

METHOW VALLEY TAKES HIT

It's been a bad year for golf in Washington's remote Methow Valley. Earlier, Winthrop's Bear Creek Golf Course shelved plans to add nine holes to its existing nine. In late spring, with the Methow River running at flood, the National Marine Fisheries Service shut off all irrigation ditches which rose in or ran through National Forest lands.

Relying on one of these ditches was the Sunny Meadows Golf Resort, which featured a small par-3 venue among its amenities. Barely surviving financially, a buyer was found for the family-owned property, but when Fisheries shut off the water, and made no promises of its return, the buyer left.

The bentgrass greens and half the fairways parched, and the owners are now facing bankruptcy.

After 3 decades, Arrowleaf throws in the towel

By BOB SPIWAK

MAZAMA, Wash. — After almost 30 years of attempts to gain a destination resort in Washington state, the last of three developers has given up. With planned development on 1,200 acres in the upper Methow Valley, which included an 18-hole Robert Cupp course, the R.D. Merrill Co. an-

nounced Dec. 7 that it was quashing its plans for a golf course, lodge and upscale housing.

Had this succeeded it would have been only the second 18-hole course in Washington's largest county. Environmental blockage, appeals, court hearings, from the U.S. Supreme Court (which ruled favorably on

two of four issues) down to the county level were the death knell for earlier developers. The current owners cited delays and lack of cooperation by the state Department of Ecology over water issues for the surrender.

On Oct. 15, the state Department of Ecology (DOE) released "Tentative findings" for water rights for the project. These rulings did not look favorable, but the developers hoped to have DOE's final reports in order to appeal the findings. However, DOE informed Merrill that a final decision could take as much as a year.

This prompted Merrill Chief Executive Officer Charlie Wright to observe, "We have tried to work with Ecology for seven years and have been frustrated by their inability to, among other things, meet committed deadlines."

The Methow Valley rises on the east slope of the Cascade Mountains, and its upper end resembles Yosemite. The pristine Methow River runs through it, snaking 70 miles to the Columbia River.

The entire valley is populated by barely 4,000 people. Surrounded by mountains and a 2,000-foot sheer cliff, the site of the course was described by architect Bob Graves as "...about the most beautiful location I have ever seen [for a course]."

Graves had designed an 18-hole course for the previous developer, Methow Recreation, Inc. a decade earlier before environmental opposition forced that owner into bankruptcy.

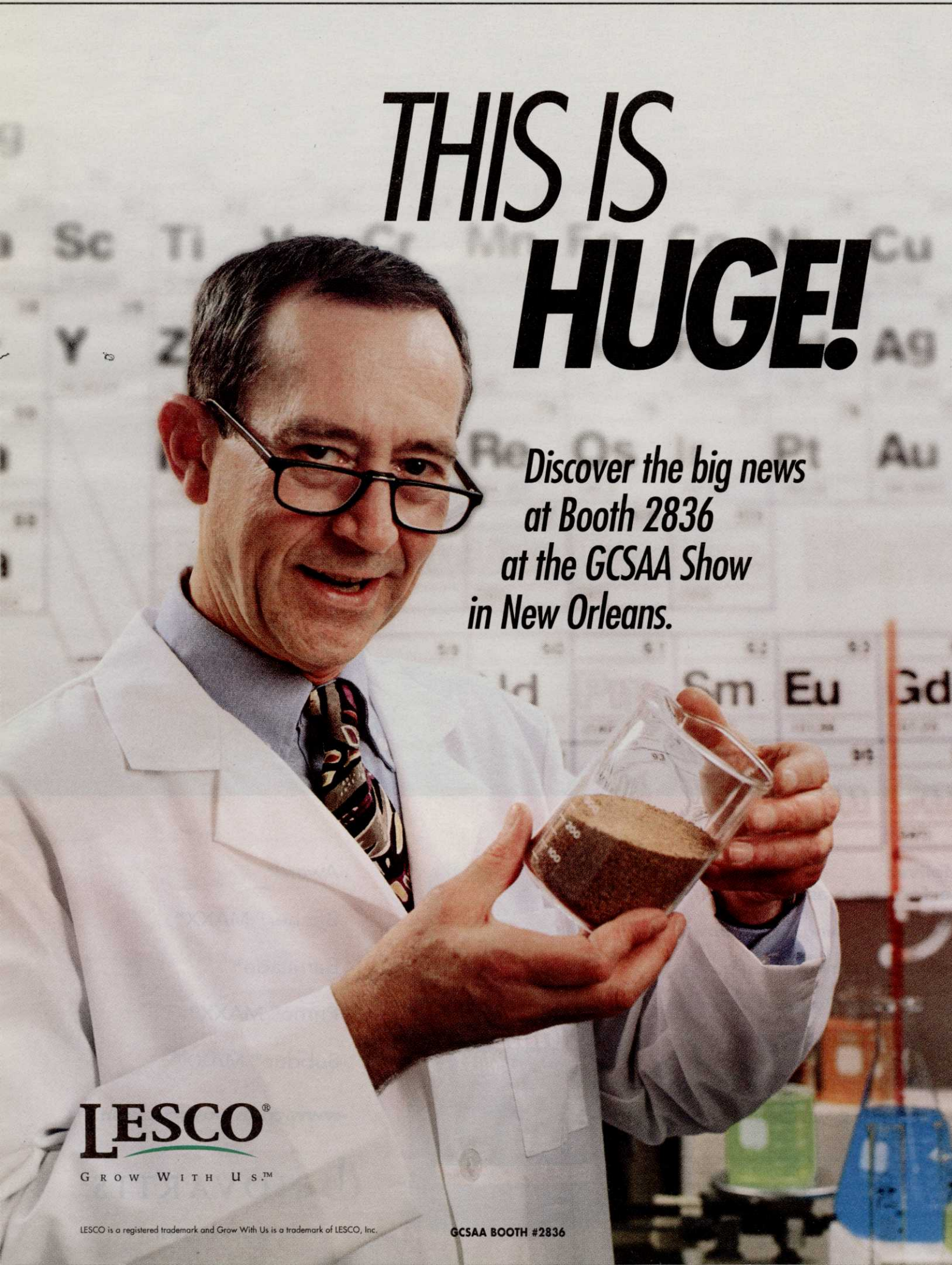
In the early 1970s, the Aspen Corporation had planned a resort in the same area, but with the emphasis on downhill skiing. Resistance was sufficient for Aspen to sell out in 1985 and take its money to develop around Whistler, British Columbia, Canada.

The new owners were confronted with fierce opposition from a local environmental group, which was frequently augmented by larger, national groups such as the Sierra Club.

The process continued, through millions of dollars in development and legal expenses, and it was during the tenure of Methow Recreation, Inc. that Bob Graves was called upon to design an 18-hole course, which was to include a golf academy and other amenities.

When Methow Recreation was in danger of defaulting on its loans, the land was bought by the Merrill Co. of Seattle, in 1992 in partnership with Lowe Development Corp. Wanting a fresh start, Graves' plans were aban-

Continued on next page



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