
 Roger Maxwell, superintendent of grounds at In Celebration of Golf

The Business Behind the Ball

by Cynthia Scanlon photography by Ray Litman

When someone speaks the word Arizona, one of the first things that comes to mind is golf. And why not? According to *Valley of the Sun Golf Guide* by Mike Armfield and Steve Wardell (Golden West Publishers, 1994), Arizona now boasts more than 250 golf courses, some of which are situated in settings that can only be described as resplendent. More than 425,000 residents play 8 million rounds of golf annually, bringing \$400 million a year to the state's economy.

While this is obviously good news for all the golf courses around the state, it is even better news for the myriad of feeder businesses that are supported by the golf industry. These unique and successful businesses have fashioned their growth off what is quickly becoming the state pastime.

Two years ago, Roger Maxwell decided to put his business idea into play and created In Celebration of Golf, the world's only golf retailer to encompass every facet of the sport. Maxwell, whose official title at the company is not owner but Superintendent of Grounds, has created a 13,000 square-foot specialty store that specializes in purely golf-related items. Whether it be art, crystal, wall paper, furniture, fabric, equipment, or clothing, Maxwell has made it all available under one roof. The company also manages two golf courses. "No one has ever taken the game, its romance and its rich traditions, and tried to bring it all together at retail," he says. "And that's what we have done."

Maxwell feels his business is on solid ground because of the tremendous popularity golf is currently experiencing. And he looks for that to continue for some time to come. "There is a tremendous influx of baby boomers moving into their 50s who have more time and more expendable dollars to be able to enjoy the game,"

he says. "That wave of people is a huge amount of the population, and they will spur affordable golf and expansion of golf courses."

And to add to the growth, Maxwell points out that casinos and hotels know that golf drives room rates, and many hotels try to have a tie to a golf experience or several golf experiences. While there was a time, Maxwell says, that golf was thought of as an amenity, much like tennis or swimming, "Now golf is a wild profit center when it is well managed," he says. "And that's been an evolution over 10 years."

It is no secret that one of golf's biggest draws is Tiger Woods. Tigermania seems to have taken hold, even of those who don't have much interest in the sport. Since signing Tiger Woods to a multi-million-dollar contract, Nike has reported skyrocketing sales of its golf apparel line. But before there was Tiger, there was golf apparel. And it has always been popular.

No one knows this better than Thomas Dooley, president of Antigua Sportswear, a company specializing in golf apparel and accessories such as jackets, sweaters, vests, slacks and the core of their business: men's and women's golf shirts. The company also manufactures club head covers, bag straps, and even has caps made sporting the Antigua logo.


Dooley, who readily admits he is a Tiger Woods fan, feels the young star will only bring good to the game. "I think Tiger and Nike are going to expand the golf business and the garment business," he says.

With factories ready to take on orders to customize golf apparel with embroidered logos, Dooley has watched

his business grow steadily over the years. Last year Antigua recorded sales revenues of \$34 million. This year, the company expects revenues to top \$44 million. That's a lot of golf shirts and head covers, and Dooley couldn't be more pleased with the direction golf is taking.

Besides the growing challenges of getting on the course at the time and location desired, others are finding more diverse reasons to be on the course. This trend, some say, is leading toward more professionals leaving their jobs in order to get on the course.

Such was not the case with Rob Resnik. He was a civil litigation attorney, but he didn't hate his job. He took up the game of golf late in life, began to enjoy it more and more, and an idea


 Hank Gardener, director of instruction at The Golfer's Gym.

began to percolate. That idea now stands at the corner of Shea and Tatum Boulevards and is called The Golfer's Gym, a unique training center where neophyte and professional golfer can go to improve their game.

The Golfer's Gym is a partnership between Rob and his wife Denise and The Pivotal Group, which owns the Ritz-Carlton, among other properties. Eventually, the Resniks hope to grow their unique golf training concept into multiple locations across the Valley and possibly across the nation. "We felt we could create a better way for people to learn golf," says Resnik. "It's hard to have lessons sporadically, practice on your own and have an idea if your golf swing is correct. Since golf is about habits, we decided to create a gym where golfers could train to have good habits."

The Golfer's Gym's grand opening was

Danny Edwards, president and CEO of Royal Grip, Inc.



held last April, and Resnik reports that hundreds of people showed up. Within four days of opening, The Golfer's Gym had already signed up 50 members.

The gym will be open 80 hours a week, including evenings and weekends. Golfers can purchase memberships for \$995 a year: \$250 initiation fee, then \$85 a month, or \$75 a day. The fee gives golfers unlimited access to the gym and its golf pros. Golfers can work on their game in instructional bays with state-of-the-art computer and video equipment, which will analyze swings, or laser-align your putting. The equipment can watch you swing once and analyze what might be off, whether it be your club angle, stance, back swing, or down swing. "We're a complete golf training and learning center," says Hank Gardner, director of instruction at The Golfer's Gym. "We have tried to structure ourselves to help business people train and learn."

