

...GT area becoming golf destination...

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Business has grown steadily. PAR expects to book as many as 10,000 rounds this summer, with an expected volume of at least \$500,000. To accompany that growth, PAR branched out from strictly arranging trips to actually becoming a marketing agent for the area. It wasn't easily accomplished, with the brunt of the dirty work going to Richards, a 28-year-old graduate of Plymouth Salem who spent the winter of '84-'85 up north in a frustrating series of meetings and pleadings trying to convince the various owners to agree to a joint-marketing plan.

Richards had been familiar with Traverse City, having been going to the family cottage there since he was a baby. When he quit his selling job in '84, he headed north to see if he could find a marketing position with one of the resorts. A friend told him about PAR. "Paul and I worked out a deal: 'Go up north and work for four months; we won't pay you but it'll be great in the future,'" said Richards, laughing at the memory. "And that's what I did. I started making the personal contacts. It was a little rough in the beginning."

"Getting them all together and getting them to agree was probably the hardest thing we've ever had to do," he added. "It took four months to get them to sit down in a meeting room together, of constant, every day going from one to the other, back and forth just to get them to agree to sit down and talk about maybe doing it. Even though they may only have been 10 minutes apart, many of them didn't know each other. They'd never even met."

"We were like referees," said Paul. "We

were presenting the concept and everyone was sitting back, and not only were they listening to what we had to say, they were watching each other. . . . When it comes to pass that Michigan assumes its place as a summer golf destination, and maybe even as an international golf destination, we'll look back and say that the toughest thing to do was to get them to accept the fact that there were other golf courses up there, and it was to their advantage to market the area."

A total of 15 courses and seven resorts decided to form the Northern Michigan Golf Council and hire PAR as their marketing agent. Small ads began appearing in the national golf magazines; promotional money was spent to bring in golf and travel writers to see what was there; the state kicked in with \$11,000 in grant money for brochures.

From humble beginnings, PAR has begun hitting eagles and aces. The golf writers went bananas. Not only was the scenery all you could imagine, the courses were as billed, too. Jack Nicklaus' course, "The Bear" at Grand Traverse Resort in Acme is regarded as world class by those who know; though named "The Legend" before it even opened last summer, Arnold Palmer's course at Shanty Creek is an incredible collection of sights worthy of the name and is a wondrous string of holes snaking around the ravines and slopes on the back side of the mountainous hill overlooking Bellaire Lake; Robert Trent Jones' Heather Course at Boyne Highlands has been rated by Golf Digest as one of the top 100 courses in the country the last 11 years; and the unknown courses match

them for beauty and difficulty.

The publicity has helped lead to increased awareness of the state and increased support from it. Legislative approval of a \$300,000 grant for promotion this summer was considered a formality at press time, well up from the modest \$11,000 of a year ago, with \$950,000 in grants planned for next summer.

Why the dramatic increase in funds? Because it makes sense financially. Golfers have wonderful demographics. They make money and they spend lots of it on their hobby. That's why TV networks clamor to broadcast golf though the ratings are tiny. That's why Myrtle Beach, S.C., has grown in 20 years from a little place on the beach with a couple of decent golf courses to a mecca for golfers.

PAR studied Myrtle Beach in depth. What Paul and Richards found out made it easy to sell the resort owners and the state on an idea whose idea had come: United we boom, divided summer remains merely what separates ski seasons.

For example: In 1967 there were nine hotels and 10 courses in Myrtle Beach. Today, there are 38 courses, 40,000 rental units and 180,000 golfers generating \$94 millions in greens fees, cart rentals and lodging.

"Last year in Myrtle Beach, 5,000 condominiums were sold at an average of \$100,000 and 90 percent of that was sold to out-of-staters," said Paul who projects that within five to seven years golf in 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 which 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

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