

# GOLF COURSE NEWS

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## Crisis in Canada puts clamps on course spending

By PETER BLAIS

TORONTO — The cry of the Loony — as Canadians call their one-dollar, bird-imprinted coin — has been a mournful sound for superintendents and suppliers of U.S.-manufactured course equipment as the plummeting Canadian dollar has made those items increasingly expensive for Canadian course managers.

By early August, the Canadian dollar had fallen to a record low, an equivalent of approximately 65 cents in U.S. currency. That represented a 15-percent decline from a year earlier and was forcing some superintendents to consider cutting back, or at the very least

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Maybe a first: Gary Player, Tom Fazio, Pete Dye, Arnold Palmer and Jack Nicklaus all in one room at the same time for the project announcement in Palm Beach Gardens.

## Developmental tidal wave hits Palm Beach Gardens, Fla.

By PETER BLAIS

PALM BEACH GARDENS, Fla. — Three major golf projects located within 15 minutes of one another are in the works in this southeast Florida community that is already home to many upscale private and public facilities.

A Catholic priest, who wants to pair a golf course with a treatment center for troubled teens, hopes to close on a 500-acre parcel for the facility here this fall; *Golf Digest* magazine plans to build a home for its golf schools and a venue to entertain corporate cli-

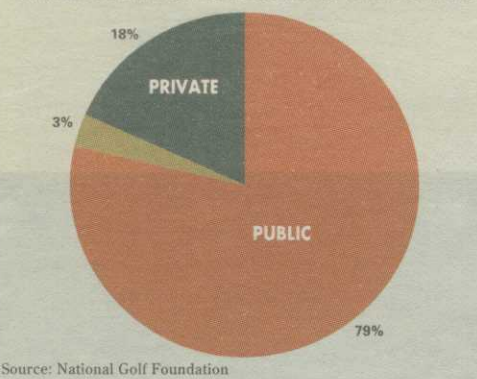
ents; and Jack Nicklaus is designing what many people are calling his legacy near his South Florida home.

Father Leo Armbrust, who is the team chaplain for the NFL's Miami Dolphins and the Big East Miami Hurricanes football teams, is negotiating with the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation to purchase the property, where he plans to build Renaissance Village.

Armbrust hopes to build a private course co-designed by Jack

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### WHERE GOLFERS PLAY A MAJORITY OF THEIR ROUNDS



Source: National Golf Foundation

### PUBLIC GOLF NUMBERS REMAIN STRONG

Twelve years ago, private golfers made up 20 percent of the golf population. By 1997, that percentage had dropped to just above 18 percent. Since 1986 public golfers grew by over 39 percent, from 15 million to 21 million in 1997.

### COURSE MAINTENANCE

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## The British are coming

By TREVOR LEDGER & MARK LESLIE

Over 100 years ago the "fathers" of golf course design boarded steam packets and headed west over the Atlantic Ocean to share the "gospel" according to St. Andrews.

Now, following 60 years of one-way eastbound traffic (with the odd exception bucking the trend), a trickle of British design evangelists is lighting the fires of revival. Saddle your horse,

Continued on page 36

## Public Golf Forum Maintenance Track: Long-sought solutions unveiled

By MARK LESLIE

PALM SPRINGS, Calif. — From unveiling the long-sought solution to *poa annua* and the initial results of the country's first "environmental test course," to illustrating the best practices for everyday operations, the upcoming Public Golf Forum promises practical help in its conference Maintenance sessions.

To be held at Rancho Las Palmas Marriott Resort here, Oct. 26-27, the *Golf*

Course News-sponsored national conference and expo is geared toward superintendents, general managers, owners and developers of public-access golf facilities.

Following keynote addresses by Dr. Michael Hurdzan on Monday and PGA Tour star Greg Norman on Tuesday, each

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### HURDZAN/FRY: LIKE A ROLLING STONE

Heavy machinery is dwarfed by the boulder work at Olde Stonewall Golf Club outside Pittsburgh. The clubhouse and maintenance building bring the British countryside to mind. See story page 27.

## Canadian crisis

Continued from page 1

delaying purchases of U.S. and other foreign-made supplies.

"It's no wonder that people who make large purchases in the U.S. would be backing off or reducing them this year," said Vince Gillis, executive director of the Canadian Golf Superintendents Association (CGSA).

