULESS, Texas — This city is constructing a premiere golf course, the Texas Star, in an attempt to attract tourists nationwide. City officials have chosen Keith Foster Golf Course Design to design the 18-hole track. Stacked rock ponds, split fairways and cascading tees will span the 7,000-yard, par 71 course. Texas Star will have a conference center, providing meeting rooms and a dining facility. Landscapes Unlimited has started construction. Projected opening for Texas Star is mid-1997.

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