

# GOLF COURSE NEWS

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**IN DEMAND ON THE GRAND STRAND**  
Golf course architect Mike Strantz has followed one Best New Upscale Course selection in 1996 — Stonehouse — with a second Best New pick, Royal New Kent, in 1997. Now he is in such high demand that he is turning down developers each week. See Q&A, page 35.

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## El Niño'd: West Coast gets hammered, with rains, floods

By DAVID WILBER

The winter's intense El Niño-driven storms have hammered California golf courses, highlighted in early February when a series of weather-related records were broken. Several areas of the state recorded the lowest barometer readings ever in February.



Access to the 15th tee at Pebble Beach Golf Links is destroyed as a result of the El Niño-driven storms in early February.

California courses found that no amount of installed drainage could handle the rains since they began on already wet ground. El Niño was not choosy about the golf courses it attacked as rivers, streams, drainage and retaining walls

SEE EL NIÑO COVERAGE, PP.30-33

statewide reached their limits. The Monterey Peninsula received no mercy. "We had the highest tide and the biggest swell ever

recorded in Stillwater Cove," said Mark Michaud, superintendent at Pebble Beach Golf Links. "If we hadn't put in the new seawall on the 18th hole, I'm sure we would have had some ma-  
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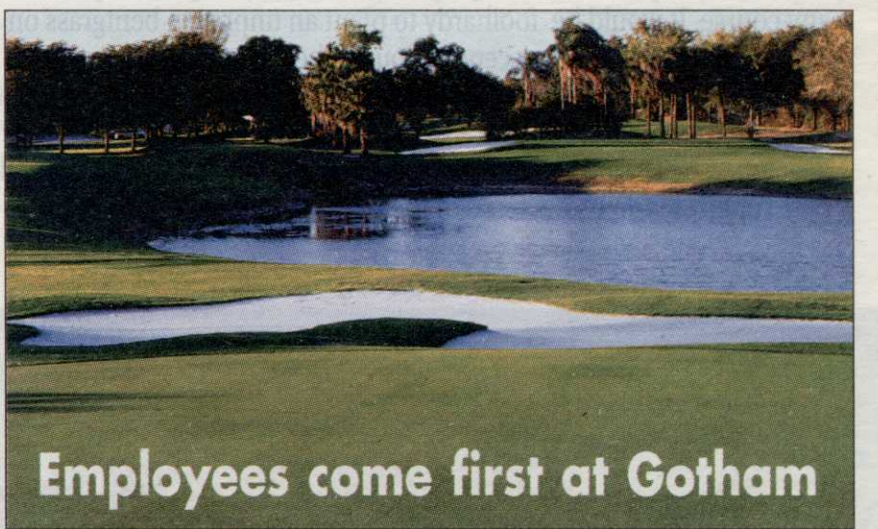
## A First Tee 'first' looms

By MARK LESLIE

RICHMOND, Va. — Neighboring Chesterfield County is "fast-tracking" the Richmond First Tee Foundation (RFTF) proposal through an approval process that could lead to earthmoving in May and put it on target to be the nation's initial project built from the ground up as a First Tee facility.

"We are thrilled with the county's support," said Fred Tattersall, a financial adviser and the moving force behind RFTF. "They have put us on a fast-track program they reserve mostly for large businesses moving to the area."

If all goes smoothly, an April 6 informational meeting with the general public and representatives from the County Board of Supervisors and Planning Commission will be fol-  
**Continued on page 42**



## Employees come first at Gotham

California Golf Club was one of the early purchases that propelled Gotham Golf Partners into the world of course operations.

By PETER BLAIS

Building a course operations firm that is both financially successful and provides a first-rate quality of life for its owners and managers are the dual goals of Gotham Golf Partners, according to company President R. Danny Mays.

"Family and quality of life are very important to all my managers," said Mays, who along with many of GGP's upper-level executives are former employees of KSL Fairways, a Vir-

ginia-based multi-course operator. "In the golf business, it's always been a given that you work seven days a week. But to properly manage entities you have to put people in place who can perform and do their jobs. We have sophisticated management so that there is time for other things in our lives.

