

GOLF COURSE NEWS

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INSIDE

Golf Car Market

With more than 900 courses under construction, the golf car market has never been busier 61

Beauty and the Berm

When the "new" wears off at a golf course, put on a new dress. 17



ATOP TWO WORLDS

Scott Hoffman not only maintains four courses at the top-rated resort in Minnesota, he stepped into designers' shoes and laid out Golf Digest's 1997 3rd Best New Upscale Public Course in North America. See Super Focus, page 17.

COURSE MAINTENANCE

The power struggle in today's clubs 26
Pro-active job interviewing 30
Help! USGA needs it with effluent study 32

COURSE DEVELOPMENT

Q&A with ASGCA President Bob Lohmann 29
City takes action to attract golf project 49
Ault, Clark take on landfill site 52

COURSE MANAGEMENT

AGC upgrades Tilden Park Golf Club 8
Environmental Golf acquires Sandpiper 53
Annual management company chart 54-58

SUPPLIER BUSINESS

Toro lands exclusive with St. Andrews 59
Eco Soil to acquire micro-irrigation distributor 60
Lesco boosts internal information systems 62

Rain Bird snags AGC exclusive

By M. LEVANS

AZUSA, Calif. — The directors of maintenance at American Golf Corp. (AGC) have changed its irrigation supplier with the recent signing of an exclusive three-year agreement with Rain Bird.

AGC estimates that it will use Rain Bird Products — from replacement sprinkler heads to the new Cirrus central control irrigation system — in 20 new course irrigation system installations this year. The arrangement could even-

tually trickle down to all 260 AGC courses.

According to AGC, it will continue a service contract with Toro, AGC's previous irrigation supplier, to maintain the existing equipment.

"There are perceptions that we go after the low bidder," said John Meyer, director of fleet management and national accounts at AGC. "That is not the case. We have 8 directors of maintenance. I look at them as the committee and say, 'Irrigation is coming up, who should get a proposal.' The only two names that come up are Rain Bird and Toro. Quality versus quality, you can't get any better in this industry."

Rain Bird won the tight battle, said AGC, with its commitment to extensive after-market service. Rain

Continued on page 63

CCA banks on PGA ETC

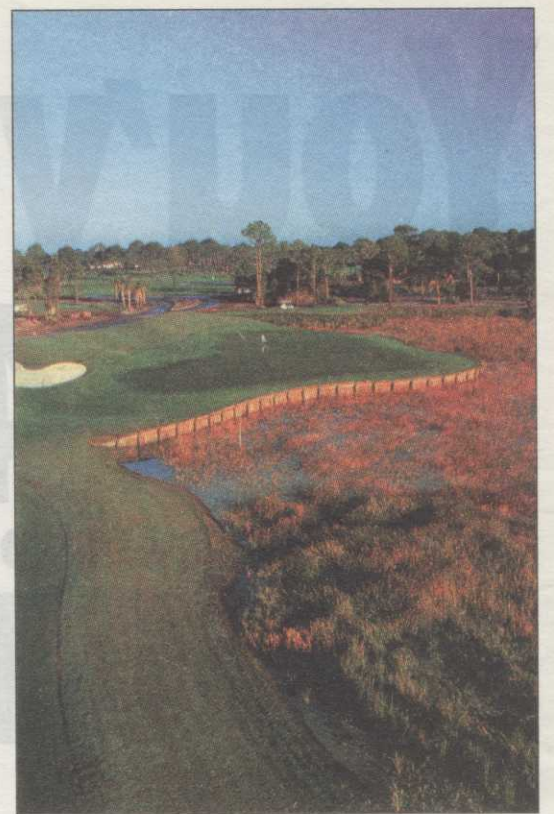
From wire services

DALLAS — The International Group of ClubCorp has acquired a 23-percent interest in PGA European Tour Courses PLC (PGA ETC) from Thompson Investments, Ltd. The transaction is valued at more than \$10 million.

PGA ETC is a company that owns and invests in flagship, tournament golf venues in Europe. It is listed on the London Stock Exchange and trades under the symbol (PGA). ClubCorp will also have two seats on the board of directors of the company.

Thomson Invest-

Continued on page 70



The Indian River Club: an environmental winner

Audubon cracks down

By MARK LESLIE

SELKIRK, N.Y. — Probation. Excommunication. These terms that embody enmity are now part of the lexicon at Audubon International (AI), long a bastion of teamwork and cooperation.

While the majority of the 66 golf courses in the 4-year-old Audubon Signature Program are committed to it and swear by its effectiveness, others have fallen off the bandwagon, or perhaps were never aboard, according to AI President Ron Dodson.

