

Laurelton Center May Soon Become Signature Golf

By Jerri Kost-Brouse

LAURELTON - A team of Union County investors has signed a sales agreement with the state to purchase the former Laurelton Center in Union County.

Three local men - Bill Seigel, David Iddings and Ted Cresswell - plan to turn the former institution for the mentally retarded into a resort and conference center called Hickernell Springs Resort.

The group outlined their plans for the property to citizens at a community meeting several weeks ago.

Much of the information was not new to those who attended the meeting, held at the Hartley Township Community Center - it's virtually the same proposal they heard two years ago, when the group made their first attempt to get the property from the state.

The Laurelton Center, located in western Union County, consists of 335 acres of land and 52 buildings. The previous center for the mentally retarded was closed by the state back in 1998. Until recently, plans for the facility had included turning it into a senior living facility. But the group that had won the bid for the property, Hampton Laurelton Associates of Allentown, failed to meet numerous deadlines for securing the proper funds and permits for the development of property.

When the deal with Hampton Laurelton fell through, the Department of General Services decided to give Hickernell another chance at pursuing their idea - turning the facility into corporate resort and conference center, complete with a golf course, restaurants and hotel rooms.

Bill Seigel said when finished, the resort would offer 125 rooms (most of which will be in the former hospital building and the remaining of which will be in the surrounding cottages), a keystone building (Wolfe Building) which will include a few rooms and serve as a registration area; ballrooms, which will be located in two of the larger buildings on the campus; an indoor pool and health spa in the Moyer Building; an outdoor pool and at least two restaurants. The restaurants will vary in formality and price - one will be located in the clubhouse for the golf course, the other elsewhere. Seigel said he also hopes a small informal cafe will be made available.

About five of the cottages may be marketed as condominiums and could be sold to corporations so they could use them at will.

group must adhere to a strict budget. The group plan to spend \$24 million in renovations to the buildings. The golf course design and construction will cost \$7 million.

Seigel noted that Arnold Palmer is a Pennsylvania native, and believes the signature course is vital for the type of facility they plan to develop.

Where is the money coming from? Investor capital, debt service and hopefully, he said, financial assistance from the state.

If all goes as planned, Seigel said the facility will be open by late 2003 or early

2004. Hickernell has six months to secure the necessary financing, though Seigel said he believes they may be able to get an extension if they can show they have made substantial progress.

They also have six months to get land development plans submitted to the township and fill out needed applications for zoning permits. Seigel said he hopes the process will move along faster than that.

"We are committed to developing this site. We want to be geared up and ready for construction one year from now." ~PBC

About five of the cottages may be marketed as condominiums and could be sold to corporations so they could use them at will.

A major factor - critical to the success of the endeavor - will be the Arnold Palmer Golf Course, which will be wrapped around the complex, Seigel said. The clubhouse will be located at the north end of the 18-hole course. The Johnson Cottage would serve as the clubhouse.

Seigel said there is some concern about the golf course - primarily that they still need to acquire an additional 100 acres of land. Seigel said he is confident they will be able to swap land with the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources to obtain the land they need. He said there also is one landowner who has expressed an interest in selling some property.

In order to do all of this, Seigel said the