Gardner expects business people to stop in during their lunch hours to practice their swing or work on their putting before heading



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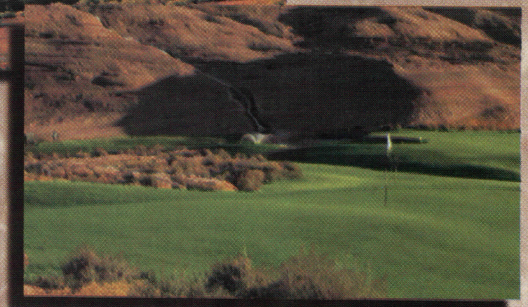
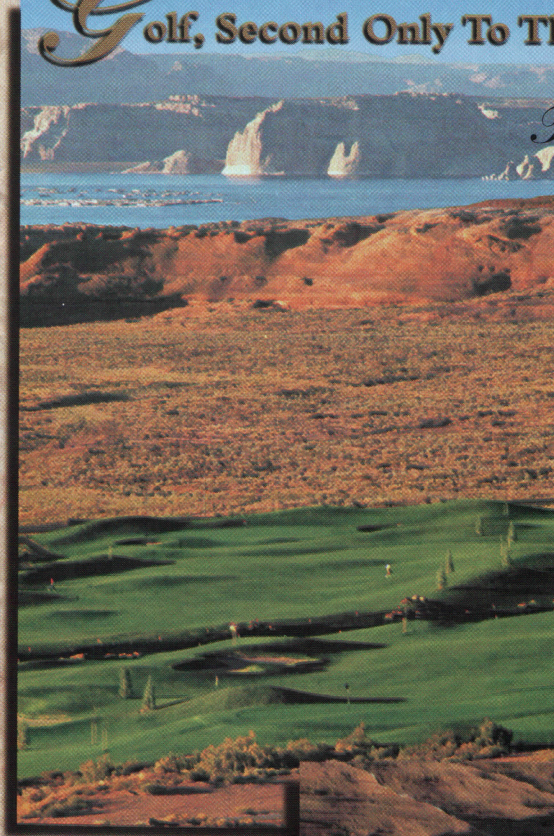
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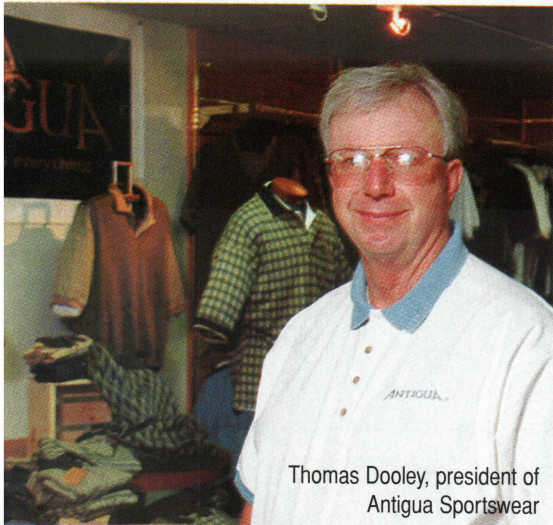
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Thomas Dooley, president of Antigua Sportswear

the state. So pleased, in fact, that they are co-sponsoring a first-ever, all-encompassing economic impact study of the state's golf industry in conjunction with the Arizona Golf Association. The study is estimated to cost between \$35,000 and \$40,000, and will be conducted by Florida-based National Golf Foundation.

"There's been no study of its kind that we know of that's ever been done in Arizona," says Chris Baier, director of Sports Development for the Arizona Department of Commerce. "It will encompass the economic impact of golf courses, retail, manufacturing, tournaments and value-added real estate development as a result of golf courses." Baier also adds, "It will also look at the number of rounds played by in-state and out-of-state players."

The data for the study is due back in June, and Baier says the Arizona Department of Commerce is "expecting big numbers."

According to Baier, who estimates that Arizona currently has almost 300 golf courses statewide, the Arizona Department of Commerce is hoping to educate the public with this study to the benefits of golf in Arizona. "We feel it's important to inform the public as to what golf does for the state," he says. "It's the linchpin of the tourist industry here."

If big numbers do turn out to be the case, Baier says the Department of Commerce will look at the study as a kickoff to market Arizona golf nationally and internationally, which would not only grow golf's popularity here, but keep the feeder businesses in business as well. "We need to know how big the pot is before we can stir it," says Baier. "This will give us a good idea what our pot is and then [help us] chart a course from there."

For Danny Edwards, charting a course to business success required taking a break from being a professional golfer on the PGA tour. In 1988, Edwards started Royal Grip, Inc., a manufacturer of golf grips for companies that make new golf clubs and clubs for the replacement market: golf shops, pro shops, private and public golf courses and off-course repair shops. Royal Grip also does big business in Japan. Edwards started the company from scratch in an airplane hanger at Scottsdale Air Park. Last year, the company posted \$17 million in sales revenues.

