

Domestic course construction still going strong

New openings top 400 mark for third consecutive year

Another 429 golf courses opened in 1997, the third consecutive year the number has cleared the 400 mark, according to the latest figures released by the National Golf Foundation.

While the figure is down slightly from 442 a year ago and the record 468 in 1995, the number of course openings should remain steady or perhaps even increase over the next couple of years.

A record 932 courses were under construction at year's end. That's up almost 10 percent from the end of 1996, when 850 courses were under construction.

"When I came to the NGF in 1987 we were opening about 200 projects a year," said NGF Vice President of Communications Bill Burbaum. "Now we're up over 400 over the past three years. It's mind boggling."

Of the 429 new courses, 285 (66 percent) were new facilities and 144 (34 percent) expansions of existing courses. Of the 932 under construction, 655 (70 percent) are new and 277 (30 percent) are expansions.

The 429 figure includes both nine- and 18-hole courses, and figures out to 316 18-hole equivalents.

The flowering public course market continued in full bloom during 1997 with 334 daily-fee and 48 municipal courses together making up 89 percent of the new courses built last year. The trend should continue with 86 percent of the courses under construction — 677 daily-fee and 128 municipal — being of the public variety.



Pictured above is the 10th hole at StoneWater Golf Club in Highland Heights, Ohio, among the 429 golf courses that opened in 1997 and marking the third straight year the new course figure has surpassed the 400 mark. StoneWater is a Michael Hurdzan/Dana Fry design featuring stunning cut stone and water that comes into play on 16 holes. Gregg Foster and Craig Immel are the founders of the 18-hole, private course. Foster is owner and president of Elyria Foundry and a member at several prestigious private clubs including Pine Valley (Clementon, N.J.), Olympic (San Francisco) and Double Eagle (Columbus, Ohio) golf clubs. Immel, a former president of the Northern Ohio PGA, brings 25 years of PGA private club experience to StoneWater.

U.S. courses opened in 1997

	New	Expansions	Total
Daily fee	226	108	334
Municipal	30	18	48
Private	29	20	49
Total	285	144	429

U.S. courses under construction, Dec. 31, 1997

	New	Expansions	Total
Daily fee	487	190	677
Municipal	90	38	128
Private	78	49	127
Total	655	277	932

Source: National Golf Foundation

Golf construction and participation continue to rise throughout Europe

According to a special report released in conjunction with Golf Europe '97, the game is enjoying some healthy gains in that part of the world.

The report was released by Messe Munchen GmbH, a German company that staged Golf Europe '97 in Munich.

The report shows that participation and golf course development were both up in 1996.

More specifically, the report notes that, in 1996, the number of people with golf club memberships in Europe rose by 5.7% to 2.8 million. [Note: Most of Europe's golfers are members of a golf club.]

The report contained no information on rounds played or golfer demographics.

Sweden, Germany and France recorded the greatest increases in numbers of golfers. The report notes that these countries were also the home of 56 of the 229 new courses that opened across Europe last year.

At the end of 1996, Europe was home to 5,331 golf courses.

In its look at golf consumer spending, the report estimates that golf merchandise sales rose 3.3% in 1996 across Europe to \$1.3 billion in U.S. dollars. Included in this total are sales in golf course pro shops, sports retail shops, department stores and by mail-order businesses.

While still sizable, the 1996 increase in golf consumer spending in Europe was less than what it was in 1995 when sales rose 6.3%.

This slowdown, according to the report, was the result of a cooling off of the economy and lower retail prices due to the dollar's lower exchange rate throughout 1996. The "price wars" that erupted during the year between the various golf retail outlets were cited as another factor.

Great Britain, Sweden and Germany led the way in golf sales last year with \$422 million, \$234 million and \$153 million respectively.

The report based much of its information from data received from golf associations in 14 of the 29 countries that make up the European Golf Association. In addition to Great Britain, Sweden, Germany and France, the other members of this group are Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain and Switzerland. The report notes that these countries make up 95% of the total European golf market.

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CIRCLE #161

Worldwide acquires four new golf centers

LAS VEGAS — The new management team of Worldwide Golf Resources Inc. has acquired four golf centers located in the Greater Orlando, Fla., area.

These centers feature driving ranges, golf-training facilities and family entertainment. Worldwide Golf assumed control of these ranges on Jan. 1. Included in the acquisition is the Altamonte Springs Center, recognized as one of the top driving ranges in the United States.

This strategic acquisition provides the company with an immediate presence in Florida's booming golf market and initiates the company's new range acquisition and development plan.

Mac Shahsavari, chairman of the board for the company, indicated that "the change in management through the election of Donald Stoecklein to the position of president, with an extensive background in real-estate acquisitions and financing, provided the impetus in the expedited acquisition."

Stoecklein indicated that "the company will be looking to the immediate acquisition of additional golf-range facilities in attractive markets while pursuing other horizontally integrated acquisitions."