

It's a new era at Ferncroft Country Club

It has not been the best of times for Ferncroft Country Club and its members the last few years.

The club and course, once considered among the elite in the area when it hosted state, regional and LPGA tournaments, had lost its luster, often perceived as the poorly treated stepchild whenever it and its sister, the nearby hotel, were sold by their parent company.

Well, its stepchild days — and subservience to the hotel — are over, says **Damon DeVito**, managing director of Virginia-based Affinity Golf Management (AFG), the firm that purchased Ferncroft outright from WPH Boston in February for \$13 million.

"We're going to bring back the great tradition and heritage Ferncroft Country Club enjoyed during its glory days of the 70s and 80s," says DeVito. "This is a great course and club in a great location with all the ingredients necessary to restore its past stature. It has a real pedigree."

Those ingredients, of course, are cash and talent. DeVito and his firm appear to have both, attracted particularly by what he calls "a property that has a fine history and a beautifully built-out community."

Affinity Golf Management is restructuring the membership plan as part of its strategy to return the club to a fully private arrangement. In a matter of days, 120



members from the 2005 membership roll forked over \$25,000 to become founding members of the "new" Ferncroft CC. The founding membership classification is sold out. Next available will be charter memberships at \$30,000 a clip. Annual memberships will be available short term, along with social memberships.

"That was a huge vote of confidence from the founding members, which converts to a huge responsibility for the new management, but we welcome the opportunity," said DeVito.

"We've worked with clubs in 19 states. We know exactly what we're doing and we plan to provide quick results. We'll spend \$3.3 million to upgrade the course, clubhouse, locker rooms and overall property. We leased \$120,000 in golf course maintenance equipment for our superintendent, **Mike Cassidy**, and his staff. We're also doing pool and clubhouses renovations."

CBC Construction owner **Ed Harrison**, a Ferncroft member, oversaw the renovation of "19th Hole" facility, including the restaurant, function space and pro shop.

"The 19th Hole makeover was critical," DeVito added. "The more we heard about members not being able to have a beer and a sandwich after golf the past 10 years, we realized this first phase needed to show potential members what we're all about."

DeVito called the early months of the Ferncroft ownership "the best launch we've ever had. We're in this business to make money and to lower our risk, and we'll succeed by taking care of our membership and staff first. The rest will take care of itself."

DeVito's on-site AFG director is **David Swales**, who has been with the firm since 1997 and most recently was the membership director at The Renaissance Club in Haverhill. Previously he managed Wentworth Club in England and Keswick Club in Virginia.

This is AFG's first acquisition. Its prior golf management projects were on a consulting basis. But in its short time at Ferncroft, AFG has already won over the club's Director of Golf, **Toby Ahern**.

"Affinity has done more for the club in three months than anybody else did in three decades," said Ahern, who has worked under four different ownerships during his 14 years at Ferncroft.

"They listen to members, bring a ton of experience and are independent of the hotel. That inspires confidence."