

Tour world's best on 18 holes

MYRTLE BEACH, S.C. — A new layout that will allow golfers to play replicas of some of the greatest holes in golf is preparing to open around mid-year, according to its owner.

However, Mel Graham, the Charlotte-based developer who conceived the idea for World Tour Golf Links, said he will not rush the opening of the 27-hole course being built in the heart of Myrtle Beach. For that reason, no firm opening date has been set for the course located just west of the Intracoastal Waterway off Highway 501.

More than seven years in planning, World Tour represents a difficult construction job at best, as engineers and contractors have sought to replicate famous holes from around the world in as authentic detail as possible. The task has been made even more difficult by the unseasonable weather patterns that have plagued the East Coast during the past year.

"Throughout the past winter, spring and much of the summer, El Nino dumped record rainfall on the entire Southeast and, certainly, Myrtle Beach. That put us behind schedule," Graham explained. "Then, Hurricane Bonnie came along and kicked us in the shins again. In fact, last fall and this past winter were the wettest since they started keeping records in South Carolina."

Graham said he had hoped to open World Tour in early 1999, but weather delays made that an ambitious goal even before Hurricane Bonnie damaged the clubhouse and snapped more than 200 trees on the 250-acre site. Though little damage was done to the course itself, time lost in cleaning up the debris from the storm has forced Graham to delay the opening date.

When Hurricane Bonnie struck the Carolina coastline in late August, construction of the World Tour clubhouse was well underway. Even though the brunt of the storm was felt in North Carolina and Virginia, strong winds along the Grand Strand twisted and destroyed the steel framework of the clubhouse. Contractors had to strip away debris before construction could begin again from the foundation up, costing approximately a month's work in the process.

"We spent more than seven years planning World Tour and we'll have close to two years invested in its construction, once it opens. We aren't about to rush things at this point, just to meet an arbitrary opening date," Graham said.

Once open, World Tour will afford golfers an opportunity to play holes inspired by famous holes from courses like Augusta National, St. Andrews, Troon, Seminole, Baltusrol, Royal Melbourne, Pinehurst No. 2 and Pine Valley, among others. They can test holes that replicate the famed and feared island green 17th at the TPC at Sawgrass, "Amen Corner" at Augusta National, the "Postage Stamp" green at Troon, the namesake 18th at Doral's Blue Monster and more.

Pinehurst, Fazio work on Nos. 4 and 5

PINEHURST, N.C. — Fresh off a renovation of its No. 5 course, Pinehurst Resort starts in early January a thorough redesign of No. 4. Tom Fazio, with lead architect Tom Marsolf, will reroute four holes entirely and extensively change the other 14, including all 18 greens complexes and irrigation.

"It will be a new golf course," said Director of Maintenance Brad Kocher about No. 4 which was originally designed by Donald Ross and since redesigned by Richard Tufts and Robert

Trent Jones Sr.

Kocher said officials hope to reopen No. 4 in December. It is situated between No. 2 and No. 7. Wadsworth Golf Construction Co. is the builder.

On the Ellis Maples-designed No. 5, Fazio redesigned two greens complexes and the rest of the work was done in-house, with crews repositioning bunkers, recontouring greens, and building two sets of ladies' tees so that there is now a far-forward set that measures 5,200 yards.

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