

IN BRIEF

WORCESTER, Mass. — City officials are planning to use excess funds from the city golf course to better maintain and improve the long-neglected 18-hole course at Green Hill Park. According to City Manager Thomas R. Hoover, the state is also prepared to direct two additional \$500,000 grants for improvements to Green Hill Park if the city can resolve a series of issues that led to the rescinding of its eligibility earlier in the summer. The state has objected to the lack of access by the general public to the golf course that is used primarily by a group of several hundred regular players.

KINGSPORT, Tenn. — City officials have officially accepted the donation of the 160-acre Cattails municipal golf course site, worth \$1 million, from the Eastman Chemical Co. The 18-hole Cattails course, now under construction, is part of the MeadowView Conference Resort and Convention Center Complex. In return for the donation, the city promised Eastman it won't sue the company if chemicals from an adjacent piece of Eastman property migrate onto the golf course site at some time in the future. Two ash landfills, used by Eastman years ago, are located on the adjacent property.

Bethpage, USGA strike a blow for public golf

By J. BARRY MOTHES

FARMINGDALE, N.Y. — Next to Tiger Wood's professional coming-out, it might be the biggest golf story of the year.

After several months of postponements, apparent jiltings and behind-the-scenes wrangling, the United States Golf Association (USGA) has announced the 2002 U.S. Open will be held at the public Black Course at Bethpage State Park on Long Island. The historic decision means the country's most prestigious golf event will be held at a publicly-owned facility for the first time since the tournament was started in 1895.

Along with Tiger Woods' widespread appeal in recent PGA Tour events, the USGA's selection of the Black Course as an Open host is another strong sign that golf is moving towards a broader, more democratic identity and greater access for the public.

"It's hard to overstate our enthusiasm for bringing our national championship to a golf course owned by the public," said David Fay, executive director of the USGA, in a prepared statement. "Most courses and golfers today are public in orientation, and this news just underscores how important public golf is to the game of golf."

The 2002 Open will be held June 13-16,

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Photo by John Johnson

**HARBOTLE UNVEILS OLYMPIAN, CITY-OWNED DESIGN**

The city of Bremerton, Wash. has opened its second 18: the Olympic Course at Gold Mountain, designed by John Harbottle (left). The track meanders through the wooded terrain of a Northwest forest and is named for the mountains surrounding it. While the first course is geared toward the average golfer and is annually rated as the best golf value in the state, the Olympic Course stretches to 7,003 yards, challenging the expert golfer as well as higher-handicapper. Harbottle routed the layout to challenge golfers with ever-changing wind directions.

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Good news at Bethpage

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on the Black Course, one of five courses at the 1,500-acre state park on Long Island and one of three there designed by A.W. Tillinghast. Tillinghast designed the course in 1936 and, even though it has changed some over the decades and received less precise and expensive attention than an Augusta National or Oakmont, it has consistently been rated among the country's best courses — private or public.

Now that the USGA has taken the substantial step of selecting a publicly-owned course to host the U.S. Open, will there be others in the running in the near future? Will public courses become part of a loose, regular rotation that has historically been dominated by private courses like Oakland Hills, Merion, Medinah, Winged Foot and Congressional?

"This will be a litmus test for us," said Marty Parkes, director of communications at the USGA. "Certainly there are some other courses around the country that would be comparable and could probably host an Open. The way the game is today, it sends a great message about public golf and our commitment to that."

The USGA will pay an estimated \$2 million to bring the 7,065-yard Black Course up to U.S. Open standards. The USGA has said much of the work will focus on restoring and reintroducing bunkers at the course, along with tee areas and overall turf improvement. The Bethpage State Park course-maintenance department, led by veteran superintendent Bruce Latman, will help supply manpower and equipment to assist in some of the reconstruction projects.

"Luckily we have six years to work on this," said Parkes. "We have time. The improvements will be done over time. It will be a restoration back to the way the course was [in 1936]."

One project will be a substantial revision to the 18th hole, a 378-yard par 4 that will be lengthened and toughened for the world's best golfers via the reintroduction of fairway and greenside bunkers and new tees. Parkes said the Black Course will be closed in advance of the Open — six or nine months, or even a year — so the course can "peak" in time for the competition.

It hasn't been officially announced yet which golf course architect, if any, will consult on Bethpage with the USGA. Rees Jones has developed a reputation as the "Open Doctor" for his work in recent years preparing courses like The Country Club and Hazeltine National for U.S. Opens. Rees Jones did visit Bethpage earlier this year with USGA officials. It would seem likely he will be

involved again, but nothing has been formally announced.

The USGA's decision put an end to months of anxious waiting and hoping by New York state officials. Bethpage started as a candidate for the 2002 Open, then was bumped up to 2001. Observers waited for an announcement in June during the 1996 U.S. Open at Oakland Hills, the time USGA officials traditionally announce future host courses. But the only course officially named

then was Southern Hills in Tulsa, Okla., as the host course for the 2001 Open. The USGA said at the time that Bethpage was still in consideration for 2002.

The sticking point was not the quality of the Black Course, according to Parkes. He said the USGA's concerns had more to do with the logistics of hosting the event at a public park.

"We're charting into uncharted waters here," Parkes

said. "That led things to move perhaps a little more slowly. I think it was mostly us being comfortable dealing with the public and the state of New York."

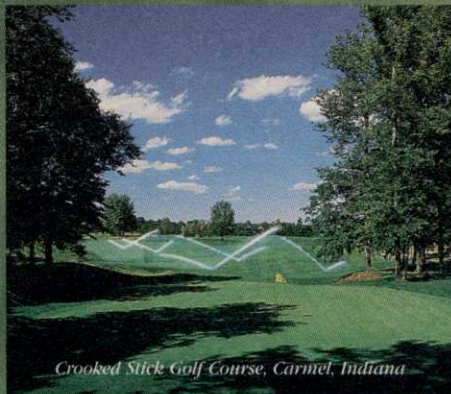
To help smooth out working arrangements, New York Gov. George Pataki announced the formation of a special Task Force that will work directly with the USGA to organize the event. Under the agreement between the USGA and the state, the USGA

will lease the Black Course and other park property for a limited time to conduct the U.S. Open, an event requiring layers of planning. One interesting aspect of the agreement mandates that green fees at the Black Course (currently \$25 on weekends) will not skyrocket after the Open and be increased nominally and within the rate of inflation for a period of two years after the completion of the Open.

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