

Developer to turn public course into shopping mall

By ANDREW OVERBECK

CANTON, Conn. — Instead of re-opening this spring for its 72nd season, Canton Public Golf Course will be turned into a shopping mall. The \$4.77 million deal closed March 31, five years after the Lowell family put the 130-acre, nine-hole course on the market. W/S Development of Chestnut Hill, Mass., started work on the site in April.

According to superintendent Heather Garvin, whose great-grandfather and grandfather opened the course in 1932, the time had come to sell the property, which is in a developing area 12 miles west of Hartford.

"My Dad owns it with his two brothers and they knew they couldn't pass it on to the next generation," she said. "I am the fourth generation working here. It has been fun, but it is the way progress is going to go and it is part of life."

Garvin, who was recently

named superintendent of the year by the Connecticut Association of Golf Course Superintendents, grew up on the first tee and started working at the course in 1985 after a brief career as a legal secretary. Her husband, Dana Garvin, is the assistant superintendent and mechanic at the course.

While the community will gain a shopping mall, and the town will enlarge its commercial tax base, a venue for learning the game of golf will disappear. "Juniors played free after 6 p.m. on Saturday nights and before 7:30 a.m. on Monday mornings," said Garvin. "It's a

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The fifth hole and barn at Canton Public GC, which sold in late March for \$4.77 million.



Pellucid says industry down, but not out

By DEREK RICE

BUFFALO GROVE, Ill. — Golf participation was down nearly a million golfers from 2001 to 2002, according to preliminary results from Pellucid Corp.'s second annual golf consumer survey, released in late March.

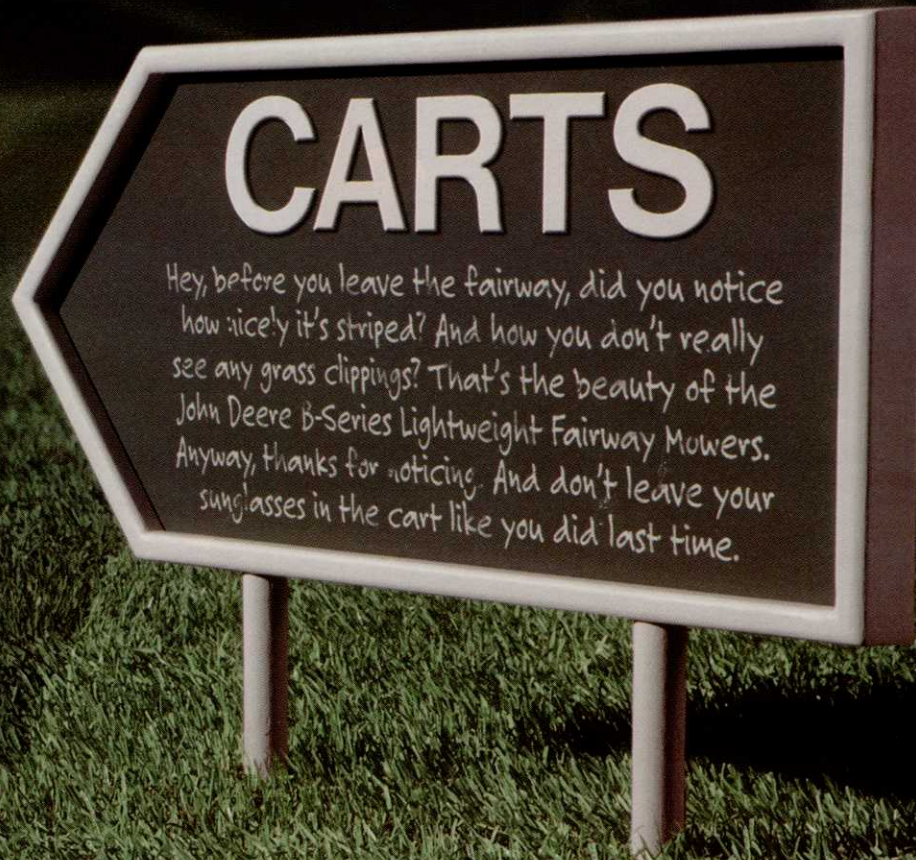
Pellucid founder James Koppenhaver presented these findings at a panel discussion on growing the game initiatives at the Urban Land Institute's conference on developing golf courses and communities in Naples, Fla.

Koppenhaver told conference attendees that participation was not flat, but that retention continues to be public enemy number one for the golf industry, which he said lost almost 40 percent more golfers than it acquired in 2002.