Added CGSA President Doug Meyer of Cedarbrook Golf & Country Club in St. Sophie, Quebec: "This will definitely affect our capital budgets when we are buying new equipment, as well as other course supplies such as chemicals, fertilizers, seed, parts and course supplies. The only products that will not be affected are those produced in Canada.

"At this time it appears that U.S. products will increase in cost more than those from Europe. As a result, many golf clubs may choose to lease equipment manufactured in the U.S. rather than buy new equipment outright. As for the rest of the products, we will have to budget an extra 15 percent for our next budgetary year. Some courses will delay purchases until the spring in the hope that the Canadian dollar rebounds. However they choose to deal with the situation, the low dollar is sure to negatively impact profits in the coming year."

The effects of Canada's struggling dollar may be somewhat offset by this year's increased play at Canadian courses, according to Nolan Duke of G.C. Duke Equipment Ltd. of Burlington, Ont., a Canadian distributor of U.S.-made products such as Ransomes, National and Smithco.

"The exchange rate," Duke said, "has caused our prices to go up 7 to 8 percent, which really would have screwed up budgets. But the weather up here since April has been phenomenal. Almost no weekends have been lost to rain and golf courses have been busy from dawn to dusk. So, it doesn't seem it will have as much impact as you would think.

"We have had some customers ask whether they should wait until spring. Will things be better or will they be worse? People are concerned about it. But most have had such good years that it's really not the prime thing on their minds. Most are looking to reinvest the money in their golf courses and pay less taxes. It's had an effect in that people are calling their bankers to see where rates are going. But we don't think it will be as drastic as it might have been. If it had been a rainy season, it might have really kicked the heck out of us."

The CGSA's Gillis agreed this has been a good revenue year for Canadian courses, due again, in part, to the weak Canadian dollar.

"It [the weak dollar] has been

great for tourism in Canada," Gillis said. "More people have stayed at home and visited their own resorts and attractions instead of going to the U.S. Older people who normally spend five or six months in Florida, are having to rethink their plans. Every other part of our economy is doing well — inflation is low, unemployment is lower than it's been in a long time, the Gross Domestic Product is rising. Everything

is great, except the dollar.

Meyer has also noted an increase in play. "Public courses near the border," he said, "will definitely see an increase in play as it is a real bargain to play at Canadian courses this summer. Also, large resorts with golf facilities report an increased number of American players. Private country clubs and courses further from the border will benefit less.

Duke said he and other suppli-

ers will have a better idea of what impact the exchange rate will have within the next 60 to 90 days when golf courses begin their 1999 budget years.

"The golf industry is much like the municipal industry, they may be six months to a year behind in actual spending, because they wait until they have acquired the wealth to actually spend it," said George Bannerman of Bannerman Ltd., a Toronto-

based manufacturer and distributor of topdressing, aeration and seeding equipment. "If they made money at golf this year, it will reflect somewhat on what they buy this year but more so next year."

On the other side of the coin, Canadian manufacturers distributing in America may be benefiting from the loony's woes since the exchange rate makes Cana-

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# SR 1020 Conquers the South.

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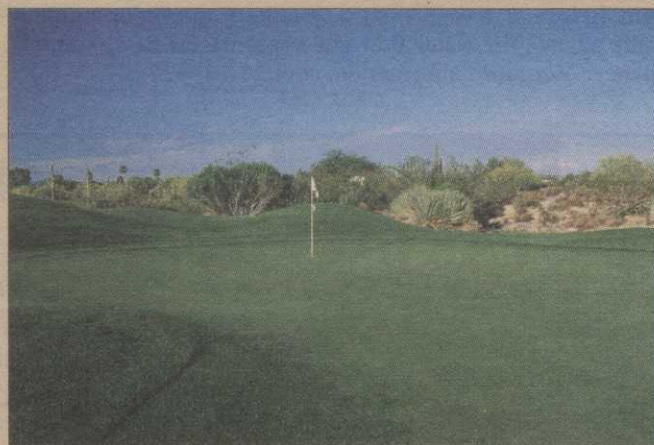
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## Vietnam's growing pains: Part II

*Edit Note: The following is part II of Andrew Overbeck's overview of the Vietnamese golf course development market. The story picks up from page 46 of September's Golf Course News.*

By ANDREW OVERBECK

The next two golf courses are in Dalat and Phan Thiet and are close enough to be weekend courses for Ho Chi Minh City residents, but they are best positioned to attract resort golfers and other Asian members.

