

GOLF COURSE NEWS

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NEW PARTNERS

Architect Dr. Michael Hurdzan (right) has asked long-time associate Dana Fry to join him in his growing Columbus, Ohio, practice. For story, see page 44.

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Fearis joins GCSAA order of ascension

By PETER BLAIS

LAS VEGAS — Blue Hills Country Club's David Fearis, 50, was elected GCSAA secretary/treasurer at the recent annual board of directors election here, meaning the Kansas City (Mo.) superintendent will eventually succeed new President Paul McGinnis and Vice President George Renault as leader of the national superintendents' organization.

The membership also voted in favor of a \$40 dues increase to \$250 for head superintendents (\$125 for assistants), but rejected a proposed bylaw amendment that would have created a new classification (C-V) for career assistant superintendents who would receive the right to vote at annual elections.

Fearis, a 29-year GCSAA member who has served on the board since 1993, bested R. Scott Woodhead,



Dave Fearis

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Palmer Mgmt. moves toward franchising

By PETER BLAIS

ORLANDO, Fla. — Arnold Palmer Golf Management Co. has unveiled a franchise program that allows course owners to use the Palmer name and proprietary operating systems, but permits course owners to continue operating their golf facilities themselves.

"No one has provided management services to people who want to continue running their own courses, until now," said Palmer Chief Marketing Officer Joseph Redling. "We created this system specifically for them."

In exchange for an undisclosed annual franchise

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Wetlands rulings send mixed signals

Had ground been broken today on Gary Player's Floridian in Stuart, Fla., the project would be subject to far stricter wetlands permitting.

Policy-makers hold key to development

By MARK LESLIE

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The country's hotly debated wetlands policies are in turmoil following contradictory developments issued in the early days of 1997: First, Nation Wide Permits for wetlands were tightened, then a court ruling weakened regulations limiting excavation of marshes and swamps.

According to experts, this upheaval may continue for the next two years, until the federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and Army Corps of Engineers install a new set of Nation Wide Permits (NWPs). Golf course developers and oth-

ers are now dealing with two major changes:

- A revised NWP 26 [*GCN*, January '97], which reduces the number of acres a project can affect. In the past, a developer could impact 1 to 10 acres of isolated wetlands or stream headwaters. One acre could be affected without seeking permits. Under the new rules, permits are required for any impact of more than 1/3 of an acre. The 10-acre maximum of wetlands that could be affected has been cut to 3 acres.

- U.S. District Court Judge Stanley S. Harris, who ruled here on Jan. 23, has thrown out the "Tulloch

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DELICATE WORK AT GLEN DORNOCH

Architect Clyde Johnston has unveiled the newest addition to South Carolina's Grand Strand. At Glen Dornoch Waterway Golf Links, now open for play in Little River, Johnston employed 26,000 feet of silt fence to secure the surrounding wetlands and waterfronts from construction activities. For the story on this and other Johnston projects, see page 49.

Factory stores meet market-specific needs

By HAL PHILLIPS

DALLAS — Factory stores here in the competitive Texas golf course market have shown how much distribution has changed, while simultaneously re-emphasizing the importance of independent distribution to the selling process.

Citing loss of market share, The Bloomington, Minn.-based Toro Co. has opened three factory stores serving the Dallas-Fort Worth, Houston and San Antonio markets. One of Toro's major competitors — Racine, Wis.-based Jacobsen Division of Textron — has also opened a factory store here in Dallas.

Yet executives at both firms are careful to point out that market-specific factors — not a loss of faith in traditional distribution channels — have prompted creation of these factory stores.

"This is not a trend," said Eddie Clark, who manages Professional Turf Products, Toro's three-pronged Texas distribution operation. "Toro's expertise is manufacturing and marketing. Distribution is the facilitator that Toro uses to take its products to market. We had lost quite a bit of market share here, so we decided we had to make a transition."

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Palmer franchise

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fee plus a percentage of course revenues, courses that pass a selective screening process can become part of a Palmer Management network that currently includes 20 courses nationwide.

Palmer will supply the franchisee with the Palmer name, proprietary operating systems, access to a national course sup-

plies purchasing program, design partner Design Forum's retail and marketing services, and Palmer's marketing, sales and design support.

The cornerstone of the franchise arrangement, Redling said, is a two-year customer service survey that resulted in The Arnold Palmer Golf Management System™ which includes detailed, proprietary models for

all key business segments, including course maintenance and agronomy, sales and marketing, merchandising, food and beverage, driving range, instruction, equipment services and training. All are aimed at providing a superior experience for golfers.

"Customer service has become somewhat of a platitude in the management business," Redling said. "The hardest thing

to do is exceed customer expectations in any business...We've created detailed management systems to provide affiliated courses. They aren't abstract, but very distinct and have resulted in manuals that show specifically how to deliver quality service to golf customers."

The franchise concept is commonplace in other industries, but new to the golf business, Redling

said. "There's a great deal of interest [among competitors] in what we're doing," the Palmer executive said.

KSL Fairways President Eric Affeldt, whose company manages roughly two dozen public courses nationwide, questioned the wisdom of standardizing every aspect of a golf course operation.

"I'm not sure all systems are transferable in golf," he explained. "We operate in micro markets. Customers look for different things in different places. You couldn't pick up everything we do at one of our Maryland properties and move it to Florida."

"There are some standardized back-of-the-house issues. But to put your name on so many different courses in different areas, and not manage them yourself, is pretty bold."

Affeldt also wondered how Palmer would follow up with its franchisees to make certain they adhered to the company's required quality level.

Redling acknowledged that golf "is not a cookie cutter industry" because no two golf courses are exactly alike. But making customer service the focus at each facility is something that can be consistent from course to course.

Palmer's comprehensive screening process will help insure that only course operators willing to "raise the customer-service bar" and adhere to the company's strict measurement standards will be granted franchises, Redling said. Courses and facilities that are in need of upgrades will have to agree to make those changes before becoming part of the Palmer operation. In addition to frequent meetings with Palmer staff, customer surveys and mystery guest visits (similar to shopping services conducted in retail stores) will be conducted to check if customers are being treated as promised.

"If the course owner is unwilling to make the changes or adhere to the program, we'll move on," Redling said. "There will be a standard franchise agreement that both sides must meet."

Redling said Arnold Palmer "is the name most golfers can relate to...We have the brand name and the other Palmer companies to back it up — our equipment, apparel, course design, Design Forum and other Palmer companies."

Rich Katz, vice president of marketing with Billy Casper Golf Management, noted his company has worked hard to develop a consistent quality and superior customer service.

"Billy Casper himself has a wonderful reputation," Katz said. "But this business is a matter of rolling up your sleeves and going to work. The name helps. But the name players aren't your meeters and greeters. That is done in the trenches by the people you've trained."

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