



Rick Robbins

Robbins teams again with IOI in Malaysia

By MARK LESLIE

JOHORBAHARU, Malaysia — The contractor is on site and clearing the fairways for a 27-hole, daily-fee golf course that will serve as centerpiece of a huge new development here called Sweelam Estates.

The 6,000-acre property is being developed by Industrial Oxygen Inc. (IOI), overseen by managing director and chairman Tan Sri Dato Lee Shin Cheng. IOI is a large plantation landowner as well as a producer of oxygen and industrial petroleum.

Rick Robbins, the principal of Robbins & Associates based in Cary, N.C., who designed 27 holes for IOI at Palm Garden Golf Club in Kuala Lumpur, is master planning the development as well as designing the golf course.

"This will be mostly a daily-fee course oriented toward the middle market," Robbins said. "So many in the area are high-end private facilities. This one is different. There will be some semiprivate members" in the development.

Spencer joins Matthews staff

By MARK LESLIE

LANSING, Mich. — Some 47 years ago an 8-year-old Denny Spencer and his younger brother sawed off several inches of their dad's new persimmon driver, wrapped tape around the shortened handle and headed out to play golf down the street. Happily banging their way around Toledo's Ottawa Park Golf Course, they were confronted by a grandfatherly man who allowed them to continue on even though they had no "ticket" allowing their play. "I've been lucky my entire life and my luck started that day," Spencer says. "If he had chased us off the course I might not have been a golfer. My brother shot 154 and I shot 146, but I was hooked."

Indeed, being a golfer has transformed Spencer's entire life from what it might have been.

Passion for the young Denny Spencer became two dreams: playing on the professional tour and designing golf courses.

In 1992 a much older Denny Spencer fulfilled the first dream when he joined the T.C. Jordan Tour (now Hooters Tour) and then the Senior Tour. And on Jan. 13 he realized the second of those dreams when he joined Jerry Matthews' golf course design firm.

"I'm one of the luckiest guys you will ever meet," he said. "I shake my head at how fortunate I've been — not only to dream about them but have them come true. I pinch myself sometimes."

Spencer's passion to become a good golfer consumed his early

years. He'd practice all winter long, peeling tarpaulin off the ground when it snowed so he could hit the ball off turf. The practice paid off. Among other trophies, he won the Toledo District Amateur five times in match play and five in stroke play beginning in 1971 at the age of 29; placed in the top five in four Ohio Amateur competitions; was low medalist for the U.S. Amateur five times; coped 11 club championships at Highland Meadows Golf Club in Slovenia outside Toledo; twice was Toledo District Player of the Year. In college he won the Mid-American Conference championship in 1964 and was named to the NCAA East-West All-Star Team, and has been inducted into the University of Toledo Hall of Fame.

While earning a lucrative living in the printing industry, amateur golf was "truly my avocation," Spencer said. Although circumstances forced him to twice refuse opportunities to turn pro, the idea always lurked in his mind, in his dreams. And, all the while, as he drove through the countryside he continually found himself envisioning what golf holes he would design on the passing landscape.

"I had basically two passionate wishes: play on tour and design golf courses," he said.

When, at age 45, he asked his wife Peggy if she would have a problem if he gave the Senior Tour a try in five years, she responded: "I would have a problem if you didn't."

Five years of physical and financial preparation followed, and when the time came he sold himself "like stock, to 10 wonderful sponsors." The result of the next five years on the Senior Tour could be described by what Spencer jokingly says should be on his tombstone: "Missed by a shot."

"I cannot tell you the number of times I would shoot 70, 71 or 72 and go down the road" rather than earn one of the slots open to "Monday qualifiers," he said. He played in eight events and was an alternate 16 times. But time and again he missed qualifying by one shot. Several times he missed by one shot playing with one of his idols, Arnold Palmer. In a field of 532 in 1995 he missed, by one shot, the cut to earn one of eight playing cards. In 1995 he was the first-round co-leader in the Bank of Boston Classic before finishing 24th. He played in only three official events, yet finished 112th on the money list, averaging more than \$5,000 per event.

"I got all of the juice out of the orange except I didn't get an exemption card," Spencer said. "That's the one thing I didn't



Denny Spencer stands behind his design mentor, Jerry Matthews.

accomplish. I really would have been fine if I could have gotten out there full-time."

Yet the dream was fulfilled. He did play on the Senior Tour with such greats as Orville Moody, Dave Stockton, Jim Colbert, Bob Goldby, Gibby Gilbert, Doug Ford and Dave Hill.

Last November marked the point at which things were set in motion for fulfilling Spencer's second passionate dream. He finished 21st in a competition for 20 cards for the European Senior Tour. Friend and Senior Tour player Al Reigel, knowing Spencer was "experiencing one of the low parts of my life," asked

what other job would be at the top of his wish list.

"I didn't bat an eye," Spencer said as he recalled his answer: "The design business."

Reigel called friend Matthews, Matthews interviewed Spencer, and the rest of that story is about to be written.

"This is all I want to do the rest of my life," Spencer said from his office at the newly named Jerry Matthews Natural Golf Design.

"Jerry and I are so much on the same page," he said. "His feeling for golf courses, aesthetics and the environment are identical to my own... Golf courses,

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Sand bunkers surround the 3rd green on the Robert von Hagge-designed West Course at Arima Royal in the mountains northwest of Kobai, Japan.

von Hagge course lands Asian tour stop

KOBAI, Japan — The Suntory Ladies Open will have a new home this year, playing an 18-hole layout consisting of a new nine holes designed by Robert von Hagge and a remodeled nine from the previous 27-hole facility at Arima Royal 45 minutes north northwest of Kobai in the mountains. The new 18 opened in September. The existing 27 holes had been built more than two decades ago and was due for a facelift of sorts, according to Mike Smelek of von Hagge Design. Arima Royal is owned by the Obayashi family.

Meanwhile, von Hagge should complete construction by the end of April on Malibu International, which lies 30 minutes west of Kobai. It is expected to open in 1998. Malibu International of Tokyo, which is involved in the entertainment business, is the developer of the project which was begun in 1990.

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