

Development heats up along Mississippi's Gulf Coast

GULFPORT, Miss. — Golf is booming on the Gulf Coast of Mississippi.

New golf course development involving names like Nicklaus, Palmer and Floyd has been unfolding at a rapid rate while existing courses are spending millions of dollars to upgrade their layouts and stay competitive in the battle for local and visiting golfers.

The newest course on the coast is The Oaks, an 18-hole daily-fee which opened last month in Pass Christian and features dramatic elevation changes and deep bunkers. The daily-fee layout, developed by Landmark National and designed by Landmark's golf director Chris Cole, has four sets of tees and measures 6,885 yards.

Cole has described the course's elevation changes as its most unique feature. There is a 65-foot change in elevation from the north side of the property to the south, which project officials have said is one of the most dramatic in the region.

With the opening of The Oaks, there are now more than 20 courses between Bay St. Louis and Pascagoula.

Palmer made a big mark on the coast with The Bridges Golf Resort at Casino Magic in Bay St. Louis, which opened in early 1997. Nicklaus, meanwhile, is involved in a \$20 million course and clubhouse that Grand Casinos is building in northern Harrison County. The course, which Grand Casinos hopes to open in spring 1999, is in the final design stages. The Oaks may also become a host site for a Nike Tour event.

"Names like Palmer and Nicklaus will help us make a statement throughout the United States that we're an up-and-coming golf destination," said Scott Ratcliff, who promotes golf for the Mississippi Gulf Coast Convention & Visitors Bureau. "Golf is a lot about perception. Those courses will add to our ability to market the Coast as a true golf destination."

Along with the flurry of new construction, there is significant renovation and upgrade work going on along the Gulf Coast:

— Miami-based Florida Golf Properties bought Southwind Country Club in St. Martin last year and has spent \$1.2 million to renovate the BlackJack Bay Golf Links.

— The Great Southern Golf Club in Gulfport, formerly the Broadwater Sea Course, has spent \$500,000 on a new irrigation system and cart paths around the 94-year-old course, reputed to be the oldest in Mississippi.

— Ray Floyd has reportedly

been checking out the Gulf Hills Resort in Ocean Springs, which has an 18-hole course that many feel could become a popular spot with a serious upgrade.

— The President Broadwater Golf Course in Biloxi, formerly the Broadwater Sun Course, has plans to renovate bunkers, greens, cart paths and other ar-

eas.

And there is talk of more new projects. Beau Rivage hotel and casino in Biloxi, part of Las Vegas giant Mirage Resorts, has bought land for a course in Harrison County. Scratch Golf of Hilton Head, S.C., is also reportedly interested in building a course on the coast.

New clubhouse, name for Ark. layout

NORTH LITTLE ROCK, Ark. — The new owners of the Quapaw Golf Links Course will build a new \$1.5 million clubhouse and change the name of the 5-year-old, daily-fee facility.

The new two-story clubhouse will resemble a castle

with towers at each end. Three holes are being moved to improve the design and allow more homes to be built. The course is also being renovated to resemble a Scottish links-style course. One possible name for the course is Stone Links.

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