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Nicklaus, Garcia to design courses for golf resort

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Two of golf's biggest names, one a legend and the other among the sport's hottest young commodities, will join forces to design 36 holes of a $200 million golf **resort** and convention center complex planned for the shores of Joe Pool Lake.

Jack Nicklaus and 22-year-old Sergio Garcia will design 18 holes each of the planned **Wildflower Resort**, which developers hope to open by October 2004.

The courses will serve as the centerpiece of a 1,000-acre **resort**, which will include a 500-room luxury hotel, a 60,000-square-foot conference center, ballroom, equestrian center, a 25,000-square-foot spa and 35,000-square-foot golf clubhouse. Numerous villas are also planned as part of the hotel's expansion.

Raymond J. Goad, president and chief executive officer of **Wildflower Resort** Co., was part of a development team that attempted to launch a similar complex at Joe Pool Lake in the late 1990s. He said he now has new partners and expects to close on funding for the project in the fourth quarter of this year.

Wildflower is scheduled to begin construction late this year, and both the **resort** and golf courses are expected to be open and operating in late 2004 when Lone Star Park at Grand Prairie is scheduled to host the Breeders' Cup World Thoroughbred Championships, Goad said.

"There will be people here from all over the world and we want to help the city be a showcase for them," he said.

Goad, city officials and designers are adamant that this incarnation of the project is the best and last plan for the long-awaited Joe Pool Lake **resort**. City officials have long bemoaned the lack of a full-service hotel, saying it has hurt Grand Prairie's attempts to attract tourists and kept it from capitalizing on events at Lone Star Park and NextStage.

Developers and city officials believe the courses will rival some of the latest golf courses designs in the area by Greg Norman, Tom Fazio and Pete Dye as well as the noted Tour 18 in Flower Mound.

"It's another great development for the city," said Mayor Charles England. "And with two people with their names and endorsement, the sky is the limit on how popular this thing could be."

"The golf market is very competitive and you better do it right or you are going to get behind," England added. "'We think this is the definition of doing it right."

Goad said the **resort** also hopes to incorporate the city's nearby Tangle Ridge Golf Course into marketing plans and tournaments.

It will be the first course design for Garcia, a three-time winner on the PGA Tour, the fifth-ranked player in the world and the 2001 MasterCard Colonial winner. Nicklaus Design, Jack Nicklaus' company, has contracted to support the design work of Garcia, Goad said.

Nicklaus and Garcia are each expected to visit the site in August, he said.

The courses, which will measure roughly 7,300 yards each from the professional tee boxes, will be built on 600 acres and situated along 4.5 miles of shoreline.

While Nicklaus has participated in area course designs, "he didn't have a signature course in Dallas or North Texas area and he especially liked this location," Goad said.

Developers focused on Nicklaus for a signature course early in the planning stages, then later suggested Garcia work with him.

"They told us he was ecstatic," Goad said.

Nicklaus Design has been involved with more than 250 courses in 27 countries and 35 states. Of those, Jack Nicklaus has designed, co-designed or redesigned 208 courses around the globe, 35 of which have been ranked in national or international Top 100 lists.

In a statement, Nicklaus said: "I am pleased for **Wildflower** to be the site of our first signature course in the Dallas area, and particularly, for the opportunity to support Sergio in his first golf course design... I am certain he will take his talent and passion for the game into his design work."

Garcia, also in a statement, said he plans to work on "only on a very few courses" while maintaining his focus on professional golf.

"**Wildflower** will be a spectacular start to my design career," he said.

All four nines will have multiple holes fronting the lake, Nicklaus said. The challenge, he said, is to balance each course with water and inland features.

Coincidentally, the cross-generational twosome will share the prime time stage on Monday, squaring off against one another with different teams in a "Battle at Big Horn," which is to be televised by ABC. Nicklaus will team with Tiger Woods to take on Garcia and Lee Trevino in the match.

The city of Grand Prairie will own the conference center at the **Wildflower** complex and lease it to the **resort**. **Wildflower** will manage the center for the city.

In 1999, Grand Prairie voters approved an increase in the local hotel-motel occupancy tax to help pay for the conference center - a financing incentive Goad still plans to use. The city has extended economic incentives to Lone Star Park and most recently to Next Stage at Grand Prairie, the city's new performance hall.

"We think **Wildflower Resort** will be very important part of their effort to bring additional economic development and jobs to Grand Prairie," Goad said. "This **resort**, we believe, will be recognized all over the country and further enhance the image of the city."

The **resort** is being developed under a design-build arrangement with Turner Construction and Gensler Architects, both of Dallas, with interiors by Wilson Design.

Comprehensive golf development and course management services will be provided by Troon Golf, based in Scottsdale, Ariz. Troon manages operations at more than 115 golf courses in 24 states and 10 countries.

"With Jack and Sergio getting together, you are creating a chemistry that doesn't exist right now," said Tim Greenwell, Troon's senior vice president of sales and marketing. "It's going to be an exciting time to be a golfer in the Metroplex."

ONLINE: For more about Nicklaus Design, go to www.nicklaus.com.

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