

GOLF COURSE NEWS

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GCN HONORS BUILDERS OF THE YEAR

MacCurrach Golf Construction, whose principal Allan MacCurrach is seen here with client Arnold Palmer, has been named the Golf Course News Small Builder of the Year for 1996. SAJO Construction earned top honors in the large builder category. For stories, see pages 56-57.

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Openings top 400 mark

A Matter of Course:
1996 Openings

Daily-fee	337
(18-hole equivalent...)	233.5
Municipal	53
(18-hole equivalent...)	40.5
Private	52
(18-hole equivalent...)	39.5

Projects currently
in construction: **850**

Openings scheduled
for 1997: **657**

Promising project pipeline makes '97 slowdown unlikely

By HAL PHILLIPS

File this one under "Business cycle be damned."

The golf course industry witnessed the arrival of another 442 facilities during 1996, fending off the downswing predicted by optimists and skeptics alike. Openings have climbed a steady parabola since 1990. Despite a slight decline from the record 1995 figure of 468 openings, observers view last year's formidable production with a combination of glee and disbelief.

"I continue to be amazed by the boom



The Class of '96: Nicklaus-designed Hualalai Golf Club on Hawaii's Big Island was among 442 new openings last year.

in new course construction," said Lansing, Mich.-based architect Jerry Matthews. "I suppose I say that because I've been in this business for 30 years. It goes in cycles, as other businesses do. History tells us there is going to be a downswing; it's just a question of when."

Not any time soon, it would appear. According to the National Golf Foundation (NGF), more than 800 projects are in the construction phase, meaning any downswing almost certainly will not take

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Alternative spikes gain acceptance

By MARK LESLIE

NORTH BARRINGTON, Ill. — In April 1994 when Wynstone Golf Club here banned metal-spiked golf shoes, superintendents nationwide held their breath, anticipating who-knows-what reaction from golfers. Three years later, and 45 years after the United States Golf Association (USGA) first called on golfers to forsake their metal spikes for more turf-friendly footwear, the revolution is on.

"The latest estimate I've heard is that 1,500 courses have switched to alternative spikes of one sort or another," said USGA Green Section National Director Jim Snow. "I think it's certainly a very popular trend that will have a big impact."

Snow pointed out that the number of courses

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SPECIAL GCSAA VEGAS COVERAGE

Bally's Casino Resort Hotel — whose Grand Ballroom will host the Opening Session — and Hoover Dam are just two of the Las Vegas-area attractions awaiting attendees of the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America International Conference and Show, scheduled for Feb. 6-12. For complete show coverage, including an easy-to-read conference and events schedule, see pages 45-55.



Ski managers: Golf key to year-round revenues

By PETER BLAIS

Skiing provides the monetary speed, but golf helps smooth out the financial bumps for American Skiing Co. (ASC), a major Northern New England ski operator that is fast becoming one of the region's major golf course owners and operators.

Although it represents just 10 percent of ASC's total revenues, golf helps even out the company's cash flow throughout the year, according to ASC Chief Financial Officer Tom Richardson.

"Golf has been very important at

Sugarloaf [USA]," noted Peter Webber, the Carrabassett Valley, Maine, resort's golf director and a member of the committee that coordinates ASC's four golf course operations. "The additional cash flow helps us through the summer. It lets us employ some of our best people on a year-round basis. It keeps the hotel rooms occupied and pulls in other summer business."

ASC operates eight ski areas — Sunday River and Sugarloaf/USA in Maine; Attitash Bear Peak in New Hampshire;

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American Skiing

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and Killington, Mount Snow, Sugarbush, Haystack and Pico Mountain in Vermont. Sugarloaf, Mount Snow, Killington and Sugarbush have golf courses. Sunday River hopes to begin construction of a Robert Trent Jones Jr.-designed course this summer and ASC is considering building a golf facility at Attitash.

Golf wasn't a major part of ASC President Les Otten's plans back in 1972 when he first became Sunday River's general manager. Eight years later he purchased the Western Maine resort.

Under Otten's leadership, Sunday River expanded its trails and lodging facilities and grew into one of the major ski areas in the country.

Sunday River's success paved the way for Otten's headlong assault on the New England ski/golf industry over the past three years. First, he purchased Attitash in the summer of 1994. That fall he signed a lease to operate Sugarbush and bought the facility in May 1995. A month later he acquired Cranmore. In June 1996, Otten doubled his ski holdings and became a major player in the Northern New England golf market, with the purchase of S.K.I. Ltd., owners of Sugarloaf, Killington, Mount Snow, Haystack and Waterville Valley. In December 1996 he acquired Pico. Cranmore and Waterville Valley have been sold.

"It [ASC's acquisitions] reflects the consolidation taking place in the ski and golf industries," Richardson said. "Having many properties creates operating synergies and can create some interesting opportunities for customers."

The golf committee — which includes superintendents, pros, managers and marketing employees of the various courses — has already begun to explore group purchasing discounts on course maintenance supplies, Webber said.

ASC plans more cooperative marketing ventures among the courses. "When Sunday River opens and if we build a course at Attitash, we could do week-long vacation packages that would allow golfers to play a different course every day," said Peter Johnson, ASC's marketing director for golf. ASC currently offers stay-and-play packages at all its courses ranging from \$79 to \$119 per person per night, Johnson said.

Richardson expected ASC to finalize an agreement by late January with RTJ II to design and build a Sunday River course that could be ready for play by 1999. "It will be a first-class facility, just like Sugarloaf," Webber said, "Sunday River will probably be a little more golfer friendly, with wider fairways, but still very much a wilderness golf experience."

Webber has walked the proposed site for the Attitash course, a river valley that would be well suited to a parkland or linksland course, he said.

Richardson said the company has also discussed upgrading the irrigation and drainage at Sugarbush; doing some "tweaking" of the Killington course; and adding another nine at Mount Snow. The possibility of another nine or 18 holes at Sugarloaf is also under consideration, Webber added.

ASC has chosen to manage the golf facilities itself, rather than turn them over

It [ASC's acquisitions] reflects the consolidation taking place in the ski and golf industries.'

— Tom Richardson
ASC's Chief Financial Officer

to a management company. "We don't concession out any part of our operations," Richardson said. "We'd rather do it ourselves, control our own destiny and cash flow."



Killington Golf Course is one of American Skiing Co.'s growing stable of courses.

"Thalonil? There's one big difference to me. It's from Terra."



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