

As development numbers dip, opportunities still exist

By ANDREW OVERBECK

JUPITER, Fla. — A slowing economy, flat golfer participation rates and over-saturation of certain markets has led to the lowest level of golf course construction since the early 1990s. According to the National Golf Foundation, course openings for 2001 will likely fall below 400, down from 524 in 2000. As of Sept. 30, just 233 18-hole equivalents had opened.

While golf course developers, builders, architects and lenders knew the euphoria of the last six years could not last forever, many are now wondering what impact the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11 will have on the already slowing market. Given the time lapse between construction starts and course openings this can be a difficult ques-

tion to answer, but industry experts said that development will continue to slow over the next two years.

“There will be a lag that will begin in the middle of next year and beyond where you will start to see construction starts go down,” said Troon Golf CEO Dana Garmany. “Projects that are under construction will be completed even if the owner has to spend more of his equity, but starts will go down 25 to 40 percent in 2002 and 2003. Then we will have a lag as projects begin to start again.”

Lee Hetrick, executive director of the Golf Course Builders Association of America also believes planning will be off, but has not seen any projects put on ice yet. “Planning will fall off. This is an era of extreme caution because people are just not sure what is going on,” he said. “However, a lot of the projects that were in the hopper for next year and those coming this spring are still going. People are still going to play golf and where there is demand, developers will find a way to finance it.”

PUBLIC GOLF MAY FILL THE VOID

According to golf course builder Joe Neibur, lower interest rates make building municipal and affordable courses more inviting. “The private club market will slow down because people are not going to write a check write now,” he said. “But the interest rates, especially those for municipal bonds, are much lower making affordable public golf more

a reality. If we don't see more of those types of projects I would be surprised.”

Damian Pascuzzo, president of the American Society of Golf Course Architects, is striving to get this exact message out. (see story page 15) “The NGF tells us there is a pent up demand of 20 million additional golfers out there who would play if they had more access to affordable golf. Municipalities and small land owners can fill this void.”

THIRD QUARTER DEVELOPMENT NUMBERS NEW FACILITIES

Type	In Planning	Under Construction	Completed
Daily Fee	43	52	59
Municipal	10	10	8
Private	20	13	9
Total	73	75	76

Source: National Golf Foundation

Turf field day showcases new Fazio course, national “super-sod” alliance

SAN ANTONIO, Texas — Tom Fazio's latest golf course design here, Briggs Ranch Golf Club, highlighted the Bladerunner Farms Turf Field Day Oct. 5. The event also showcased the formation of a national “super-sod” alliance between three leading turfgrass companies: Bladerunner Farms, Gardner Turfgrass and Patten Seed.

The Briggs Ranch course, opened this fall, is the first golf course ever to use

at the event. Featured speakers included Ronny Duncan, developer of SeaShore 1 Paspalum, and Dr. Ken Diesburg, a zoysiagrass expert and turfgrass researcher from the University of Southern Illinois.

SUPER-SOD ALLIANCE

The event also kicked off the formation of a national alliance between three regional turfgrass producers. Each company will oversee a regional network of farms and growers of specialty grasses: Bladerunner Farms, based in Poteet, Texas, will serve the Central region; Gardner Turfgrass, headquartered in Westminster, Colo., will cover the West; and Patten Seed, out of Lakeland, Ga., will take responsibility for the Eastern United States.

The alliance gives customers the selection and competitive pricing of a national company with the service and quality of a family-owned business, according to Doguet. “This allows us to maintain the



Bill Rogers (left) and golf course architect Tom Fazio (right) discuss their latest project, Briggs Ranch Golf Club in San Antonio.

wall-to-wall Zeon Zoysia that covers the entire course except for greens. The private club is situated on a 2,500-acre property with a community now under development in the scenic Hill Country approximately 20 minutes south of downtown San Antonio.

Zeon Zoysia was only one of several varieties on display here for the field day. (see chart, page 5) “We wanted to give people a chance to see these new grasses in their working environment instead of in a booth at a trade show,” said Bladerunner Farms' president David Doguet.

Fazio delivered the keynote address



Super-sod alliance — (from left) Stan Gardner, David Doguet and Ben Copeland join forces

quality and service of our individual operations with the power and reach of a national company behind us,” added Ben Copeland, president of Patten Seed.

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