

# GOLF COURSE NEWS

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#### IRRIGATION AND PUMP STATION FOCUS

As existing courses (including Pebble Beach, above) strive to keep up with new competition, irrigation upgrades and retrofits are at the heart of most renovation work. See pages 17-18 for a complete look at what's new in the irrigation renovation marketplace.

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#### PERIODICAL

## Simplot consortium wins bid for ABT's assets

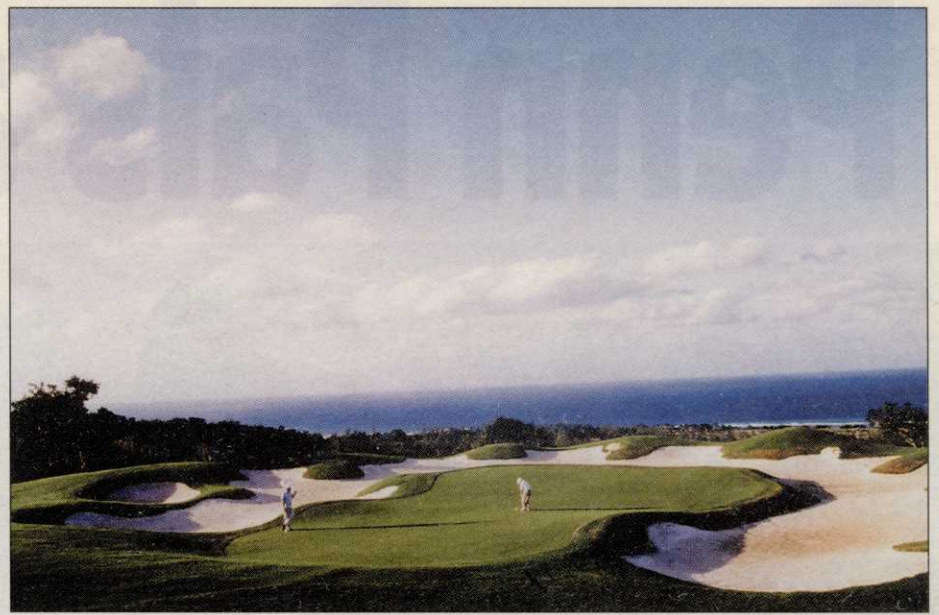
By A. OVERBECK

HENDERSON, Nev. — The bid for AgriBioTech's (ABT) Professional Turfgrass Division submitted by a consortium led by J.R. Simplot Turf and Horticulture was approved here June 10 in federal bankruptcy court.

However, the deal, which reportedly closed for less than the original asking price of \$65 million, required a lengthy day of negotiations after Central Garden and Pet (owners of Madison, Ga.-based Pennington Seeds) submitted a rival bid for this parcel of ABT's assets.

"After the overbid we left the hearings and spent the rest of the day in meetings with Development Special-

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The 12th hole at the Ritz-Carlton managed White Witch Course at Rose Hall in Jamaica

## Ritz-Carlton barrels into course management with high-end clubs

By JAY FINEGAN

ATLANTA — There's a new player in the competitive field of golf course management, and this one comes loaded with cachet: the Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company, headquartered here.

For now, the company has only three courses in its portfolio, but that will grow to at least 17 over the next few years, as the number of Ritz-Carlton hotels grows from today's 37 to 63. Fourteen of the 26 new properties will feature courses ranging from 18 holes to 45. "We're basically doubling the size of the company over the next three years," said Stan Waterhouse, a Ritz-Carlton vice president and head of the club and golf division.

Waterhouse, formerly with ClubCorp, said he hopes to bring to the courses the same levels of quality and service that distinguish the company's famous hotels. "We believe we'll be the benchmark in the industry," he said. "By extending the Ritz-Carlton imprint of excellence to man-

aging existing and new golf facilities, we have an opportunity to make an impact on the market and deliver a product with a difference."

Waterhouse plans to employ a three-pronged growth strategy. First, his division will manage courses affiliated with Ritz-Carlton hotel and resort properties. It also will enter into management agreements with independent, top-caliber country clubs. And, third, it will look to develop an interest in courses not yet built. "We'll work with residential developers who have an interest in having a golf club to enhance their residential community," he said.

#### WHITE WITCH IN JAMAICA

In the first case, an example is the White Witch Course at the Ritz-Carlton, at Rose Hall, Jamaica, which opened in June. It sits near the company's new 428-room resort, 10 minutes from Montego Bay.