"We push our managers to make sure they get their days off. If a manager can't take his days off then he  
**Continued on page 49**

## Mower manufacturers see 'ease' to please

By JOHN FARRELL

Hoping to make life a little easier for golf course operators, major mower manufacturers are addressing real-life concerns — everything from ease of operation and maintenance to noise pollution — as they bring the next wave of products to market.

In what is part of the largest new prod-

uct roll-out in the company's history, Jacobsen is introducing its new HR-9016 Turbo (TM) Wide-Area Rotary Mower.

First unveiled at the GCSAA show in Anaheim, the HR-9016 is a 16-foot-wide rotary mower with a 90-hp turbo-charged diesel engine and 4-wheel drive.

"One of our goals in designing the HR-  
**Continued on page 56**



## Watts, Ritts elected as NGF directors

JUPITER, Fla.—Edwin Watts, president/chief executive officer of Edwin Watts Golf Shops and LPGA Commissioner Jim Ritts have been elected to the National Golf Foundation's Board of Directors.

The balloting took place at the recent NFG Board meeting.

In the election of officers, all four were re-elected. They are:

- Chairman — Robert Maxon, vice president/group publisher of Golf Digest-The Golf Company
- Vice Chairman — Scott Creelman, executive vice president of Spalding Sports Worldwide
- Treasurer — Joe Louis Barrow, Jr., president/chief operating officer, Izzo Systems, Inc.
- Secretary — Cindy Davis, senior vice president/business development, The Arnold Palmer Golf Company.

Creelman was also re-elected to another three-year term as a director, as was Allan Solheim, executive vice president of Karsten Manufacturing Corp.

The remaining board members, who were not up for re-election, are:

- Edmond S. Abrain, executive vice president of sales and marketing, Titleist and Foot-Joy World Wide
- Patrick O'Grady, senior vice president/golf business development, Spalding/Etonic
- George Peper, editor-in-chief, GOLF Magazine
- Bob Rief, general manager, NIKE Golf
- Grant Spaeth, vice president business development, Golfweb
- Charles J. Yash, president/ chief executive officer, Callaway Golf Ball Co.

## Gotham Golf Partners

Continued from page 1

isn't managing very well. It's kind of a reverse of the industry norm. We want to make sure our managers are spending time with their families. It's healthier for them and, in turn, they are happier people who give better service to our customers... The corporate rat race is not what we are after. But there is the opportunity to grow."

Members of GGP's management staff are largely graduates of KSL Fairways, the Virginia-based course operator.

Before founding the Miami-based firm in 1994, Mays was vice president of operations with KSL Fairways for three years and director of operations at Doral Resort and Country Club in Miami for four years before that.

Vice President of the Southern Region Mark McCagg was KSL Fairways' director of business development and acquisitions.

Vice president of the Northern Region John Caporaletti was a regional manager with KSL Fairways.

Chairman Stephen Garchik's expertise is in the acquisition and financial arenas, having since 1987 been president and co-owner of The Evans Co., a regional commercial real-estate and development firm

GGP acquired its first course on Dec. 13, 1996, and its second three weeks later. By the end of 1997, the firm's portfolio stood at five properties: California Golf Club (GC) in North Miami Beach, Fla.; Miami (Fla.) National GC; Stonebrook GC in Pensacola, Fla.; Montgomery National GC in Montgomery, Ala.; and BlackJack Bay Golf Links in Biloxi, Miss.

The company went on a buying spree in early 1998, acquiring eight courses and starting construction of a ninth in the space of three weeks. Added to GGP's holdings were Robindale GC and Lake Arbor GC in Prince George's County, Md.; Edgewood in the Pines GC in Pennsylvania's Pocono Mountains; Eagle's Nest Country Club (CC) in Sewell, N.J.; Wild Oaks GC in Salem, N.J.; Honey Run GC and Yorktowne GC in York, Pa.; and Greencastle Greens GC in Greencastle, Pa. The company also reached agreement to begin its first golf construction project in Port St. Lucie, Fla., with St. James Residential Developer to build, own and operate the Rick Smith-designed course as part of the St. James community.