Lamenting the fact that he had to, first, "place on probation," then "excommunicate" one of the eight fully certified Audubon Signature facilities, Dodson said: "Our strongest program is only as strong as our weakest one, and we can't allow people to make our name look weak. We already

Continued on page 34



Estate courses on the rebound

Certainly not your average backyard. The 2nd at Rich Harvest.

By MARK LESLIE

SUGAR GROVE, Ill. — Disappointed in Augusta National's famous par-3 12th hole at Amen Corner, Jerry Rich came home to his 2,000-acre estate and built what he calls a better one. Dis-

appointed in Augusta's 200-yard-long Magnolia Lane, he built a Magnolia Lane of his own. It meanders across two miles.

This is Rich Harvest Links. This is Jerry Rich's dream — a dream that grew from the idea of a

SEE FEATURE ON
ESTATE COURSES,
PAGE 39

modest couple of practice holes to a stunning facility that will open 18 championship-

Continued on page 40

Audubon International stressing management commitment to ideals

Continued from page 1

are being accused by other environmental groups of kowtowing to the golf course industry and giving away the Audubon name. But we don't. People work for it and are proud of it."

However, when The Champions Club at Summerfield in Stuart, Fla., did not correct some problems targeted in AI's biannual audit, the club and the organization parted ways.

"We wrote and told them they are no longer to use Audubon International's name or logo," Dodson said. "They are to take their signs down and the Audubon print off the wall, and take all references to the Signature Program and Audubon International off their advertising materials and so on. We can not do more than that."

"Can not do" because the Signature Program is voluntary, and AI is an environmental organization, not a regulatory agency.

"We're not the South Carolina Fish and Game. We're not the local planning board. We're not giving or denying permits," he said.

The Signature Program grew out of the 9-year-old Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program for Golf Courses, which now boasts around 2,500 member courses, some in the far reaches of the world. While the Sanctuary System is for existing courses, the Signature Program was established "to provide a comprehensive, integrated approach to environmental planning" for developments still in the planning stages, so they could be built with Audubon's Principles for Sustainable Resource Management.

The Champions Club at Summerfield General Manager Jim Poole explained its withdrawal from the program simply: "We did not see the cost benefit of membership. We never had anybody say they played our golf course just because we were Audubon Signature status. We were Best New Golf Course in Golf Digest when we opened. We thought those particular accolades were strong enough to give us credibility."

Asked if the club had entered the Signature Program in 1994 because of a commitment to the

environment, Poole, who came aboard last December, said: "We joined it more for marketing purposes, I guess."

He said the club, now fully owned by Fairway Properties of Cleveland which bought it from ex-partner Riverside Golf a year ago, has not changed its maintenance regimen.

But Riverside Golf President Steve Melnyk said the split with Fairway came from "a clash of opinion about how these things should be run."

"We joined the Audubon program initially because we have an obligation and responsibility to be good stewards of the environment and this was a way for

