

BRIEFS



COURSECO SIGNS LONG-TERM DEAL

CourseCo Inc., a Northern California-based golf course management and development firm, will operate the Crystal Springs Golf Course here for the next 20 years under terms of a lease agreement with San Francisco officials. In connection with the agreement, the first phase of a \$2.5 million upgrade has begun.

NEW OWNERS FOR NH, VT TRACKS

A pair of Northern New England courses have new owners. Pete and Grace McGowan of Gillette, N.J. along with Joe and Mary King of Sand Point, N.Y., purchased nine-hole White River Golf Course in Rochester, Vt., for \$660,000. Herb and Gail Braman were the sellers. Franklin Resource Group, headed by President John Maiorino, acquired nine-hole Nippo Lake Golf Course in Barrington, N.H., for \$850,000 from seller Lloyd Jensen. J.A. Canfield & Co. Brokers of Glen, N.H., represented the sellers at both facilities.

LIVINGOOD NEW GM AT VA. LAYOUT

VIENNA, Va. — Billy Casper Golf Management has named Joseph Livingood general manager at Somerset Golf Club near Fredericksburg. Jerry Slack-designed Somerset is an 18-hole, public facility scheduled to open in by early June. Livingood has extensive management experience, most recently serving as general manager of Crystal Lake Golf Club in the Minneapolis suburb of Lakeville.



Joe Livingood

FAMILY GOLF REPORTS FINANCIALS

MELVILLE, N.Y. — Family Golf Centers reported first-quarter net income rose to \$562,000 or 5 cents per share, up from \$69,000, or 1 cent per share, for the same three months in 1996. Revenues increased 168 percent to \$9.015 million for the first quarter of 1997 compared to \$3.362 million in last year's first quarter. "We continue to pursue our ambitious expansion strategy and have added nine centers since the beginning of the year," said company President Dominic Chang.



Dominic Chang

GOLF COURSE NEWS

London-based Clubhaus widens European reach

Management firms gain popularity, increase service expectations among European golfers

By PETER BLAIS

LONDON — Clubhaus PLC has kicked off its second year in business with the purchase of three more courses, an indication of the increasing influence of course management companies throughout Europe.

"Management companies will inevitably grow here," predicted Colin Hegarty, director of London-based Golf Research Group, a golf industry research firm. "They may grow slower than some people think in terms of the numbers of courses they operate. But the effect they have will be far greater than just numbers. They will redefine customer expectations in terms of the quality golfers expect."

Management firms are gaining strength throughout Europe, but particularly in the United Kingdom, Hegarty said. Clubhaus' three recent acquisitions gives it 10 golf facilities scattered throughout Europe, with 8.5 18-hole equivalents in the United Kingdom alone. According to Hegarty's figures, Clubhaus is the third-ranked management firm in the United Kingdom in terms of total courses (measured in 18-hole equivalents) behind

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Warwickshire Golf Club in England, a Clubhaus facility.

MOVIN' ON UP

Risk-taker Evans takes advantage of opportunity

By PETER BLAIS

BELGRADE LAKES, Maine — Years of preparation and a causal conversation set Kyle Evans on the road from superintendent to course owner.

Evans, 39, then head superintendent at Waterville (Maine) Country Club, was working on the course one August day in 1995 when Maine legend Harold Alfond happened along. Alfond, the millionaire founder of Dexter Shoe and part owner of baseball's Boston Red Sox, is a Waterville CC member.

The two struck up a conversation. Evans mentioned he was looking at some nearby land where he hoped to build a nine-hole executive course. Alfond listened and then invited Evans over to his home that afternoon to meet some friends. The friends were developers who wanted to build a first-class, championship course on 250



Kyle Evans at Belgrade Lakes Golf Club.

acres overlooking the scenic Belgrade lakes. They wanted Evans, the only one in the group with golf industry experience, to lead the development team as part owner and company president.

"You can't hit unless you step to the plate," Evans said. "I didn't hesitate for a moment."

Flash ahead to May 1997, almost two years after his initial conversation with Alfond, and Evans is hoping to open the first nine holes of his Clive Clark-designed course later this summer. He's been involved with the project through land acquisition negotiations, the permitting process, architect and builder selection and course construction.

"All the experiences I had along the way were important in getting me to this position," Evans said.

