

BRIEFS

PINEHURST, N.C. — Pinehurst officially re-opened its No. 4 course in mid-April. Later this year, ground will break on No. 9, which is slated to open in spring 2002. Also, a 28,000-square-foot spa and golf fitness center will debut in late 2001.

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HONOLULU — North Korea and Korean Golf Association of Hawaii will host the Millennium PyongYang Golf VIP 2000, the first-ever golf event in North Korea. LPGA Professional Pearl Sinn, along with 50 Korean-American golf enthusiasts, will play at Taesong Golf Club in the suburbs of PyongYang on June 12-13.

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OKLAHOMA CITY — Cala Corp. tendered a revised offer to buy Oklahoma City Twin Hills Golf and Country Club for \$3.2 million, to be paid directly to each equity member upon approval of a vote of the shareholders.

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A U.S. District judge dismissed the class action litigation filed against Golden Bear Golf (GBG) and approved a \$3.5-million settlement, after its restatement of earnings, that will result in GBG becoming a private company. GBG also reported 1999 revenue of \$11,238,421, compared to \$11,385,040 in 1998.

Texas golf bites water bullet — or bites dust

By FRANCES G. TRIMBLE

Between April 1 and 3, rain fell in varying amounts across Texas, but even the 2-plus inches in the Houston area was "just noise," a drop in the bucket, according to a National Weather Service representative. The drought statewide was borderline desperate until a few light rains fell in mid-April.

At that time, U.S. Golf Association Green Section agronomist Brian Maloy, based in Dallas, called the recent rainfall "significant."

"In 1999, we were 11 inches under our average precipitation total of 32-36 inches," he said. "Though we have not totally recovered that 11 inches, and while aquifers are still not recharged, we are closer to normal than forecasters predicted."

Maloy noted that several clubs in his area are incorporating larger irrigation ponds in their long-range plans. Some older courses are remodeling on-site ponds and irrigation systems, while others are dredging to remove silt.

"We are still dependent on what (water) we capture," he said. "And even with the rain, there could still be a point this season when superintendents are forced to scale back their water use on the golf course."

However, while turfgrass can eventually recover from a prolonged drought, the dry conditions in Texas are "devastating for trees," according to said Jack Swayze, a forestry expert with Davey Golf Services of Kent, Ohio, who works out of Houston.

"Though we have had some recent rain, the damage is far-reaching and will be with us for years," said Swayze. "Damage caused by such a drought can have a four- to six-year effect, with trees developing secondary diseases brought on by drought stress."

Swayze said trees compete with turfgrass "because they can

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Trees on new courses suffer from stress due to construction and possibly poor clearing techniques.

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Texas drought

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and do require more water.”

The competition, however, goes largely unrecognized. Since trees receive no water supplementation during periods of drought and/or construction, they are left to cope with stress or die.

“There are courses in the Houston area that have lost hundreds of trees. One solution,”

said Swayze, “is to plant specific drought-resistant trees. But even native pine trees, which are good because they aren’t messy and because they have smaller leaf surface areas (which determines water consumption), are not really that drought-tolerant.”

One report from a new layout in the Humble east of Houston area reported 300 dead trees were removed during the past

winter alone and a cursory visual inspection of layouts in northwest Harris County confirms Swayze. Pine trees on newly constructed tracts as well as pines and oaks found in non-golf areas on established courses appear equally affected.

“The evapotranspiration issues in golf are now being looked at,” Swayze said. “The public is waking up and the industry has come

a long way. But one problem in Texas is that, in one county you have an agency monitoring how much ground water is used and in the next county there is little or no regulation whatsoever.”

Dr. Wayne R. Jordan of Texas Water Resources Institute said: “Harris and Fort Bend counties are in Subsidence Districts. The legislative act that formed these districts also sets their powers

to restrict ground-water withdrawals which lead to subsidence (abatement).”

These districts were created to slow the rate at which land areas around Houston are sinking due to loss of underground water as opposed to water conservation. However, a subsidence district does not control water use by Harris County’s neighbor to the north, Montgomery County.

Jordan sees the golf’s position in the scheme of things this way: “Management of golf courses is such that esthetic values predominate over conservation — so water is used luxuriously.”

Jordan noted that “statewide planning and regulatory agencies have been preoccupied with water development. However, the future water-supply planning effort will take a serious look at conservation as a means to achieve dependable water supplies.”

Which, in turn, will determine the survival of a game and an industry in Texas and other states.

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According to Dr. Richard Duple of Texas A&M University’s Crop Science Department, “Texas golf courses use 80 to 100 million gallons of water [apiece] each year. The national average is about the same for a typical 18-hole course. One reason we use more water than you would calculate is necessary, is because most irrigation systems are only 50- to 60-percent efficient,” Duple said. “If the systems were designed and functioned perfectly, this would not be the case. We generally overwater half the course trying to get adequate water to all areas.”

Duple said that a big improvement — in agriculture as a whole and golf in particular — are new, effective irrigation systems and components, including “low-trajectory sprinkler heads that concentrate water spray closer to ground level.”

Duple noted that drought-tolerant turfgrasses and ways to recapture rain and irrigation water are also being researched.

Universities and for-profit companies are working toward the day when drought tolerance and playability will meet in a grass strain that can successfully replace hybrid Bermudagrasses.

Duple pointed out that buffalograss, for instance, will survive on 10-15 inches of rainfall a year and is good for rough areas, “but, as a playing surface, Bermudagrass is preferred because buffalograss is not as dense nor as wear-tolerant.”

He also said a commercially available Texas bluegrass on the market — a hybrid combination of native Texas bluegrass and Kentucky bluegrass called Reveille — works well in northern and the blackland areas of Texas and can be used on fairways.”

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