

Venezuelan development takes off

By MARK LESLIE

ISLE DE MARGARITA, Venez. — For a country with 22 golf courses, six new ones means a jump of 27 percent. With new oil money and gambling being added to the economy, golf course development is in a boom in Venezuela.

On Isle de Margarita northeast of Caracas, which will soon have gambling, a Robert Trent Jones Jr.-designed golf course is planned. Larger, and some say prettier than Aruba, this resort island attracts people from throughout the Americas.

Meanwhile, entrepreneurs are taking advantage of the newly discovered oil fields of eastern Venezuela. A joint venture of Venezuelan and Canadian companies is building La Encantada Country Club in Puerto la Cruz, Estado Sucre, the mainland closest to Margarita. And an 18-hole private course, Altos de Golfe, with temporary memberships for transient (mainly oil) workers, is under construction in Maturin, an hour's drive inland from the coast.

The three other facilities are:

- The country's first Planned Unit

Development, called Vira Vira on the outskirts of Barquisimeto, in which the nine-hole course is designed by Arnold Palmer Design Co. and the land planning is being handled by Edward D. Stone Jr. & Associates of Ft. Lauderdale, Fla.

- An unnamed 18-hole project on the coast near Rio Chico about 1-1/2 hours north of Maturin, which is expected to get under construction this year.

- A nine-hole par-3 golf course designed by Stone & Associates, in association with the new resort hotel Cumana Goto in Cumana on the coast due east of Caracas and south of Isle de Margarita.

Venezuela is "still feeling the effects of the monetary devaluation of the mid-1980s, but they seem to be on track now," said J. Christopher Commins of Sunshine Design in Jacksonville, Fla., who will design the course in Puerto la Cruz west of the Orinoco River delta. "There are some good opportunities here and elsewhere in South America.

"Venezuela has a new oil region in the vicinity of the Orinoco River. And this project is almost strictly driven by the oil interests and trying to market to those people and their executives and visitors."

La Encantada Country Club is a mixed-use project, with 400 residential home sites and villas, a conference hotel and the private country club, Commins said. It is a joint venture between Venezuelan promoter Daniel Michelena and The Tillyard Group, a construction management firm in Toronto, Canada, led by David Ostos, vice president of international development.

Construction of the main entry road begins in March, and ground will be broken on the course in July or August. Developers hope to start grassing in 2000 and open the facility in the spring of 2001. An estimated \$7 million will be spent on the golf course alone, Commins said.

With its highest point about 450 meters above sea level, the property has a commanding view of the ocean and islands off the coast. Stretching over 400 acres, it has "tremendous possibilities — as well as big challenges," Commins said.

"We are running the terrain and traversing up and down the slopes. We have been able to separate the front and back nines from on high and low portions of the site, and that will help our phasing concept. The hotel and clubhouse sit in the middle of the site."

Rocky Roquemore, the American designing Altos de Golfe for Venezuelan developer Astral, said that project also is driven by the presence of oil.

"Maturin is an oil boom town," he said. "It is packed with men."

Since there is no other golf club in that region of Venezuela, he said, Altos de Golfe will partly serve the domestic market as well as foreigners. Developers plan to sell 50 to 60 houses to Venezuelans and also build hotels and monthly rental units.

Earthmoving just began and grass

should be planted this year, leading to an opening in 1999.

The project in the city of Porlamar on Isle de Margarita is being developed by a division of Hilton Hotel, which operates one of three hotels in the area and is planning a major structure of timeshare suites on the ocean as well as a marina and vacation homes.

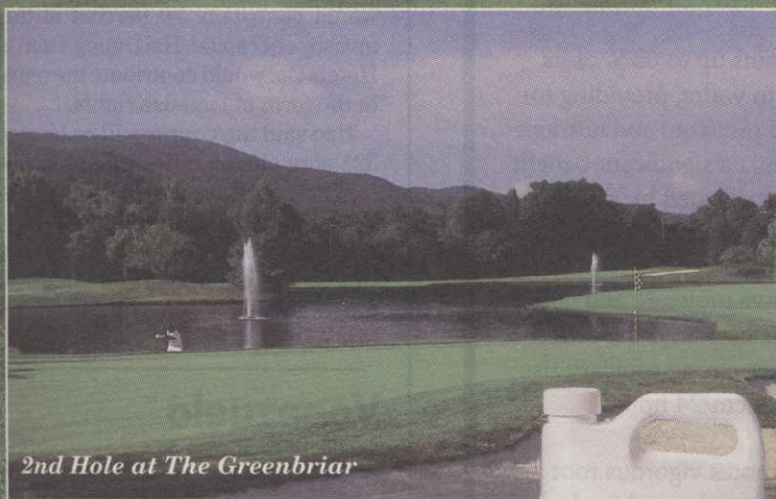
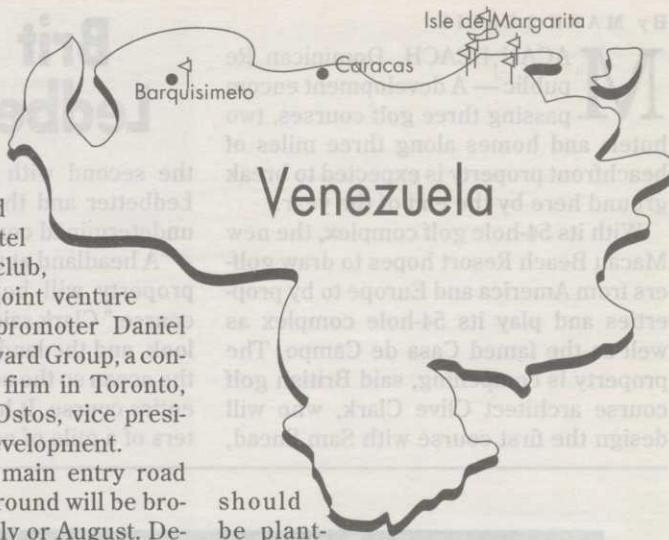
While the project contains this extensive resort element, the course is on "a core site," meaning no residences about it, according to a spokesman for Robert Trent Jones II International.

