

GOLF COURSE NEWS

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HOUSTON TO GET REES JONES' TRACK

Rees Jones (far left) has put down his first complete design for a course in the state of Texas for the Redstone Group, owners of The Houstonian Hotel. To be called Shadow Hawk Golf Club, membership will be limited to 300. See page 47.

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AGC/CCI to buy Cobblestone Golf

By PETER BLAIS

DEL MAR, Calif. — Two major players in the golf course management industry — American Golf Corporation and ClubCorp Inc. — have joined together to acquire Del Mar-based Cobblestone Golf Group from the Meditrust Companies for \$393 million.

The new partnership, Golf Acquisitions LLC, is expected to close on the 45-course acquisition by March 31. Upon closing, the two companies will divide the Cobblestone portfolio.

Meditrust, a Massachusetts-based real estate investment trust (REIT), bought Cobblestone in late 1997 for \$241 million. Cobblestone nearly doubled in size under the Meditrust banner. But the REIT experienced some

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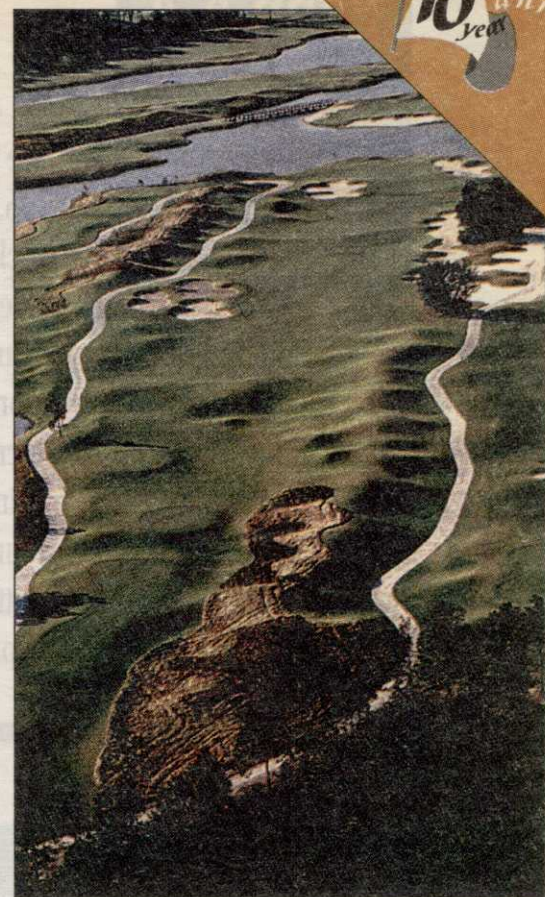
Griffin walks the walk

By MARK LESLIE

ORLANDO, Fla. — Griffin Industries has become the first company to join the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary System, committing its 20-odd properties around the country to environmental stewardship.

Announcing the move at a press conference here, Audubon International President Ron Dodson said Griffin has "picked up the mantle of conservation activism at their plant sites and corporate facility. They are, indeed, walking the walk and talking the talk."

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N.C.'S GRAND STRAND OPENS 101ST

SUNSET BEACH, N.C. — March 1 saw the opening of the first 18 at Thistle Golf Club, the area's 101st golf course to hang the 'open' shingle. Thistle was designed by Tim Cate, a protégé of noted architect Willard Byrd. Above is the par-4 6th.



THOMPSON GIVES PLAYERS A VIEW TO REMEMBER

LACEY, Wash. — Peter L.H. Thompson's Vicwood Golf Links at Hawks Prairie will be open and ready for play this spring. Built on a former logging site, the course offers rolling terrain, wetlands, water and this stunning view of 14,000-foot Mr. Rainier (above).

Audubon to open first course this fall

By MARK LESLIE

MEMPHIS, Tenn. — It was a different process but the same result: The first Audubon International Golf Course will open here this fall — the Jack Nicklaus-designed Spring Creek Ranch.

"This is not how we thought we'd get there," said Audubon International (AI) President Ron Dodson, "but it is truly the first Audubon International Golf Course."

AI courses, thought for the last year to be on the verge of reality, have been stalled for one reason or another — to a great extent because Dodson and AI-affiliated scientists are writing the "rules book" as they go. In fall 1997, the AI Golf and the

Continued on page 43

Richmond 1st Tee ready to roll

By MARK LESLIE

RICHMOND, Va. — A judge's stunning reversal of his own decision has paved the way for the Richmond First Tee project to, finally, get under way.

Richmond organizers, who had hoped to open the nation's initial new First Tee facility, had been stalled for months by opponents using legal challenges and appeals to administrative county approvals. Now, it appears, they can proceed.

On Feb. 3, Circuit Court Judge Jack B. Stevens reportedly told a

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Judge's reversal clears path for Richmond First Tee — finally

Continued from page 1

court hearing he had been negligent when ruling that the county could lease land but only if it controls fees and oversees the leasee's operation. That flew in the face of the county-First Tee agreement for the youth-oriented course at Iron Bridge Park. First Tee advocates argued that the decision also appeared incongruent with the current leases the county has in effect with an airport and various other entities.

Now, according to Richmond First Tee Executive Director Tim Merry, it will probably be mid-March to early April before construction can begin at the park which sits outside the city in Chesterfield County.

"We are relieved," he said. "We had hoped this [reversal] would be the case. We are prepared to move ahead. We remain very committed, and look forward to the day when we can have kids out there playing on the golf course."

Local businessmen, led by Fred Tattersall, had raised \$2 million for the facility — \$1.5 million to build it and \$500,000 to operate it for five years, by which time it should be self-sustaining.

The goal is to make golf affordable for area children.

Golf course architect Lester George, who is donating his services, and builder Quality Grassing & Services, which will earn no profit on the project, are prepared to get started.

Shortly after Stevens reversed his decision, George submitted a new course routing, eliminating an irrigation pond that was a safety issue for some. And Quality Grassing stood ready to begin clearing, once the new plans were approved by the Chesterfield county commissioners.

Opponents to the project, led by park neighbors, promised to appeal Stevens' decision. But Merry said: "We're not waiting for the appeal. By the end of February I will have all the permitting we need. Construction could only be held up by a judge granting a restraining order while awaiting appeal."

Richmond First Tee supporters see the year-long entanglement as a possible blessing in disguise, for two reasons:

- "When we go through it this time around, [national] First Tee is in a much better position to help us, and we're in a better position to do it," Merry said, referring to the fact that a year ago the national program had just been created by the PGA of America, PGA Tour, U.S. Golf Association,

LPGA and others.

"Though not the first facility, we'll still have a unique project here," Merry added.

- While the county project was stalled, Richmond First Tee reopened talks with the city of Richmond concerning an inner-city site the city wanted them to build on in the

'We will go from no project to two at the same time. But those are the better problems to have.'

— Tim Merry

first place. The project would be a three-hole layout next to an existing driving range, with another six holes in the future if the city can provide additional acreage adjoining the property.

"We're looking forward to moving ahead on the city side as well," Merry said. "The city will hopefully do some things to ad-

dress the initial concerns we had with that property," which is a former landfill.

Good grassroots support exists for the Richmond project, he said.

"We will go from no project to two at the same time," Merry laughed. "But those are the better problems to have."

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