

northern Michigan will be an \$83 million-a-year business.

What makes PAR's pitch to out-of-state golfers so attractive are several factors. One, it's too hot in Myrtle Beach and Hilton Head in the summer; their boom times are spring and fall, which means they aren't in competition with Michigan courses. Two, the Golf Foundation and Golf Digest estimate that 10 percent of all golfers are willing, even eager, to take golf vacations. Three, according to PAR figures, 21 percent of the golfers in the country live in Michigan, Ohio, Illinois, Indiana and Wisconsin, within 500 miles of the so-called Gold Coast, and 45 percent of the golfers who go to Myrtle Beach are from that five-state area.

The facts, figures and persistence of Paul and Richards finally swayed Bill Siebenthaler, a crusty, retired newspaperman who owns a course hardly any have heard of but who all should see and play.

Siebenthaler owns a beautiful, though unknown, course known as "A-Ga-Ming," an Indian term meaning beside the water. Siebenthaler's course is on a hillside overlooking Torch Lake and the toughest part of playing it is taking your eye off the scenery to play a shot.

While the green fees at "The Bear" are \$75 and are \$50 at "The Legend," you can play nine holes at A-Ga-Ming for \$9 or play all 18 for \$16. Water comes into play on 11 of the 18 holes, nine of which have just been completed for this season. Siebenthaler once owned a newspaper in Ohio, the Xenia Daily Gazette, that won a Pulitzer for reporting. If there was a Pulitzer for building pretty golf courses, he'd be in the running for that, too. When he wants to move a green, he's likely to be in the machine moving the dirt. "I know, now, how an artist feels," he said on a golf-cart tour of his baby.

He's got a jewel and he knows it. He long resisted the idea he needed help to market it. Finally, to his surprise, he decided to hook up with PAR for this season.

"I was the toughest nut they ever cracked," he said, taking a break from supervising the crew putting in a new tee area on one of the holes. "I wasn't going to join. No way. But they convinced me that they had something that could help us. I still haven't told Chick (Harbert, a former PGA star and his pro). He's still against it. But they're sending us a lot of tee times already, and that's business we wouldn't have, otherwise."

(There are nine resorts and 19 courses under the PAR umbrella. Members of the Golf

Council pay PAR a sliding fee depending on how many courses they control and whether there are lodging facilities.)

"When they first came in, I was pretty unimpressed," said Siebenthaler. "We had a pretty good thing going here. Well, every time they came back, they were more professional. And I give a lot of credit to their persistence. There were just very good side benefits for us all. Each of us singly couldn't afford the national magazines, for one thing."

Colleen Bagley is marketing director of Grand Traverse Resort. With the June opening of its 15-story tower, Grand Traverse has 767 rental units and is the largest resort in the Midwest. Once in severe financial difficulties, the resort has resumed monthly payments of \$144,000 on its mortgage and business is booming on the 850 acres, with home-site and condo sales projected at \$8 million to \$9 million for '86. Bagley expects 250,000 guests this year with gross revenues, excluding real estate sales, of \$18 million.

"You've really got to give PAR credit," said Bagley. "They got us together and that never happened before. It was hard. There were a lot of hard-headed individuals who had to be reined in. And what made it tougher was that we didn't know who they were or what their game was. Dave Richards was a novice in PR. All of us were suspicious."

"Now, with a year under our belt, I'd be surprised if everyone was not real pleased. I have been. The impact from a business standpoint hasn't been huge, yet, but they're trying to break new ground geographically and that takes time. They've expanded the awareness a great deal and the business will follow."

Bagley guessed that the out-of-state share of Grand Traverse's golf business has risen from 10-15 percent a few years ago to 25 percent today. "And it's going up all the time," she said.

Asked to describe the PAR team, Bagley said: "Dave is enthusiastic. Very enthusiastic. He's learning the business real quick. He works hard at it and he cares, he really cares. Doug is an idea guy. Very enterpris-

ing. He's the kind of guy you walk up to him and you'll walk away with five new assignments. So you avoid him at cocktails.

"We've been waiting a long time to be discovered. The plan is to have the entire nation be aware of us and that is not an insurmountable goal. We're well on the way toward that."

Currently PAR is in the second year of a five-year contract with the Golf Council. "Are we getting our money's worth? I think so. I really do. But don't tell them I said that," said Bagley, breaking into laughter.



So, business is up, PAR's clients on the Golf Council seem happy, even the weather's been good. The only thing wrong is there's no time to play golf, and it's an addiction for golf that got Paul into this in the first place.

"The only time I can play now is when I'm on vacation," said Paul. "The weekends I'm always tied up with PAR."

He describes himself as "an avid golfer, not a good golfer. PAR began as a product of my own frustration in setting up golf trips. Being an avid golfer, I played different courses. In the winter we'd go to Florida, in the spring we'd go to Myrtle Beach and in the summer, we'd go up to northern Michigan. We'd been doing it for years and it always bothered me I had to make the arrangements myself. There was nobody I could call up and say, 'Hey, I want to take a golf trip. Here's where I want to go.' I'd go to a travel agent and it was apparent they knew less than I did. We got so good at it, we figured: 'Why not do it and make a little on the side, too?'"

They are still trying to make the little on the side. All the money is being plowed back into PAR, which has yet to show a profit. But the principals feel a profit is just around the next dogleg. Meanwhile, the staff at the Dearborn headquarters has grown from one part-timer to six full-timers and four part-timers.

"We started passing out flyers at pro shops," said Paul. "Our only employee was a charming old lady who didn't know anything about golf. We did our best business when we had the recorder on and she couldn't screw up."

For information on course and resort locations, or to book a golf vacation, call PAR at 562-2533. PAR represents 19 courses and nine resorts; geographically, they range from McGuire's resort near Cadillac in the south, to Garland north of Vucerne in the east, to Boyne Highlands near Harbor Springs in the north, to Crystal Mountain near Thompsonville in the west.

— Tom Henderson