"This is the first industry-independent survey of participation over multiple years which goes beyond participation rates to the growth/decline components and includes Pellucid's consumer franchise methods, such as rounds per capita, attraction rates and the lost/acquired golfer ratio," Koppenhaver said.

While these findings are definitely bad news for the industry, Koppenhaver was quick to point

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GolfGM adds finance

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"Golf professionals and purchasing managers want to increase their purchasing power," Lewis said. "GolfGM Finance enables facilities to stay current with their vendors and capitalize on off-price purchases when funds are tight."

One of the main selling points of GolfGM Finance, Lewis said, is

the speed and ease with which facilities can sign up and have access to a credit line.

"There is no cost to participate in the GolfGM membership program," he said. "Within 24 hours, most clubs will increase their purchasing power by up to \$50,000."

To date, more than 500 facilities have registered for the service. Lewis said the company plans to add many more in 2003. ■

NGF report details decline in rounds, flattening revenues in 2002

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facilities, with the data weighted to be nationally representative.

According to NGF president Joe Beditz, the decrease in total rounds played was not unexpected.

"Lack of growth in the number of golfers continues to inhibit any material growth in rounds played or facility revenues, making facility owners and operators vulnerable to increased competition and the poor economy," Beditz said.

Rounds revenue, defined as the sum of green fees, golf car rentals, annual dues and trail

fees, increased 0.6 percent, from \$13.1 billion to \$13.8 billion. The rest of the increase in revenues was attributed to food and beverage and merchandise revenues.

The rounds data cloud is not without its silver lining, however. Despite being outnumbered in the survey by nearly two to one, there are facilities around the country that experienced an increase in total rounds played in spite of difficult economic times, according to National Golf Course Owners Association executive director Mike Hughes.

Hughes said facilities cited a number of factors as having contributed to the changes in rounds played in 2002.

"Operators who had fewer rounds in 2002 than in 2001 cited weather, the economy and competition as the top reasons for the decline," Hughes said. "Meanwhile, those who had more rounds in 2002 cited weather, improved course conditions, improved or increased advertising/marketing and improved management as the main reasons for the increase."

On a regional basis, only central/south Florida and the Gulf Coast posted moderate gains in rounds of 0.2 percent and 1.4 percent, respectively. Hardest hit regions were the lower Midwest (down 5.5 percent), the Southeast (down 5.1 percent) and the Northeast (down 5.0 percent). For a complete list of rounds played numbers for each of the 11 regions the NGF defined for the study, see the chart at left.

The NGF's rounds played numbers largely agree with those published each month in the Databank section of *Golf Course News*. Those numbers, provided monthly by golf research company Golf Datatech, showed a 2.9 percent decrease in rounds played from 2001 to 2002. ■

2002 ROUNDS PLAYED IN THE UNITED STATES

REGION	ROUNDS (MILLIONS)	% CHANGE
NORTHEAST	67.6	-4.9%
MID ATLANTIC	30.9	-2.5%
SOUTHEAST	62.5	-5.1%
CENTRAL/SOUTH FLORIDA	36.6	0.3%
GULF COAST	29.2	1.4%
SOUTH CENTRAL	32.5	-0.1%
LOWER MIDWEST	85.6	-5.4%
UPPER MIDWEST	52.6	-4.4%
MOUNTAIN	19.2	-2.3%
SOUTHWEST	64.4	-0.2%
NORTHWEST	21.4	-2.7%
TOTAL U.S.	502.4	-3.0%

Source: National Golf Foundation

From fairways to a shopping mall

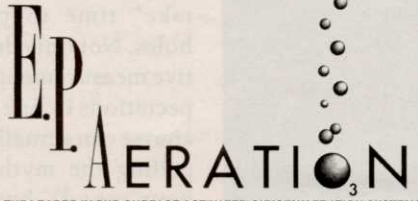
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nice thing, it got kids playing golf."

When the Lowell family originally considered selling the property, they had hopes of keeping some of the golf course intact and preserving open space. However, the group of developers that were planning an outdoor health facility on the property couldn't get the funding together to make the project work.

However, as the once-rural area began to grow as a bedroom community for Hartford, the change was inevitable. "It is very busy now," said Garvin. "It's turned into a pretty affluent area."

While Garvin plans to stay in the golf business, she will spend this spring shutting down the golf course, helping her parents move off the property and auctioning off two barns full of antiques. After that, she said, she plans to "take the summer off for the first time in a long time." ■



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