



LOCAL

AUGUST 23, 2016 7:11 PM

Puyallup tribe buying Northeast Tacoma golf course



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The Puyallup Tribe of Indians is buying the 54-year-old North Shore Golf Course in Northeast Tacoma. **Drew Perine** - dperine@thenewstribune.com

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Staff at the North Shore Golf Course are hopeful about its new owner and operator, the course's general manager said. An influx of cash could transform the place, sprucing it up and allowing for some overdue upgrades.

"It's a great course. It's just a little long in the tooth, and it needs some refurbishment and some capital infusion," said David Wetli, general manager and head golf professional at the public 18-hole course in Northeast Tacoma. "So we're pretty stoked out here."

The Puyallup Tribe of Indians announced Tuesday that it's buying the 55-year-old golf course with its economic development arm, Marine View Ventures, effective Sept. 9. Daily operations will be handled by Seattle-based Columbia Hospitality, and Ryan Moore Golf, the company of local professional golfer Ryan Moore, will serve as an adviser, CEO Michael Moore said. Ryan Moore's company owns public courses in Spanaway, Lakewood and Port Orchard that are operated by Columbia Hospitality.

The land will remain a public golf course under the tribe's ownership, Michael Moore said.

"That was their vision and desire, to make it a great experience and improve golf conditions and amenities there and make it something they and the community are proud of," Moore said. "They were here long before any of the residents in Northeast Tacoma — that was on their tribal land. They've been there a long time and they're proud of it."

Wetli, who's worked at the course since 1982, said he's been told North Shore's management will stay in place, at least for the time being.

Current owner North Shore Golf Associates developed the golf course in 1961 and has been its sole operator. Almost a decade ago, the group tried to develop the land for the controversial [Pointe at Northshore project](#), which aimed to build 366 houses and 494 townhouses over the 116-acre golf course, but the project was stopped in court. A 1981 city-approved rezone of the land, which allowed development of The Northshore Country Club Estates — a 338-acre planned neighborhood around the course — came with the condition that the neighborhood "will maintain and always have the use of the adjacent golf course for its open space and density requirement," according to stories in The News Tribune.

“We’ve kind of been trying to improve the operations ever since the real estate deal fell apart, but we haven’t had a lot of financial backing or we’re just short on capital,” Wetli said. “We’ve just been trying to improve the place and get better, but we kind of feel like we’ve been doing it with one hand tied behind our back. We haven’t had the resources to update the cart fleet and update the buildings and facilities as they’ve needed to. ... The money hasn’t been there in last 10 to 15 years, so it’s been kind of tough. But we’ve managed to grow the business since the real estate deal fell apart.”

While the golf course is intended to remain a golf course, as tribal-owned land it could be placed in trust — a move that would have to be approved by the Bureau of Indian Affairs — and would then no longer be in the city’s jurisdiction. If that happened, the land use could be changed without getting a permit from the city, said Alisa O’Hanlon, government relations coordinator for Tacoma. The property would also become tax-exempt if it were placed into trust. O’Hanlon said she hasn’t heard anything to suggest that’s in the plans.

“If they want to transfer (the land) to trust, we get to comment on that,” she said, “and we get to say, this is how it would impact us. Once it’s in trust, they could change the land use without getting a permit from the city,” but the city would get an opportunity to comment on that as well, she said.

North Shore Golf Course began when Jim Bourne leased the front nine holes in 1961, Wetli said. He and Larry Proctor became partners in the late 1970s, when they purchased the front nine and the land for the back nine and developed it, he said.

Councilman Robert Thoms, who represents Northeast Tacoma, said he’s pleased a local operator with experience in the business is coming in with a solid financial backer with deep roots in the area.

“I’m excited that we now have a group that’s taken this that has a long-term history here in the area and has long-term financial stability underneath it,” Thoms said.

Chad Wright, CEO of Marine View Ventures, led the purchase along with Michael Moore, according to a news release. Moore said the sale amount would not be public until the golf course officially changes hands in September.

“The acquisition of North Shore was a long-term, strategic decision by the Puyallup Tribe,” Wright said in a statement. “It is the goal of MVV to work closely with (Ryan Moore Golf) and Columbia Hospitality to elevate all areas of the North Shore guest experience. We are excited to bring new energy, along with capital improvements, new amenities and an overall revitalization to North Shore Golf Course.”

“The opportunity to re-acquire a parcel of land of this magnitude on the Puyallup Reservation doesn’t present itself often, so we are thrilled to add the North Shore Golf Course to our real estate holdings,” Puyallup Tribe of Indians Chairman Bill Sterud said in a statement.