Both courses are owned by Danao International and were assisted in the con-

struction process by International Management Group (IMG) and its golf course design team.

The principal investor behind both projects was the late Larry Hilbloom (the "H" in DHL) who died in 1995. While the Dalat Palace Golf Club was already constructed at that point, his death severely affected the development pace of Ocean Dunes in Phan Thiet. They have faced numerous funding setbacks and construction delays due to the sticky issues surrounding the settling of Hilbloom's estate.

However, the course was completed in July of 1996, and the 123-room Novotel hotel just held its soft opening this April. The Nick Faldo signature seaside course is outstanding and at the moment is probably the best conditioned in Vietnam.

The Dalat Palace Golf Club is the best situated in Vietnam. Dalat is a prime tourist destination, is easily reached by plane from HCM City, and boasts comfortable weather year-round. The course is located in the heart of Dalat offering panoramic town views from its hillside perch.

The cool weather enables the club to have tee-to-green bentgrass — only one other course in Asia can boast this distinction. However, the course is still without a permanent clubhouse and members facilities — they will need more members in order to afford this next step. While other facilities are lacking, accommodation is readily available at both the Sofitel and Novotel hotels that are a part of the project.

Currently, the two clubs are in a bit of a transition period. IMG is no longer providing the management services and have

downgraded its position to a "consultancy." Further, in order for both resorts to take off, international access must improve. An international airport is planned for Dalat in the coming years, but getting to Phan Thiet is still a treacherous four-hour drive from HCM City. This is the last hurdle that the two golf clubs must overcome if they are to compete with other Asian resorts.

The story changes dramatically in the North. There is only one golf course, the King's Island Golf Club which is precariously situated on the banks of Dong Mo lake, northwest of Hanoi. While they have a solid lock on the market, this project has struggled from the very beginning.

Due to a miscommunication between the Thai investors and the local government, the course was built below flood level and the first phase of the golf course construction was flooded out. It took the better part of 1994 and 1995, to resolve this problem, and as a result, the project has lost investor interest. Some credibility has returned lately, as the full 18-hole course has opened and is in high player demand among expatriates on weekends.

Effectively, the "design" was done by the owner, and it, therefore, lacks consistency. It was inadequately constructed and many of the greens have had to be rebuilt. The project will require more investors if it is to become a success.

Clearly golf projects in Vietnam must take a long-term approach to development. Despite the obstacles, however, there are five golf projects that are licensed by the MPI and are awaiting construction.

The first is a Daewoo backed project in the Dong Anh province located near the Hanoi airport. However, with the collapse of the Korean economy, the construction

of this project is well down the line. Another is the Do Son Golf Club in Haiphong which is financed by the California Investment Group.

The golf course industry has faced a tough road in Vietnam, and the newly licensed courses will undoubtedly have their growth problems. Hopefully, the industry in Vietnam can benefit from their experiences thus far and readjust their business strategies to fit the current demands of the market. As the Vietnamese economy continues to grow and to expand, the golf market will undoubtedly expand as well.

In the meantime, the focus must continue to be on creating growth among the local Vietnamese market and introducing them to the game of golf. Movement in each of these areas is presently detectable and the golf in Vietnam will be richer for it.

## Malaysia: Public Golf

Continued from page 13

to make them better golfers. With that in mind, golfers are invited to enroll in the seven-part "Homeless Golfers Program" which has been created to ensure golfer proficiency.

The classes cover everything from rules and etiquette to golfing fundamentals and techniques. Lessons from members of the Malaysian National Team and other qualified professionals are an integral part of the program.

After they have completed the course, they receive a "proficiency certificate" and a free USPGA handicap rating that is maintained by the club.

While educating the older golfers on the finer points of golf is necessary to maintain the integrity of the game, giving junior golfers the opportunity to get on the course is vital to the survival of the game itself. Khamis is extremely excited about his "Teen Golf" program.

"Having served as the general manager of private clubs in the past, it has been nearly impossible to set aside time for juniors to have access to the course. However at Seri Selangor, I have been able to create my dream junior program and it will be the center for junior development in Malaysia," said Khamis.

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## Canadian crisis

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