Edwards, who has been a professional golfer for the past 14 years, was ready for a change and decided to take a run at the business world, he says. Now that his business is successful, he is looking to find more time to get back to the professional game of golf.

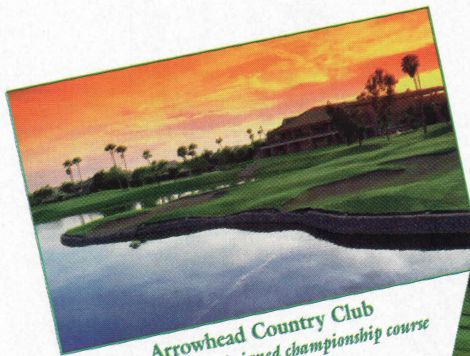
As might be expected, Edwards is passionate about the game and positive about being in a business that depends on the sport. "Golf is a

back to the office. "They don't need to change their shoes and go into a golf shop and buy golf balls and go out to the range," he says. "You can drive up to our door, come in and work on your golf game."

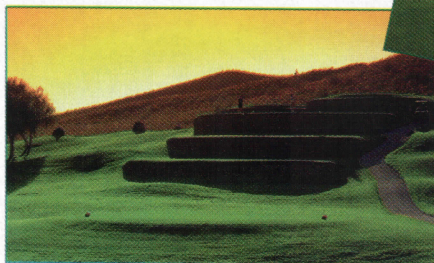
Judging from the opening response, The Golfer's Gym may be just what the Valley has been looking for. It doesn't look like Resnik will be returning to the law anytime soon. "I'm enjoying [running the gym]," he says. "It's exciting to be involved with a new concept."

The Arizona Department of Commerce is also pleased with the entire industry of golf in

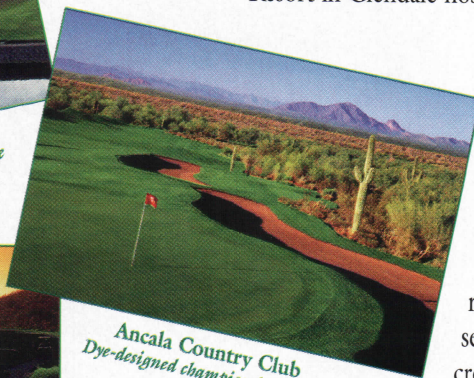
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unique sport because you can play for a lifetime," he says. "The largest segment that plays golf is over 50 years old."

He is excited by the fact that golf is gender neutral, which translates to "terrific for ladies." Edwards also makes the point that golf is one of very few sports that is genuinely clean. "We don't have scandals in golf, drug problems or prima donnas," he says. "It's the sport of corporate America, executives and successful people all over the world are golfers. Even the President is a golfer."

As might be expected, golf, like everything else, has moved into the computer age. Leading Edge Technologies, parent company to PROLINK, has created a golf cart-mounted-electronic monitor that is integrated into the roof of a golf cart. With a simple glance up, players can immediately see a computerized version of the hole they are about to play. Players know in an instant what hazards they may encounter and where the pin is placed.

As players progress from hole to hole, mapping software known as a Global Positioning System (GPS) automatically changes to reflect the cart's position. A computer in the clubhouse tracks all the carts on the entire course. A digital readout of what is going on throughout a golf course is made available to course managers, who can tell if a foursome is slowing their progress and making others wait. The manager of the course can identify the

slowing party and either send an electronic message to the cart to pick up the pace, or send someone from the clubhouse to investigate.

"Our research has indicated that one of the biggest issues in recreational golf today is slow play. We felt we could develop a system which could either reduce or eliminate this issue," says Rich Rudow, president of Leading Edge Technologies. "In addition, it also has the direct impact of increasing revenues for the course by optimizing the number of tee times available."

Currently, PROLINK, which had sales revenues of \$3.5 million last year, is available on a number of courses in Japan and one golf course in Tucson. The company expects to have a number of Phoenix courses signed up by summer's end.

What's nice about PROLINK, according to Erica Henderson, marketing coordinator for PROLINK, is that golfers don't have to interact with the monitor if they don't want to. "They can just look up at the screen and it will tell them everything," she says. "There are options for them to interact with it and get more information if they want to, but it's not necessary."

So far, the monitors have been met with positive reviews. In addition, the pace of golf



Erica Henderson,
marketing
coordinator for
PROLINK.

courses using the system have quickened, making the game even more enjoyable. "A lot of golfers want the rounds to go quicker because they don't want to spend five hours on a course," says Henderson.

So for Arizona, golf is certainly the name of the game, now and in the future. And for businesses even remotely tied to the sport, success seems as bright for them as it does for Tiger Woods.

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Cynthia Scanlon is a Tempe free-lance writer

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