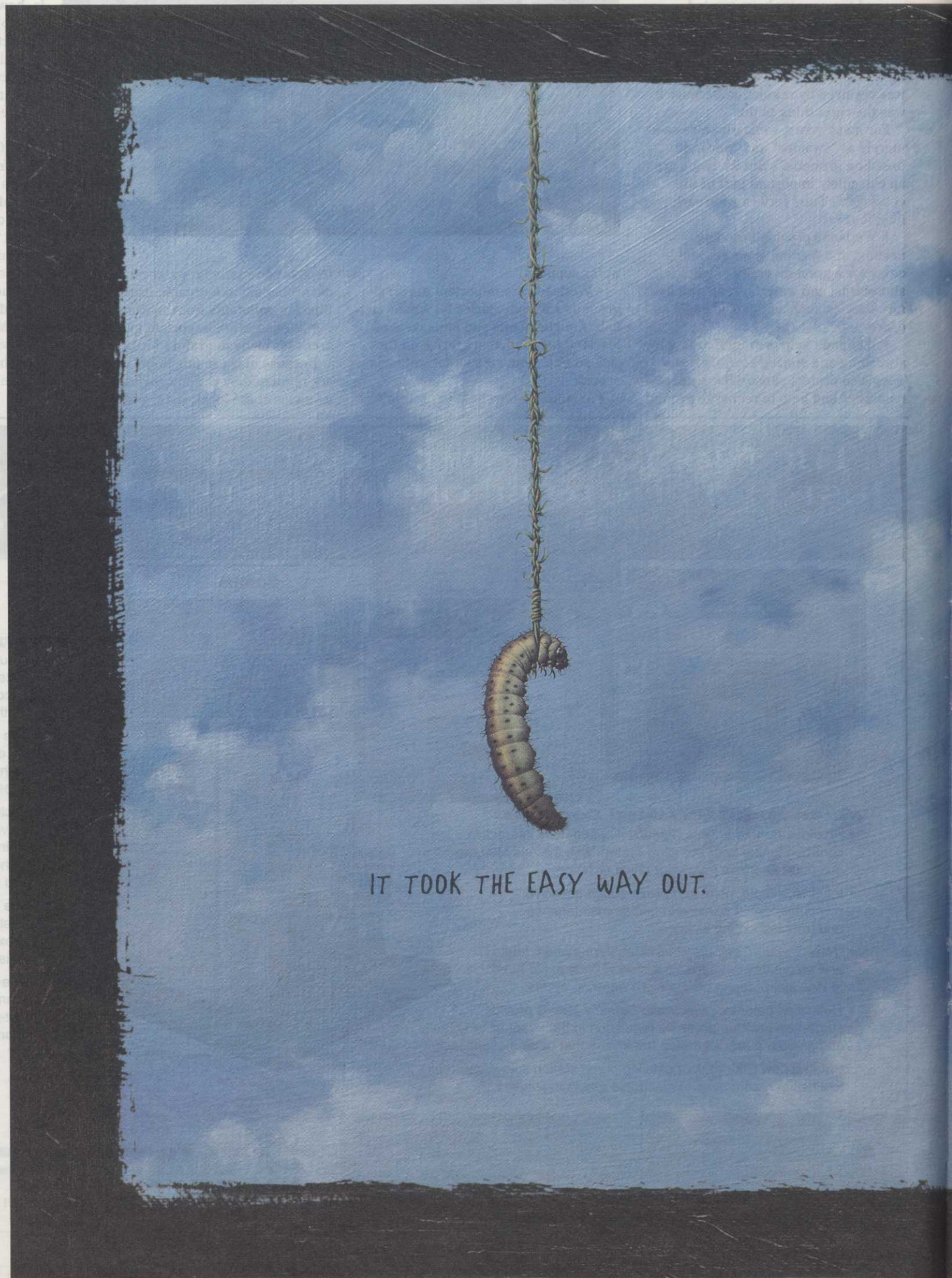
us to further that cause to a much higher level," Melnyk said. "As long as we were involved, we adhered to the somewhat fluid principles of the program."

Meanwhile, Dodson and Signature Program Director Nancy Richardson, who works out of Henderson, Ky., are also concerned about a case in

which a golf course project joined the Signature Program, used its materials as support during the permitting process, then, after gaining approvals, pulled out of the program.

"From registration on, they did not participate in the [certification] process," Richardson said.

Continued on next page



IT TOOK THE EASY WAY OUT.

Dodson on wetlands

Continued from page 33

for that matter) who manages wetlands. I recommend you keep an eye out for it, and if you have wetlands on your course, learn more about their value and how to manage them. If you're considering development, do the environmental "right thing" — learn as much as you can about wetlands and the "ecology of golf courses."

Audubon Signature Status members

Facilities that have earned full Signature certification:

1. Collier's Reserve, Naples, Fla.
2. Indian River Country Club, Vero Beach, Fla.
3. Stevinson Ranch Golf Club Savannah Course, Stevinson, Calif.

4. PGA Golf Club at the Reserve, Port St. Lucie, Fla.

5. Top of the Rock Golf Course, Ridgedale, Mo.

6. Bonita Bay Club East — Cypress Golf Course, Bonita Springs, Fla.

7. Pinehurst #8 Centennial, Pinehurst, N.C.

Audubon Int'l scrutinizes Signature Program

Continued from previous page

"The general manager said they were going to do certain things and they did not."

"Everything the National Audubon Society claimed about us, this outfit just did it," Dodson said. "They used our name. They used our materials. They waved their arms up and down and said,

'Look at this video, what Collier's Reserve did. We'll do this, too.' I'm not saying they are not going to do a nice job on their golf course. I don't know. But the fact of the matter is, they went to the permitting agency and public hearings with our materials. Whether that had any influence on the decision to permit them, I don't know. But

as soon as they got through the process they decided they couldn't meet our guidelines and are now out of the program."

