

Hutchinson undertakes major Bahamian project

By HAL PHILLIPS

FREEPORT, Grand Bahama Island — A massive hotel purchase and renovation plan here will result in the refurbishment of one golf course and the resurrection of another. It also means management of both layouts, in addition to more than 1,300 hotel rooms, will be consolidated under a single operator.

That operator is Hutchinson Port Properties (HPP), a joint venture between Hutchinson Port Holdings and Hutchinson Whampoa Properties, a wholly owned subsidiary of Hong Kong-based Hutchinson Whampoa Ltd., an enormous multinational involved in port development, telecommunications and energy.

With its June purchase of the Grand Bahama Beach Hotel, the Lucayan Beach Resort and Casino and the adjacent vacant land, HPP has entered the resort business, too, while simultaneously bolstering the golf destination status of Grand Bahama Island, now a stronger player in the golf resort market.

HPP has also agreed, in principle, to purchase the Clarion Atlantik Beach & Golf Resort, the Lucaya Golf & Country Club and the now dormant Bahama Reef Golf Course.

"The Hutchinson deal, we believe, will take the tourism product of Grand Bahama Island to a higher level and will make the island a much more competitive destination in the marketplace," said David L. Johnson, executive vice president of the Grand Bahama Tourism Board.

According to Bahamian Prime Minister Hubert Ingraham, HPP has also agreed to match government funds of \$2 million annually for five years to promote the destination and attract more airlift from the North American market.

Ingraham said the Lucayan Beach Resort & Casino would close for two years of extensive renovations beginning July 16, with construction commencing in August.

"We are very excited about the development plan for the Lucayan Beach strip," said Ingraham. "We think that it will become to Grand Bahama what Paradise Island has become to Nassau."

Under Johnson's leadership, Grand Bahama Island (GBI) is bidding to match the tourism success enjoyed by its Bahamian sister island. The HPP purchase will also help GBI compete with the Caribbean's increasingly golf-centric resort market.

The massive redevelopment project will be undertaken in two phases. Phase I will last two years and include construction of a new hotel — on the vacant beach-front parcel — and complete renovation

of Lucayan Resort and Casino, which includes the golf course.

Phase II will entail renovation of Grand Bahama Beach Hotel and the Clarion Atlantik. These plans include development of a luxury health spa, eight new restaurants and bars, and other tourist attractions.

Though an architect has not been named, renovation of the Dick Wilson-designed Lucaya G&CC is the first step, according to Craig Martin, operations manager at the Grand Bahama Beach Hotel.

"As far as the Lucaya golf club goes, there will be a new clubhouse, pro shop and upgrades to

the golf course," Martin said. "We want the Lucaya course to be the best in the Caribbean. The Reef Golf Course will be renovated. It's just a question of when."

Refurbishment of the Reef course is the plan's most intriguing element, as the layout has lain fallow for 20 years. The Reef sits directly along the Caribbean and has the potential to offer spectacular views. A flat site and strong

trade winds will provide the as-yet-unnamed architect all the elements for a compelling links course.

When both course renovations are complete, GBI will boast four top-notch golf venues — a total few Caribbean nations can claim. Unaffected by the HPP purchase, the Bahamas Princess Resort and Casino currently manages a pair of fine designs, the Emerald and Ruby courses.



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