

GOLF COURSE NEWS

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LIKE FATHER...
Bruce Williams (left), superintendent at Bob O'Link in Chicago, will assume the GCSAA presidency next month, following in the footsteps of father Robert Williams (right), who led the association in the late 1950s. For the story on this dynamic, dedicated father-son duo, see page 15.

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Course a day? That's chicken feed

Last year's new openings total 400-plus; 500 in '96?

By HAL PHILLIPS

More than 400 golf courses opened for play across the United States in 1995, a one-year record that will likely stand for a mere 12 months. The National Golf Foundation (NGF) projects between 400 and 500 new facilities will come on line during 1996, as more than 700 courses are under construction and financing options abound.

"The majority of openings are occurring in the heartland," said Rick Norton, the NGF's vice president of operations. "This region benefits from the highest participation rates in the country, and it has relatively inexpensive land. That's what I like to call a golf-sustaining culture."

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New openings	9-hole	18-hole	Total
Daily-Fee	86	99	185
Municipal	12	22	34
Private	6	19	25
Totals	104	140	244
Expansions			
Daily-Fee	84	8	92
Municipal	18	1	19
Private	24	4	28
Total	126	13	139
Grand total	230	153	383*

* Source: National Golf Foundation (through Oct. 5, 1995)

Myrtle Beach to hit century mark amid oversupply fears

By PETER BLAIS

MYRTLE BEACH, S.C. — One would think the opening of the 100th course here sometime this year would be cause for celebration. But for some, it's a matter of concern.

Even with a healthy surge of golfers visiting Myrtle Beach, the eight additional courses scheduled to come on line this spring could mean fewer rounds per course and smaller profits, according to figures provided by the Myrtle Beach Tourism Coalition, a local group comprising tourism industry representatives.

According to the Coalition's 1994 figures, golfers played 3.8 million rounds here, an average of 44,186 rounds per course. If 1996 projec-

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ARBOR CARE

Tree maintenance is best accomplished in late winter/early spring, so now is the time to start planning your pruning strategy. For the first in a two-part series on tree care, see page 15.

PGA aims for new management standard at Reserve

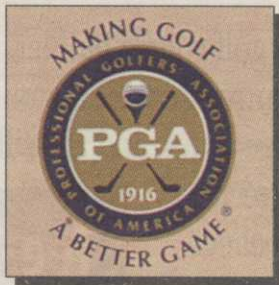
By MARK LESLIE

PORT ST. LUCIE, Fla. — "Automatic adrenaline." That's how the head golf professional describes the PGA of America's new home golf course.

"It's a showplace," Bill Cioffoletti said of PGA Golf

Club at The Reserve which opened here Jan. 1. "Our mission is to meet and exceed the expectations of every golfer who comes through here."

To achieve that mission, Cioffoletti and boss Marty Kavanaugh, two acclaimed PGA golf professionals, brought together a core group of pros from a cross-section of the best merchandising facilities. They drafted a training program... sat down with course architect Tom Fazio and clubhouse architect Viorel Florea... worked with Club Car to design a state-of-the-art golf car storage



structure and with superintendent Rick Wise and Toro to build a user- and environment-friendly maintenance facility. And, voila! When the world welcomed in the Year 1996, it also welcomed what the PGA hopes will soon be a model for the country.

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GCSAA BYLAWS

Membership vote takes center stage

By PETER BLAIS

ORLANDO — Two proposed bylaw changes — one requiring head superintendents to belong to both their national and state associations, and a second setting assistant superintendent dues at half the fee charged head superintendents — will be on the ballot at February's Golf Course Superintendents Association of America (GCSAA) annual meeting here.

The first change would require all head superintendents joining a state or regional chapter after July 1, 1997, to also join the national association. Assistants, associates, affiliates and other members would be exempted from the dual-membership requirement. Head superintendents joining a local chapter before July 1, 1997, are grandfathered and would not be required to hold dual memberships in the local and national associations.

The dual-membership recommendation emerged from September's chapter

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Davis Love III's first design effort, Ocean Creek at Fripp Island (S.C.), is part of last year's record new-course crop. Story page 5.



