

Big Island's golf boom has landed deeply in rough

Funding stalls 50 projects

By Hugh Clark
Advertiser Big Island Bureau

HILO, Hawaii — The Big Island's golf boom has slowed but hasn't gone bust, and it is providing some benefits to Big Isle residents, according to developers, attorneys and planning consultants.

Two West Hawaii courses have opened and a third is finished, awaiting a turn in the economy before opening.

Still, some 50 proposed golf course projects are mostly stalled for lack of money.

One golf course development, the Kealakekua Bay Club in South Kona, has been withdrawn after two years of delay on a special management area permit for the 262-acre property.

There were problems with the development, primarily involving environmental concerns over the impact on historic Kealakekua Bay. But Royal Coast Development Corp. and Pac Inv Hawaii, Inc. said a weak economy contributed to the decision to withdraw.

A number of golf course developers are negotiating with the county on "community benefit assessments" that average \$3 million per 18-hole course. Others are hung up in planning or legal disputes.

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Nearly every Big Island golf course project involves Japanese investments, according to county planning spokesman Daryn Arai.

Brewer sugar land at upper Kaumana in Hilo. The county's focus is on gaining a public park.

Courses that have opened are Mauna Kea Properties' Prince course and Sokan Hawaii's Makalei Hawaii Country Club on former Huehue Ranch land.

The Waimea Country Club Course is finished but not yet open for play.

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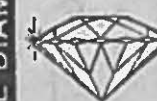
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course project involves Japanese investments, according to county planning spokesman Daryn Arai. Some have been affected by the downturn in the economy.

At Pohoiki in Puna, grading started but stopped on two 18-hole courses because of funding problems, according to David Matsuura, a representative of the developer, Oneloa.

In North Kona, the Barnwell project involving two 18-hole courses along with a Four Seasons Hotel has been delayed for more than three years by financing and reorganization problems.

Financing is not a problem for Nansay Hawaii but its Kohanaiki Resort in North Kona is one of those stalled by litigation.

Greg Mooers, a Nansay senior executive, said his company spent \$10.2 million on the Kohanaiki Resort, also known as the Pine Trees.



Mooers

But the project is headed to the Hawaii Supreme Court over disputed claims of Hawaiian gathering rights.

At Ouli, in South Kohala, Nansay is spending another \$4 million on water projects and donated a helicopter ambulance as part of its county benefit assessment.

Nansay plans six other courses at the Puako Mauka residential complex. It has spent \$6.5 million so far on the project and is working on two water projects for the development expected to cost \$500 million.

The KTA group from Japan is well along on a course in Ainako upslope of Hilo. (The firm is not associated with the Big Island's KTA grocery chain.)

KTA's goal is for completion in 1995, according to its representative, former county planning director Sydney Fuke. The developer now is complying with flood control and wetland requirements supervised by the Army Corps of Engineers. It also pledged to provide road improvements for the surrounding residential areas.

Another golf course project that Fuke represents, the Big Island Country Club at Puuanahulu, has agreed to a \$3 million contribution to the county.

An environmental impact statement is being prepared for Oceanside 1250's Villages of Hokukano in Kealahou in South Kona that includes a 27-hole course. The joint venture includes Japan Airlines.

On the Hamakua Coast, the failure of Hamakua Sugar and a court ruling nullifying zoning for Kukuihaele-Waipio may have killed plans for 3½ proposed courses in the area.

Mayor Steve Yamashiro said the whole Hamakua area is in such a state of flux, his administration has not decided what the next step should be for the golf course plans.

Planning lawyer Ben Tsuzaki of Hilo said he is negotiating community benefits for a course planned on former