"We don't have a definite plan to grow by 10 or 15 courses a year," Mays said. "We never went at it that way. Our plan is quite the opposite. We'll simply grow as

fast as we can get good people in place. We'll be governed more by people than plan, equity, debt or whatever."

What differentiates GGP from other firms?

"We're going in buying," Mays said. "We're not looking to manage. We're specialists in turn-arounds. The first two courses we bought were definitely turn-arounds and they turned around even more than we'd projected. When you do that, why work for just \$10,000 a month? We like to make an investment in time, effort and capital and realize a reward, from both the capital appreciation and annual revenues."

GGP's original name was Florida Golf Properties, reflecting the Southeastern location of most of its original five properties. As the company expanded up the East Coast, it searched for a new identity. Following this February's multi-course acquisitions, the firm changed its name in deference to Gotham Partners, the New York-based investment partnership that has capitalized much of GGP's growth.

"It's an equity fund that looks for projects that are under-capitalized with good management. That's basically what we were when we found each other," Mays said.

While many industry experts say most of the easy-turnaround properties have been bought up, Mays disagrees.

"There has traditionally been very little financing available for non-cash-flowing properties," he said. "If you tried to go to golf lenders today, unless you're a proven operator, you won't be able to get a project financed. But there are still a bunch of turn-around properties available... We get calls every day from areas we're not in. The reason we won't go is because we don't have the extra people within our system. We could grow by 25 courses year if we wanted. But that would be foolish."

Asked if GGP is either putting itself in position to be acquired or looking to acquire another major course operator, Mays replied: "We definitely have the equity and debt lined up to go that route. But none of the private guys can compete with the public funds. The cost of their money is so much less than ours, i.e. Meditrust, National Golf Properties, Golf Trust of America. Public money, where you are paying a 5- or 6-percent dividend, is obviously a lot less than we have to pay."

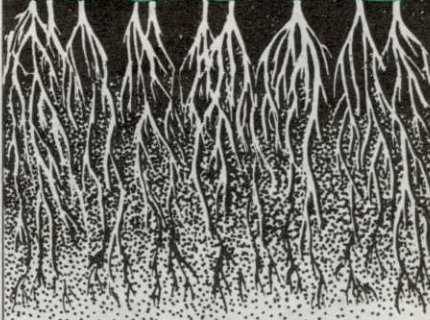
"It's still very much a cottage industry. There are more than 15,000 courses with less than 1,000 that are professionally managed. That means we [professional opera-

tors] are not even at a 10-percent market share, even with everything that's going on. There's plenty of opportunity for everyone. There will be a consolidation. The public companies are in the driver's seat. But the REITs (real estate investment trusts) still have to have course operators."

The Mississippi River is the company's westward geographic boundary. GGP would also consider any type of course. It currently operates semi-private and daily-fee layouts and will start construction of the private, St. Lucie, Fla. project in the next six months.

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## TPC at Wakefield names Davis director

NORTH RALEIGH, N.C. — Robert P. Davis has been named marketing director at the PGA Tour's Tournament Players Club (TPC) at Wakefield Plantation, the private golf club on Falls of the Neuse Road in North Raleigh.

Davis is responsible for corporate and individual membership sales, marketing collateral and strategy, and public relations for the TPC at Wakefield Plantation, the 21st facility in the TPC Network operated by PGA TOUR Properties Inc. of Ponte Vedra Beach, Fla. Davis previously served as national accounts manager for GTE Wireless in Cary.

The TPC at Wakefield Plantation features a course designed by three-time US Open champion Hale Irwin. Also planned is a 35,000-square-foot clubhouse. Both the course and clubhouse are scheduled to open in spring 1999.

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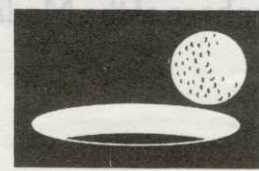
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