"I want to brag on people who really do things," said Dodson. "But when somebody doesn't follow through on their commitment, or they let it go, should we just walk away? I'm the guy who keeps getting shot at by the Sierra Club. In the last couple of months there have been a half dozen facilities that we have removed from the Signature Program. We are taking their last \$100 and applying it toward a year's membership in the Cooperative Sanctuary System when they open."

Officials at fully certified facilities say the program is well worth their efforts.

"Good environmental sense makes good economic sense," said Robert Swift, general manager of Indian River Club in Vero Beach, Fla., which in November 1995 became the third course to earn Audubon Signature status. "Just about everything we've done as a participant in the Signature Program has or will have a positive economic benefit at some point as a payback."

"Everything we look at — every project, every capital expenditure, every operational decision — we have to consider on the basis of the payback. Does it enhance the value of the club, the value that our members perceive? Does it make for a better round of golf, pay for itself and bring money back to us? ... The programs we've undertaken have, by and large, demonstrated positive payback — some long-term, some short-term."

"At the end of the day, if you look long-term, I venture to say we're probably saving \$20,000 a year on water, energy, etc.," said George Kelley, co-owner of Stevinson Ranch Golf Club in Stevinson, Calif., which gained Signature status in September 1996. "I'm very surprised more developers have not joined the program. I believe they think it's like getting in bed with the big bad wolf."

"It's ironic that a golf course will irrigate 125 acres of turf, which costs a lot of money to build and maintain, and then say they don't have the money to be in the Signature Program," said Tim Hiers, superintendent at Collier's Reserve in Naples, Fla., the first facility in the country to become fully certified. "People will spend extravagant amounts of money in areas that many times will not have any benefit from Day One or forever. Or, some people will hide behind the statement: 'We don't have an unlimited budget.'"

"But, if you're a public golf

Continued on page 37

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Audubon

Continued from page 35

course and think you can't afford to join, think about it. The intent is to use less water, pesticides, fuel, electricity, resources; to me that means spending less money. So how do you argue the program? It's because you don't really understand it."

"Up-front dollars are the hardest to get and the hardest to let go of," explained Indian River Club's Swift. "Your early-end dollars are the most expensive, because they're the hardest to recoup. It's all risk at that point. To ask somebody to do something that seems to add on then is a hard sale. But if you're going to be there for the long haul, it's like anything else: Pay me now or pay me later."

Indian River Club's membership, he said, "has helped us better define and codify, if you will, the standards and goals that we set as managers, and made us better managers. We're better managers and operators and that makes us better stewards of the environment. And that's great. What we have is a beautiful piece of land and if we don't manage it properly we've wasted an asset."

Meanwhile, the Audubon Signature status enhances the facilities' image in the eyes of golfers and the public — whether they use it or not.

"We don't actively pursue the publicity angle," said Stevinson Ranch's Kelley. "But I've always said it's the extra bullet in your marketing gun. It's the kind of publicity money can't buy."

At Indian River Club "every piece of collateral material we produce and send out, every newspaper ad and TV spot we do, every video produced here for a golf show or whatever, at some point communicates the fact that we're an Audubon Signature community," Swift said. "We use it daily in our marketing efforts. That creates value for the real-estate and the club."

Hiers feels more clubs don't join the Audubon programs because of misconceptions besides money — like paperwork. But, all agree, paperwork consumes little time. And Audubon's Richardson added: "It provides a history of the project, and alerts this office to details that we may have questions about. So, in a timely manner, we get necessary information."

At this point, with so many golf facilities in the Signature Program and perhaps on the verge of certification, what troubles AI President Dodson is their continuing efforts to live by the credo of sustainable resource management.

"It's still voluntary," he said. "We work with them and give them, or don't give them, Signa-

ture status. The local governments, Audubons or other environmental groups never go back and check, and we're left to audit them on a regular basis. And the worst we can do is say, 'We're pulling all the logos. You're not a Signature course any more.'

"I wish there were a third party who, for the good of the industry, could report on the properties."

The option of force is out. Fa-

'There has to be some way to strengthen the commitment, but I think Audubon will have to do that in the early screening process.'

— Tim Hiers

ilities that join Audubon's programs sign no contract.

"If the program were ever required, it wouldn't work because the spirit would be gone," Hiers

said. "It's a cooperative program. They want to attract people who already desire to do what Audubon wants them to do. If you heart's right and your inten-

tions are right, you don't need a contract."

Discovering the heart of potential members perhaps is the best way to determine membership.

"There has to be some way to strengthen the commitment, but I think Audubon will have to do that in the early screening process," Hiers said.

And, indeed, Dodson said: "I'm increasingly turning down people who want to join."

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