The White Witch, designed by architects Robert von Hagge and Rick Baril,

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## Pete Dye finds gold at Lost Canyons

By MEGHAN FOLEY

SIMI VALLEY, Calif. — Take one look at the vast array of hills, slopes, meadows and rolling canyon floors, and it is no wonder why Lost Canyons Golf Club could become one of Pete Dye's greatest design achievements. Despite the fact that the famed architect does not like to compare his courses, he does admit that Lost Canyons is going to be special. The sheer terrain will see to that.

The 36-hole layout is currently in the final phases of construction and grow-in in the Santa Susana Mountains here, just north of Los Angeles. Landmark National, one of the leading golf real estate investment



The rugged terrain at Dye's Lost Canyons design near L.A.

companies, provided 1,600 acres of land, located on a portion of the historic Big Sky Ranch, and commissioned Dye to create two 18-hole public golf courses.

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## Supers in Southeast coping with drought

By JAY FINEGAN

HILTON HEAD, S.C. — How bad is it?

Here in the southeast corner of South Carolina, only 10.3 inches of rain had fallen as of mid-July. A normal year would have brought 36 inches

by Independence Day. And that's after a dismal 1999, when the area came in 10 inches below normal.

"We're real dry," said Steve Wright, superintendent at the Long Cove Club, a private, 18-hole, Pete Dye

facility here on Hilton Head Island. "The greens are fine but the green banks are burnt. The edges are bad. We have effluent and water from the lagoon, where we trap rainwater. But now the

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## Ritz Carlton

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features 18 picture-postcard holes that play through lush hillside country. "This mountainous terrain offers opportunities for amazing diversity," said von Hagge. "Combine that with these striking views of the sea, and you have a course that will be unequalled in the Caribbean, and maybe the world."

Similarly, Waterhouse said,

"We're opening a new property in Orlando called Grand Lake, where we'll have a hotel and an 18-hole Greg Norman course. We'll probably have enough demand from the hotel guests to keep the course full. It's intended to be a property driven primarily by the guests."

Another course under Ritz-Carlton management, however, is a stand-alone operation — the Country Club at Columbus (Georgia), an 18-hole facility founded in

1910. And this month or next the company will open the Ritz-Carlton Country Club, set on 7,600 acres of rugged high country some 30 miles from Seoul, South Korea. "It's Korean-owned," Waterhouse said, "but we'll do all the management. It's the first club we've branded."

There's no hotel at the 10,514-yard, 27-hole Country Club course, laid out by Ault Clark & Associates and Lim Sang Ha Golf Design. But the Ritz name and

prestige have driven membership fees to \$150,000, Waterhouse said, "and they're climbing rapidly." Membership is capped at 450.

Waterhouse said the Ritz "brand" will be applied judiciously. "Not all the courses we manage will be called a Ritz-Carlton Country Club," he explained. "We'll use it only in those cases where we feel good about the quality of the product and the market opportunity. The ones that we brand will

be special places."

At the Korean operation, for instance, amenities include a 70,000-square-foot clubhouse; saunas and masseurs; private dining rooms; caddies and forecaddies; and a first-class golf course.

"Our goal is to have courses that are in keeping with our image," Waterhouse said. "They have to challenge the low handicappers but give the high handicappers a chance. In resort properties, you can't have courses where the average player loses 12 or 15 balls each round. Resorts depend on repeat business."

### THE SERVICE DIFFERENCE

Waterhouse knows that course management has become a crowded field, but his advantage, he feels, lies in the legendary Ritz guest service, which he plans to leverage in the golf operation. His plans go well beyond a club-cleaning service and a bag drop.

"We believe that the service quality in golf leaves a lot to be desired," he explained. "So much of it has been to just take their money and send them out on the course. But where else in business do you get a five-hour capture of someone's time? We'll take that time and provide the kind of service that other people aren't doing. We'll make that round memorable."

Ritz-Carlton employs 17,000 people, and every one of them receives an average of 41 days of training per year, Waterhouse said. Customer service is stressed with religious zeal. "Nobody goes live with customers before they've taken a five-day orientation and then two weeks of training in their specific department," he said. "Ground crews at the course, caddies, the superintendent — they also will get training in the customer experience."

"You can still ride in a golf car," he said. "The caddy will walk and explain the course and show you things — make it more fun. Once you've been ushered onto the course by a concierge, you'll have the same unobtrusive service level that we have in the hotels. It will add to the experience."

One example: Waterhouse dislikes beverage carts patrolling the course. He finds them intrusive. "They basically stop you from playing," he said, "and then the group behind you has to stop. It breaks your rhythm. So we can either put stations around the course, or put drinks and snacks in the golf car. The problem with stocking the cars is refilled them during a round. So right now we're looking at putting refreshment centers at every third hole."

The Ritz-Carlton "signature" will be apparent at every level of golf course operation, he said, including guidance of professional staff, management of agronomic practices, the quality of retail merchandise and food service.

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