

Royal Kunia course, longtime political football, may open at last

By JAY FINEGAN

HONOLULU — A political deal has been reached that could enable Royal Kunia Golf Course to finally open. The Robin Nelson design was completed in 1994, but the 163-acre layout has lain dormant, primarily because the owners have paid only \$12 million of a \$25-million "impact fee" to the city.

According to the *Honolulu Star Bulletin*, a resolution signed by all nine members of the city council calls for the elimi-

nation of the remaining \$13-million charge. Instead, course owners and creditors have agreed to a \$2.5-million payment, plus one dollar per round for the life of the course. Another stipulation is that at least half the tee times be reserved for public play.

JAC Hawaii, the major financier to course owner Liongain Hawaii, has been negotiating the deal with city council chairman Jon Yoshimura.

The course, originally developed by

Royal Oahu Resort Inc. and Halekua Development Corp., has been a political football since its completion.

"The mayor of Honolulu decided to impose a \$100-million impact fee to get a golf course open there," said Nelson, who has designed 10 courses in Hawaii. "It was negotiated down to \$25 million. This was at the height of the Japanese interest in golf, but now nobody can swing it. Nobody can pay the \$200 green fees you'd

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View of the Royal Kunia Golf Course

Eco-terrorists hit Canadian course with turpentine

By JAY FINEGAN

COURTENAY, British Columbia — Another golf course has come under attack from environmental extremists, this time here on mountainous Vancouver Island.

The championship Crown Isle course, at Crown Isle Resort and Golf Community, sustained damage to seven greens, seven fairways and a number of tee decks. The vandals also destroyed ball washers and flags, and spray painted club signage with slogans about "class warfare."

"It's physical damage, it will come back, and it's not much worse than a hydraulic leak, except to the extent they did it," said superintendent Dave Creamer. "They applied what we think was turpentine and killed off the grass. We're using different nitrogen sources to break down the hydrocarbons and get the soil ready to support new growth."

The attack took place last October but only recently came to light. Club management tried to keep the story out of the press, for fear of inspiring copycat attacks. But in late January a group identifying itself as the Earth Liberation Front (ELF) sent a communique to the local *Comox Valley Record*, claiming responsibility for the damage. The story broke from there.

"The usual vandals gouge up greens or throw the pins in the lake or steal tee blocks. Most golf courses get that kind of thing on a fairly regular basis," Creamer said. "Your biggest fear is that somebody comes out and dumps fuel all over your greens. Most places have been pretty lucky that way, when I talk to other superintendents. But now it's happened, and I don't want to give anyone ideas. That's why we tried to keep it out of the press as much as possible."

DENOUNCING 'THE RICH'

In their communique, the ELF warned developers not to build any more "upper class housing" next to the golf course, continuing the theme from their "turpentine writing" on the greens denouncing "the rich."

The attack, the ELF said, "is in protest of Crown Isle's destruction of green space."

The Crown Isle course is an 18-hole, 7,000-yard layout, designed by Graham Cooke & Associates and ranked as the 33rd best course in Canada. A "resort-style" daily-fee facility,

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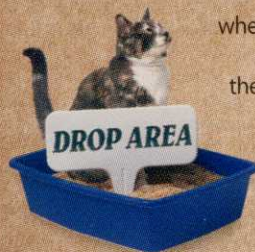
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Eco-terrorists

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opened in 1993, the club has hosted the Canadian Tour and other major championships. With 11 lakes, views of the Beaufort mountain range and verdant fairways, the course has won numerous awards and is in the front ranks of British Columbia golf facilities.

The 40,000-square-foot clubhouse is equally impressive, with

a dining room, a members' lounge, a gym and many other amenities.

Club members and guests were "upset and disappointed" by the attack, Creamer said. "They didn't understand why someone would do this. To go out and damage a golf course doesn't make a lot of sense. To go damage buildings is one thing. That can be repaired. But it's tough to repair turf that

quickly. It's not something we could go out and resod very fast."

DELAYED-REACTION DAMAGE

The attack came at night and involved more than one person, according to Creamer. "The damage didn't show up for four or five days, then the grass started to die off," he said.

The course, however, remains open for play. "It's not to the point where it even affects the

ball roll," the superintendent said. "The greens are open. Apart from damaging the aesthetics, the real costly part was breaking up the ball washers and flags."

"We have stepped up security," Creamer added. "We now have a night watchman and a security truck that drives around."

The Royal Canadian Mounted Police are investigating the attack. The Earth Liberation Front is



18th hole at the Crown Isle course

an underground environmental group that specializes in sabotage and arson. Many ELF attacks have been joint operations with the Animal Liberation Front. The FBI lists both groups as terrorist organizations.

Golf courses in the U.S. Northwest have been the target of eco-terrorism assaults in recent years, but strikes against Canadian clubs have been rare. ■

Royal Kunia

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need to charge to make the numbers work. That pretty much killed the industry in Hawaii, and then the Japanese bubble burst."

BIZARRE FATE OF A SUPERB COURSE

Over the past five years, because of the \$13-million "underpayment," the city has explored a number of options for Royal Kunia, including condemning the course either to use as a public facility or to sell to a third party for a profit that would finance the construction of public courses elsewhere on the island.

In arguing to get the course open, the city council said it would create jobs and tax revenues, and it also would serve as a buffer between the Waikale Naval Magazine at Laulaulei and the Royal Kunia subdivision. It also could absorb potential flooding.

The bizarre fate of the course has been a disappointment to Nelson. "This course would have put my name on the map," he said. "It's got commanding views of Diamondhead and downtown Honolulu, and it looks out over Pearl Harbor and the ocean. It's quite spectacular, and it's a real shame it isn't open."

Nelson added that the course remains in "pristine condition," tended by a skeleton crew. "The owner has paid, out of the goodness of his heart, to have it maintained, but there's nobody playing it," the architect said. "Now there's some talk that the PGA Tour and the governor of Hawaii would like to turn it into a focal point for golf on Oahu, and perhaps turn it into a PGA-owned course."

According to Nelson, the course plays at 7,100 yards from the tips. "It will play really well for the pros," he said. "But I designed it quite wide because of the wind, so it should be playable for people of all skill levels." ■



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