

Donald's Trump Card

Real estate billionaire's makeover of Ocean Trails is nearly complete

by Eric Tracy

The sun was shining, the sky was blue and the ocean was gleaming at the bottom of a craggy cliff 200 feet below. It was a glorious day for a Sunday drive on the Palos Verdes Peninsula.

Pulling into Ocean Trails Golf Course I passed a limousine that looked longer than the first hole. Donald Trump was in town checking on the construction of his newest toy. The billionaire businessman whose passion for golf is only slightly less than his passion for making money has made things happen in a big way for a course that seemed cursed. Weeks before its scheduled opening five years ago the 18th hole at Ocean Trails fell into the ocean and dragged with it millions of dollars belonging to the former owners. About a year ago The Donald picked up the property for a fire-sale price of \$27 million and, like everything else he owns, he's intent on making this beautiful golf property a winner that lives up to the ornate filigree of the Trump coat of arms.



Donald Trump at his newest property.

TRUMPING THE CHANGES: More than the reconstruction of the 18th hole and repair of two other holes affected by the landslide is taking place. A driving range that parallels the ocean is almost ready for sod. Outside the pro shop, a couple of acres of what was waste area is taking shape as a park-like setting perfect for outdoor weddings with the ocean as a backdrop. In an effort to transform the course into a golf resort, a day spa is planned along with the construction of about 100 casitas ranging in size from 800 to 1,400 square feet.

With an eye toward professional tournaments, Trump also is making changes to the Pete Dye-designed course beginning with the lengthening of the first hole from 308 yards to 420 yards. He's also replaced the brown sand in all of the traps with Augusta crushed white marble, which serves as a wonderful contrast to the green fairways and blue sea.

GOING DUTCH: Mike van der Goes has been working at Ocean Trails since before the course opened. Hired as the head professional, the man whose e-mail address is "dutchpro" was promoted to director of golf under the previous owners. Soon after the winner of Trump's TV hit "The Apprentice" turned down the chance to operate Ocean Trails, the Dutchman was given the interim general manager's title by the man who made "you're fired" famous. The catch phrase is perfect for Trump, who is "very clear in communicating what he wants," van der Goes said.

It's hard to fathom that no matter how much money Trump uses to transform Ocean Trails into Trump National Los Angeles, it's still just pocket change to the real estate giant. Earlier this summer Trump put a building in New York up for sale that cost him \$1 million in 1995; today he stands to make a \$400 million profit on the investment. That's not likely to happen with Trump National Los Angeles because golf doesn't turn over those kinds of numbers. But at least The Donald has a place to play when he comes to the West Coast.

MAJOR OPPORTUNITY: The last major golf tournament of the season finds the PGA of America trying something new. Usually major championships are played on venerable old courses like Oak Hill, Hazeltine, the Atlanta Athletic Club and Riviera. This year the site is Whistling Straits, a resort course owned by Wisconsin-based Kohler, the king of bathroom fixtures and a course that's only 6 years old. But don't let its youth fool you. Peter Jacobsen called it one of the "five best courses in the world."

Reminiscent of an Irish seaside links with sand dunes, fescue fairways and pot bunkers, the course wasn't carved out of a faultless Wisconsin forest, but rather was man-made out of an abandoned military base that became a dump.

What the Kohler folks and course architect Pete Dye saw were million-dollar views of Lake Michigan and a couple of miles of uninterrupted Lake Michigan shoreline. Whistling Straits is perhaps the most faithful reproduction of an Irish seaside links course in America — from its soaring sand dunes and punishing pot bunkers to its wiry fescue fairways and the grazing Irish Blackface sheep. I will honor the replica by watching the tournament with a bottle of Bushmills Irish whiskey on the table next to my recliner.

At this year's 86th PGA Championship, one of the big-name bridesmaids from the previous three major championships will break through. Ernie Els will win by a stroke over Tiger Woods and two over Phil Mickelson.

ON A ROLL: Last month's magazine had a nice profile on Tom Barber, head professional at Griffith Park Golf Course and one of my favorite people in the game. Tom is the son of the late Jerry Barber and no mention of the PGA Championship is complete without mentioning one of the most amazing finishes in the tournament's history with Barber putting on one of the greatest exhibitions of clutch putting in a major championship.

Barber was trailing Don January by four strokes with three holes to play at Olympia Fields for the 1961 championship. Barber sank successive putts of 22 feet, 44 feet and 58 feet — two for birdies, one for par — to tie a stunned January. Barber won the 18-hole playoff by a stroke the next day.

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