"We have views of the ocean from one to two miles away because the property is pitched slightly down to the water," said RTJ II Vice President Steve Schroeder.

The Cumana Goto project is under construction and due to open by year's end. In addition to the nine-hole course, it will include one main hotel with condominiums/apartments, tennis courts and other typical amenities.

Vira Vira is a planned community, which Palmer project architect Joe Veal said is the country's first Planned Unit Development. This means all the amenities — tennis, golf and social clubs are the main

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By MARK LESLIE

MACAU BEACH, Dominican Republic — A development encompassing three golf courses, two hotels and homes along three miles of beachfront property is expected to break ground here by the end of the year.

With its 54-hole golf complex, the new Macau Beach Resort hopes to draw golfers from America and Europe to by properties and play its 54-hole complex as well as the famed Casa de Campo. The property is compelling, said British golf course architect Clive Clark, who will design the first course with Sam Snead,

the second with golf instructor David Ledbetter and the third with an as-yet-undetermined consultant.

"A headland at the northern end of the property will be devoted to one golf course," Clark said. "It will have a cliff-top look, and the land gently slopes down to the ocean so the ocean is in view over the entire course. It has a half to three-quarters of a mile of ocean frontage. And the

other two courses are alongside the ocean. It's a huge site."

Amsterdam, Holland-based Golf Ag One is developing the property and has been working with European governments to finalize tax-effective purchasing agreements for Europeans.

Clark said he expects Golf Ag One to fast-track the second course, beginning construction shortly after the first is com-

pleted. It will be Ledbetter's first venture into course design.

Clark will visit the property again in early summer to begin the design process with Snead. He said the site is very similar to Casa de Campo's, but boasting both beachfront and cliff-top.

Is it a challenge to design courses so close to the Pete Dye-designed Casa de Campo track, nicknamed "Teeth of the Dog"?

"Yes," he said, "we want to produce something of a high standard because Casa de Campo is so good. In terms of cliff-top golf Casa de Campo is about as good as anything in the world, very much on a par with Pebble Beach."

The layout will measure as long as 7,000 yards from the back tees, Clark said.

Golf Ag One hopes to attract some form of professional involvement with a tournament of some type.

Vietnam project OK'd

HANOI — Vietnam's government has approved a \$22.1-million joint venture between Gateway Development Ltd. and a local firm to build an 18-hole golf course in the northern province of Hai Hung. Construction is expected to start in April.

Hoang Van Bao, vice-general director of the venture said the foreign partner, which is registered in the British Virgin Islands, would contribute 70 percent of the total investment capital. Hai Duong Tourism and Hotels Co. would contribute the remainder in the form of land-use rights.

Bao said the course will be located on a 321-acre site 50 miles east of Hanoi.

Work on a number of golf courses in Vietnam is already under way, but some have hit problems because of sensitivities in the country associated with acquiring land for construction from farmers.

Venezuela

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three — are being built first, with housing construction following.

Palmer is designing a nine-hole course, which will expand to 18 holes in the second phase of the project, probably in two years.

Ground could be broken as early as April, and a summer 1999 opening is expected.

"The property is basically dome-shaped and sits on a large knob," said Veal, "and the golf course skirts around the lower part. It has good elevation, with beautiful views over an agricultural valley and the city of Barquisimeto."

Developers face the problem of few Venezuelan golfers. "As they start building facilities like this they expect the demand will skyrocket," Veal said. "I think you will see a boom in golf here for sure. Arnold Palmer Design is attracting real-estate developers who can get instant credibility before the course is built."

While the future is not certain, these projects go a long way in relieving the pressure for more golf holes in a country where the latest surge of development was in the 1960s when Dick Wilson and Joe Lee designed layouts here.

"I know some local people are skeptical about the economic future here," said Sunshine Design's Commins. "But keep in mind, in terms of scale, 'a lot' of opportunities here might mean 20 courses."

Brit Clark joins with Snead, Ledbetter in Dominican project

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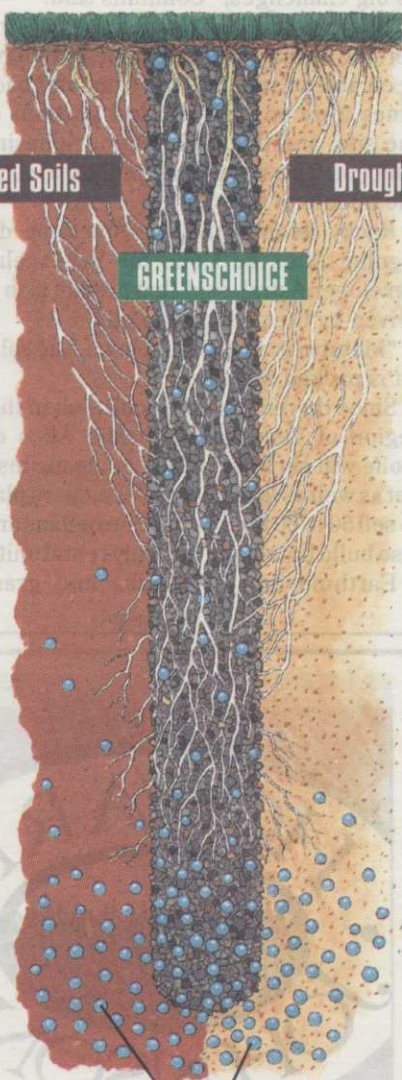
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