



## Is the GMO's future at Tuckaway?

By Rob Schultz

Officials of the Greater Milwaukee Open and the Milwaukee County Parks District met last month to discuss the feasibility of building a new, high-profile golf course at an existing park in Oak Creek, this reporter has learned.

Although the meeting was just a fact-finding mission, GMO president Gordon Kress admitted that tournament officials have explored potential options for moving the PGA Tour event to a different site within the Milwaukee area if its contract with Tuckaway Country Club is not renewed when it runs out in 1992.

"We're probably going to be (at Tuckaway) for a couple of years after '92, hopefully. But maybe not," said Kress, during a phone interview from Ponte Vedra, Fla., when he was attending the Tournament Players Championship this past winter. "After all, we still have to get the OK from Tuckaway for beyond '92. That's why we have to look at our options as well."

Kress said Tuckaway is a good PGA Tour site and cited tour players' reactions and the fact that it was rated as one of the best conditioned courses on tour last year as strong reasons to keep the tournament there.

He added, however, that he felt Tuckaway could use a few changes — such as a new 18th hole that would include an amphitheater that could house more spectators — to strengthen the course for its members, the tournament players and the spectators.

Kress, who is an active member and former president at Tuckaway, also expressed some confidence that Tuckaway will want the GMO to renew its contract with the club, located in the suburb of Franklin and the site of the GMO since 1973. He supported his feeling with a 1989 survey of Tuckaway members that showed overwhelming support to keep the GMO there.

But a source close to both Tuckaway and the GMO had a different feeling.

"I'd be surprised if it was renewed," said the source, who wished to remain anonymous. "It's just a feeling I have

from the people who are involved in both places. That's why I think the GMO has to look at other options."

The source said one option that the GMO is seriously considering is moving the tournament to newly renovated Brown Deer Park after the Tuckaway lease expires. The tournament would stay there until a new, Tournament Players Course, or a reasonable facsimile, is built by either the county or a private developer at Bender Park, located on the Lake Michigan shoreline in Oak Creek. The source also said that Madison pro Andy North and architect partner Roger Packard were contacted about designing the course.

Kress denied that such a scenario exists. He said the GMO was simply asked by Milwaukee County if they'd be interested in moving the tournament if a course was built at the Bender Park site. He admitted, however, that North, who is one of the GMO's directors, was contacted for his input.

In attendance at the meeting with the GMO and Milwaukee County officials in February were Kress, GMO executive director Tom Strong, Milwaukee County supervisor Tom Mohs, Milwaukee County deputy parks director Bill Teitgen and Milwaukee County director of finance Tom Ritato. They discussed the political ramifications and other difficulties of building a course there by either the county or a private developer. Both sides said the other side called for the meeting.

"It was a question of potential, future golf course development, it was a far-reaching question," said Teitgen, who said he told Kress and Strong that it would take at least two years before any land there could be developed because five governmental agencies would have to be involved.

"The land is spectacular," Teitgen added. "It's not the first time a golf course has been discussed there and it may not be the last and it may come to fruition. But it's not a quick process."

Kress said he was not impressed with what he learned at the meeting.

"There are too many federal, state, county and local ramifications," he said. "We didn't even discuss the local ones. Hell, I don't even think the mayor of Oak Creek knows about it."

Kress also said cost figures never were discussed. "If I were a county official who is a golf nut and said, 'Boy, I would like to see them build a golf course at Brown Deer,' well, maybe there were some inquiries made about something here or there. But an inquiry is not a story. It's a dream or a thought."

Kress added, however, that the GMO probably would be in favor of a TPC course, or a stadium golf course made famous by the TPC at Sawgrass, being built somewhere in Milwaukee County, including the Bender Park site, if donations could be found. All TPCs, the brainchild of the PGA Tour, are built to house PGA Tour or PGA Senior Tour events. As of 1989, there were 13 TPC courses operating across the nation.

"If an offer were made on something like that, we'd weigh (moving there) very seriously," Kress said. Kress said the GMO, which lacks the sugar-daddy influence of a big-time corporate sponsor and survives on generous donations by the Lloyd Pettit family and other sponsorships by Midwest Express and Miller Brewing Co., could get free rent on a TPC site and also get the first \$100,000 in gate receipts.

"I don't think a TPC course is impossible (in Milwaukee)," said Kress. "And I'm not going to lie to you, if they build a TPC course here, no matter where it is, you get that free rent and the first \$100,000 in receipts. You have almost a \$300,000 swing (from the Tuckaway contract)."

Kress also said a TPC course in Milwaukee would be good for the community because it would be the perfect complement to the wide array of other public courses in the area.

"I'd like to someday see a championship-type course and I'd like it to be public in Milwaukee and the county. After all," he added, "I think Blackwolf Run (in Kohler) is a great asset for people to see a Pete Dye course. We need more of that. And we need one in Milwaukee county."

But who would build it? The county? Maybe. A private developer? Kress said a private developer is the better possibility. He added both are far-fetched dreams.

"We're a ways away as far as getting ourselves involved in it unless somebody came around and donated \$5 million to get this thing rolling," he said.

One possible financier, Kress said, could be the state of Wisconsin. "Maybe something with their development fund could be worked out," he said.

Although Teitgen said Milwaukee County hasn't offered, or been asked, to officially do anything related with such a course, he didn't rule out the possibility of the county building such a course with either county property tax supported capital or through a private donor.

"I've learned never to say never, that possibility exists. . ." said Teitgen, who added that most county officials are still unaware of the meeting with the GMO. "But given the strain on capital dollars, that's why the discussion has turned to the possibility of turning the land over to an entrepreneur on one of those 99-year leases for development purposes."

Kress said the county could never build the course. "I don't think the county could afford to build a golf course, a clubhouse and a media room and all that would facilitate a PGA Tour

event," he added.

Getting back to Tuckaway, Kress said keeping the tournament there is the safest move. "The players like it at Tuckaway. They like the big greens, those fairways. They like the manager of Tuckaway. It scares me to think that someday down the road you move and they don't like the course," he said.

Kress said Tuckaway's biggest problems are an inadequate practice putting green and the 18th green, which is built on a site that is inadequate for large crowds. "If that hole were cut in half and the pond was brought into play, you could build an amphitheater around there, it wouldn't distract from the members and it would be easier to maintain."

But Kress didn't want that to sound like an ultimatum. Asked if Tuckaway has to do something down the road to keep the GMO, he answered, "My personal opinion? I would say that's a question mark. We would like to have them do that. Maybe there's a way for it to be funded. I don't know. Right now we don't have the money."

If Tuckaway would not renew the contract and the GMO was left out in the cold, Kress said there are other options besides building a new course such as moving the tournament

around to different courses in the area or moving the tournament to an existing county course such as Brown Deer Park.

"I'm not the sole decision maker on this, but I'm not the one who would say it shouldn't be moved around to two or three different places," he said. "But I don't see any private clubs outside of Tuckaway that could house it."

But, Kress said, at this time, he foresees the GMO and Tuckaway continuing their strong relationship.

"But down the road, just speaking as a GMO official, I'd like to see something more economical set up for the GMO and its fans," he said. "But you have to be so careful. Sure everybody's looking for a dream golf course. There are a lot of them out there now. But a lot of those TPC courses, the pros don't like them."

Kress equated the process to house shopping. "I might find the house that I knew I would be happy in. Then I go down the road and find the same exact house for \$50,000 less. Would I be a fool not to take the house that would save me money? I wouldn't do it for 200 bucks. But when you're talking about big bucks, certainly our eyes will be open."

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