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GATX course portfolio still up for grabs

By PETER BLAIS

NationsCredit has ended its efforts to buy GATX Capital Corp.'s golf course loan portfolio, according to a NationsCredit spokesman.

"We just couldn't agree on a price," said Don Rhodes, vice president of Atlanta-based NationsCredit. "We made an offer we thought was high, but they apparently thought was too low. In the end, they wouldn't adjust their asking price."

Asked about the negotiations, GATX spokeswoman Sandra Parker offered, "No comment."

Saying the increased willingness of traditional lenders, like banks, to make golf course loans meant too-low rates of return for a financing company [See November GCN], GATX Vice President Roy Powell announced last fall that the firm would no longer make golf loans and would sell its existing \$75 million loan portfolio.

Among GATX's clients were several major golf course operators including Golf Enterprises (now part of National Golf Properties), The Fairways Group, LinksCorp and National Fairways Inc.

"The whole package included 22 courses," Rhodes said. "They cut out the LinksCorp courses early and a few others, leaving somewhere between seven and nine courses we were discussing. We talked, but kept coming up about \$200,000 apart."

Rhodes said he was unaware if GATX was negotiating with other potential buyers for its course portfolio.

"They indicated they might just keep the loans," he added. "If the properties do as well as they believe, keeping them may be the best return they will get. It was hard for us as a lender to pay for an upside that may be five to seven years in the future."

Kyle Evans

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Golf is the only job Evans has had for the past 25 years. He started flipping burgers, working in the pro shop and mowing greens at Naples (Maine) Country Club at age 15. He worked summers at Naples while finishing his bachelor's degree in physical education at Springfield (Mass.) College.

"The gentleman I worked for and who was the first to really spark my interest in the golf industry was Chet Cutting," Evans said. "He was the pro and head superintendent there until he died in 1984."

A brief stint as a student teacher after college convinced Evans to return to the golf industry. He enrolled in the University of Massachusetts winter turf program, where he came under the tutelage of Professor Joseph Trull. Trull helped Evans land his first job as assistant superintendent at Spook Rock Golf Club in Suffern, N.Y. in 1981.

"It was the first time I saw golf as a big-time business," Evans said. "We had a \$500,000 maintenance budget and did about 50,000 rounds a year."

"Stu Staples was the head superintendent and Angelo Palermo [Vice President of Golf Course Development with National Golf Foundation Consulting Inc.] built the course. Stu kept the course in great shape and Angelo ran a good ship. It was a well-run business. I was able to get involved in many parts of the operation."

The chance to be head superintendent and return to his native Maine led Evans to take over Springbrook Golf Course in Leeds in 1983. Going from a *Golf Digest* Top 50 public course to a family-run operation in Central Maine was "a big shock," Evans noted. Owner Shirley Hamel and his son-in-law Joey Golden had rigged up an old fire truck to pump irrigation water onto the course, a sign of Maine ingenuity and thriftiness Evans came to appreciate.

"I was very involved in the entire operation," Evans recalled, "and it really whet my appetite for owning my own course one day."

But that would have to wait. After three years at Springbrook, Evans moved 45 minutes north to Orrin Smith-designed Waterville Country Club, a frequent entry on the state's Top Ten course list. Evans spent the next 10 years in Waterville. In addition to manicuring the course, Evans sat in on greens committee, golf pro selection and long-

range planning meetings.

"I owe the folks at Waterville a lot for that," Evans said. "If they hadn't provided me the opportunity to gain that experience, I wouldn't be where I am today."

Evans said two things have contributed largely to his success — an ability to deal with people and golf's growth.

"You are only as good as the

people around you," Evans said. "The two guys who will help me run Belgrade Lakes have been with me for 10 and seven years, respectively."

"Another factor in my career path is the popularity of the game itself. At every facility I have ever been involved with, I noticed more and more people playing the game. There was an increase every year. That seemed to be

true at most facilities."

Evans believes moving from course superintendent to course owner or manager is a growing phenomenon and logical progression.

"The most valuable asset is the course itself," he said. "So it makes sense we are seeing more and more superintendents taking GM positions and even owning courses."

MARRIOTT NAMED TO MANAGE NEW TENN. LINKS

KINGSPORT, Tenn. — Marriott Golf has been named to manage 18-hole Cattails at MeadowView Golf Course on behalf of the City of Kingsport. The Denis Griffiths-designed course will open this fall.

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