

Sports & Fitness Management expanding its portfolio

JULY

By PETER BLAIS

MANCHESTER, Mo. — It's going to be a busy summer for Sports & Fitness Management, the Missouri-based golf and health club management firm.

Sports & Fitness will open Fred Couples/Gene Bates-designed StoneBridge Golf Club in Bossier City, La., later this summer and recently agreed to purchase Garden Valley Golf Resort in Tyler, Texas. The firm is also about to break ground on a Gary Kern-designed course near St. Louis called Aberdeen and is negotiating a three-course

purchase with a management firm operating facilities in Louisiana and Texas, according to Vice President J. Christopher Kerckhoff.

In addition to StoneBridge, Garden Valley and Aberdeen, the firm operates Briarwood Golf Club in Tyler; Crystal Highlands Golf Club in Festus/Crystal City, Mo.; Golf Club of Incline Village in Foristell, Mo.; Innsbruck Resort & Golf Club in Helen, Ga.; Golf Club of Macon (Ga.); and The Country Club at the Legends in Eureka, Mo. The five new courses added this year put it ahead of its acquisition goal of two properties per year.

Signet

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Pinehurst. Dejak's background is in agronomy and construction, while Embler's is in finance and operations.

"We had a lot of in-the-trenches experience and saw a need for a company where the principals were actually doing the work," Dejak said. "Many companies hire professionals to handle different divisions. What makes us unique is that we handle everything."

"We have superintendents, golf professionals and food and beverage people. But we handle day-to-day operations and construction ourselves. That's where we thought we could be different. We're not only the guys who sell the management contract to clients, but also meet with the clients on a daily basis."

Rocky River Golf Club at Concord (N.C.) was the company's first development/management contract. Signet built and manages the 18-hole, Dan Maples-designed municipal course that opened in September 1997.

Signet began overseeing the grow-in of Chestatee Golf Club in Dawsonville, Ga., last November and assumed management when the Denis Griffiths-designed course opened this June. Signet became construction manager at Bear Creek Golf Club in Douglasville, Ga., last June and will assume the operational reins when the Integrated Golf Services-designed layout opens in April. The firm also has a seasonal management contract with Bayonet at Puppy Creek in Raeford, N.C.

Signet believes its strength lies in combining development and management. "We can develop and open a golf course," Dejak said. "Many owners don't understand how complicated opening a golf course is. The gray area between construction and opening is an intensive transition period that can make or break you during that first couple years."

Signet also does feasibility studies, consulting and renovation work. The firm recently completed a driving range and tee renovation at Cabarrus Country Club in Concord, N.C. and a drainage renovation project at Whispering Pines Country Club in Pinehurst.

Dejak said the firm would like to add a couple courses annually to its management portfolio while maintaining a hands-on approach to daily operations. "We're targeting the Charlotte, N.C., Pinehurst and Atlanta markets primarily as far as new management contracts."

So far, Signet has concentrated on management contracts. But the company is also looking into acquiring facilities, Dejak said

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