

Pursell Playing Up Southern Hospitality

The sleepy little town of Sylacauga, Ala., is about to become a big-time destination for superintendents.

David Pursell, perhaps best known for Polyon products and his golf lithographs, has announced a bold plan to develop his family's 2,700-acre Sylacauga homestead into a headquarters campus featuring an upscale course and a guest lodge for small groups of visiting customers. His goal is to create a corporate showcase which will wow superintendents and cement lifelong customer relationships.

"We're playing up our primary strength: Southern hospitality," Pursell says. "We're going to win the market with a strategy that combines technology, research, education, recreation and, of course, down-home Southern cooking."



David Pursell takes aim on his company's soon-to-be golf course

In short, Pursell is investing \$15 million to build his company's brand and gain customer loyalty one superintendent at a time. It's a visionary concept that's not without risk. But given the shakeups that have occurred in the fertilizer market (Scotts, Terra) and supply chains over the past few years, the chance to emerge as the brand leader makes the concept a good bet for Pursell and his team.

The Pursell Farms project consists of:

- FarmLinks, an 18-hole course designed by Mike Hurdzan and Dana Fry. The course, which is scheduled to open in early 2002, will take advantage of the property's mix of rolling farmland, heavy woods and foothills. Longtime Pursell executive Tim Lacy is overseeing the project and will manage the completed property.

- A First Tee facility featuring a junior course and teaching academy for kids.

- A new 20,000-square foot Pursell Technologies headquarters that will overlook the 18th hole.

- A nine-room guest lodge designed to house the small

Quotable

"Golfers think you mow once a week and go to the bank once a day."

— A Michigan owner overheard at breakfast during the National Golf Course Owners Association annual conference.

"First you manage people, then you motivate them, and then you lead them."

— George Sweda, president of Sweda Training & Development.

"Who's in charge of the greens these days at Hogan's Ally? Stevie Wonder?"

— Alan Shipnuck, Sports Illustrated golf writer, on the conditioning at Riviera CC.

"It's hard to play in this slop field."

— David Duval, complaining to CNN/SI about the conditioning at La Costa Resort after rain poured down on the course for two days prior to the Match Play Championship.

groups of visiting customers in comfort.

- A system of trails and nature areas suitable for hunting, hiking and ATV riding.

- Three largemouth bass ponds (my personal favorite).

In addition to golf, fishing and other outdoor activities, visitors will also tour the Pursell plant and the already completed PTI-Max multimedia theater.

"My dad Jimmy told me years ago that you never get a second chance to make a first impression," Pursell says. "We're putting that advice into action."

Pursell and his team (Lacy, operations chief Arnold Cleghorn, marketing guru Jeff Higgins and sales vice president Dave Heegard) are already hosting small groups of superintendents — and lucky editors like me — for visits to the site and a preview of the coming Pursell Farms project.

— Pat Jones