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Richmond golf course takes swing at going wireless

Mayfair Lakes Golf and Country Club first in North America to provide full fairway Internet access for its members

Richard Chu

Richmond's **Mayfair Lakes Golf and Country Club** will be the first golf course in North America to provide full wireless Internet coverage thanks to its purchase of a new information management system developed by Vancouver-based **GPS Industries Inc.**

"It will allow the business person who's pressed for time to use their computer before or while on the range if they're waiting for that key e-mail," said Mayfair Lakes Golf and Country Club general manager **J.J. Belanger**.

He said there is demand for the service. "The convenience is huge, especially with the time crunch of the new millennium."

But other golf course operators aren't as bullish on the wonders of wired fairways.

Shaughnessy Golf and Country Club manager **David Wood** noted

that private clubs don't allow cell phones or any other devices on the course.

Said **University Golf Club** manager **Michael Mather**: "I haven't been asked if we can be a hotspot for wireless access, but I'd definitely look into it. If they [wired golfers] were holding up pace of play by typing away an e-mail, we would have to address that issue, but if it wasn't slowing them down, I wouldn't be opposed to it."

At Mayfair, golfers will be able to buy wireless Internet, or wi-fi, access time and use it with their laptops and personal digital assistant devices, Belanger said. After paying a fee, users will be given a scratch ticket that will have the code needed to access the satellite-based system for the time they purchased.

While the fees have yet to be finalized, Belanger said they could range from \$3 an hour to \$10 a day or \$30 a month.

GPS Industries' Inforemer system

also provides golfers with global tracking technology. The Mayfair Lakes system includes 30 golf cart and 27 handheld units that provide several services for golfers and golf course managers.

"The features are endless," according to Belanger. "It's really going to transform golf with the variety of things it can assist [the golfer] with."

According to a GPS Industries fact sheet, the system "provides golfers with valuable location-based pro tips and suggestions; a 'drive button' to measure drive distances; pace-of-play information; a push-button electronic scorecard for up to four players; and two-way communications for receiving and sending important messages, ordering food, beverages and pro shop merchandise."

Mayfair Lakes served as the test area for the system last year.

Belanger declined to say how much Mayfair paid for the system, but he estimated it would take 18 months to two years for the system to pay for itself. Mayfair Lakes received a discounted purchase price for being the system's test site.

For golf course managers, the Inforemer system can provide several revenue-generating options, including advertising and increased food, beverage and pro shop sales, Belanger said.

Mayfair Lakes Golf and Country Club is a member of the Golf B.C. chain of golf courses. Belanger said



Mayfair Lakes' GM J.J. Belanger: "it's really going to transform golf"

the organization is looking at implementing the system at one of its golf courses along the Sea-to-Sky corridor in the next couple years, either **Nicklaus North Golf Course** or the **Furry Creek Golf and Country Club**.

GPS Industries was founded in 1995 and has invested more than \$20 million in product design research and development. The company has partnered with professional golfer **Greg Norman** to introduce the Inforemer system at courses worldwide.

In a February 23 release, GPSI announced it had assembled a board of advisors with several high-profile

golf-industry executives, including **CBS Sportsline** president and CEO **Michael Levy** and **American Golf Corp.** vice-president **Mike O'Donnell**.

American Golf Corp. is one of the world's largest golf course owner/operators.

Richmond has become a Lower Mainland wi-fi hotspot with wireless Internet available throughout Richmond from **Fido**, and with Vancouver International Airport providing Telus-based wireless Internet service since October.

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