Warren Grant photo

Myrtle Beach

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tions for a 17-percent increase hold true, rounds per course would jump to 50,574. But new courses about to come on line could dilute that down to 44,000 rounds per facility. More courses but fewer rounds per course, that's not a good situation, according to industry representatives.

"Myrtle Beach courses are averaging 44,000 rounds, and they need that to survive," said Charles Staples, chairman of KSL/Fairways, a management company that has been looking to buy a Myrtle Beach property for several years. "But if that's the average, that means some courses are doing over 50,000 rounds while others are under 40,000. Somebody isn't getting their fair share and those courses are hurting."

Competition for golfers has already led some courses to aggressively discount their fees. To save a few dollars, many visitors have begun ignoring the traditional play-and-stay packages in favor of simply making hotel reservations and trying to book their own tee times.

"Myrtle Beach is experiencing an alarming decline in green fees. This problem is commensurate with increased market competition," states the Tourism Coalition report.

Unless the number of golfers continues its healthy increase, adding the new facilities scheduled to open this spring to the current 92-course Myrtle Beach golf supply will do nothing to diminish market competition. More courses without a proportionate increase in demand means green fees will continue to fall, according to Donald Wizeman, president of International Resort & Golf Resources, which generated the report for the tourist business group.

The report claims Myrtle Beach is, in effect, competing with itself through heavy off-season discounting that ultimately impacts in-season rates; having hoteliers play golf courses against one another, thus driving rates down; and creating an inferior image for Myrtle Beach by promoting it as a place to play "cheap" golf. Among other threats are the possibilities that shrinking profit margins could affect golf course maintenance and thus course quality; cooperative efforts have diminished rapidly in the past three to four years; courses are too dependent on hoteliers for generating golfers and rounds; and discontent with Golf Holiday, which resulted in an unsuccessful effort by a group of premier courses to form their own marketing group.

"Myrtle Beach has always had the image of a blue-collar golf destination because it advertised price over quality," said Larry Young, owner of six upscale

courses, including the Heathland, Moorland and Parkland courses at The Legends. "Golf Holiday realize now that we [course owners] are a diverse group with many interests. Any upscale advertising is done on an individual basis."

Wizeman said such unsettling economic news has been reflected in the recent prices golf course sellers have received for their properties. A Japanese investment group recently purchased 27-hole Buck Creek Plantation for \$9 million. "That [\$9 million] is what you would have paid for just 18 holes not so long ago," Wizeman

said. "It was the first acquisition in quite awhile, which shows the softness of the market."

But all is not doom and gloom along the Grand Strand. Myrtle Beach tourism continues to generate \$5 billion in revenue annually, with golf making up \$677 million of that, according to Tourism Coalition figures. Myrtle Beach tourism is growing at twice the national average and South Carolina ranks first in the United States in golf vacation travel (followed in order by Florida, Arizona and California).

Myrtle Beach long had the advantage of having 60 percent of its

visitors live within a day's drive. But local industry realizes it needs to pull golfers from farther away and make it easier for them to get there.

Last February's addition of Myrtle Beach Jet Express, serving Newark, New York City (JFK Airport), Philadelphia, Chicago, Cleveland and Detroit, has increased the number of visitors, 14,984 more in October alone. Coupled with U.S. Air's new service from New York's LaGuardia Airport and Atlanta and Air South's service from Atlanta, these seven cities are the main source of fly-in vacationers.

"The air service has been very

successful," said course developer Gary Schaal, who opened Wicked Stick in Myrtle Beach Oct. 1. "It takes longer to get your bags out of the airport now, but that's okay. It means more golfers."

Also in its favor, Myrtle Beach has an established product; more golf than anyplace else; a varied recreational menu that includes the beach, conference facilities, entertainment and shopping; the PGA/Energizer Battery Senior Tour Championship to stimulate market awareness; and a Golf Holiday membership that recently had the foresight to raise its dues 50 percent to increase its advertising budget.

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