



## Sports

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# Daily Herald

**dh** dailyherald.com

Sunday, April 16, 2006

PADDOCK PUBLICATIONS • 134TH YEAR • NO. 184 • TWELVE SECTIONS **\$1.50**

C234567

## Kemper Lakes about to go private

BY CORRINNE HESS

Daily Herald Staff Writer

Kemper Lakes Golf Club wants to become one of only a handful of golf courses to make history — taking one of the country's premier public fee courses to private country club status on Jan. 1 next year.

As golf course development has increased and competition becomes more keen to serve a flat

market of golf enthusiasts, Kemper Lakes is betting that becoming a private course will differentiate it from the rest.

The change has been a long time coming, said Kemper General Manager Janet Dobson. The market slowed after the 9/11 terrorist attacks and never regained steam, she said, and many courses had to slash prices to remain competitive.

Kemper Lakes owner Glenview-

based Crown Golf opted in 2003 to go private instead.

Investors are banking on the fact all comparable courses in the area are also country clubs — offering more extensive food and beverage services and amenities such as swimming and tennis — and therefore often costing members more.

"We just aren't going to have as much competition because of that niche," Dobson predicted.

Still, it is unfamiliar territory for the Kildeer course made famous for hosting professional tournaments and consistently ranked among the best.

Kemper joins only a handful of courses in Illinois and surrounding states to make such a switch.

"This is not a trend and not something that you would call a

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VINCENT PIERRI/DAILY HERALD

**Rich Johnson of Arlington Heights is the first person to buy a private membership at Kemper Lakes Golf Club.**

## Fire at city hall ignites old issue

Rejected Lake Michigan

## Security gap at our ports

*Last week, Chinese immigrants were smuggled through  
a U.S. port; could a chemical weapon be next?*

## FAA ordered own radar line to be cut

BY JOSEPH RYAN



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# Links: Luxury homes will surround private golf course

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yearly, or everyday type of occurrence," said Robert Markionni, executive director of the Chicago District Golf Association.

The association covers the northern two-thirds of the state and parts of Wisconsin, Indiana and Michigan.

Markionni said he can think of three courses, including Kemper, that have switched in the past three years.

One is Royal Hawk Country Club in St. Charles, which owner John Weiss converted from public to private in January 2005 to counter the slower golf market.

With 120 members — just under half of the maximum 300 memberships — Weiss is confident he made the right decision.

"Right now, we are in the process of finishing our clubhouse," he said. "Once that is completed, we expect more people will join."

Weiss said courses are often trying to keep customers, and privatization is one way.

"For us, it was about marketing to families and keeping it affordable," he said. "There are as many golfers leaving than coming into the sport. You need to stay competitive."

## Membership sales

Rich Johnson may someday have a place in Kemper Lakes history, right up there with the 1989 PGA Championship and the galleries watching Arnold Palmer.

Johnson, of Arlington Heights,

## Kemper Lakes Golf Course

**Opened:** 1979

**Par:** 72

**Layout:** From 7,217 yards with a 143 slope

**Signature hole:** 17th, where golfers shoot to an island green surrounded by water.

**Notable players:** Tiger Woods, Arnold Palmer, Jack Nicklaus,

was the first person to buy a private membership. He canceled his membership at a Lake County competitor to join Kemper Lakes when he heard it was going private.

"I went over there to ask a couple of questions, one of them being how many members they had," he said. "When they said they were waiting on the first, it was my wife that said I had to do it."

In the three years since announcing the decision to go private, Kemper Lakes has sold 165 memberships — slightly more than half of its maximum availability of 300.

Initially, the club was going to wait until it had 225 members signed to make the switch but decided to do it Jan. 1, 2007, instead.

Regular golf memberships are priced at \$45,000, which can be paid over three years. Corporate memberships will run \$60,000.

In addition, members will pay \$425 in monthly dues, which covers all golf. The use of carts is not included.

Memberships are refundable

Annika Sorenstam and Payne Stewart

**Tournaments:** 1998 PGA, six Senior PGA Tour events, four Grand Slam of Golf events and the USGA Women's Amateur Championship

**Recognition:** Golf Digest ranked it 27th in the top 100 public courses; consistently ranked as one of the Top 25 public courses by USA Today

up to 75 percent.

As a public course, Kemper charges \$99 to \$145 per round.

Will Kernahan, membership director, acknowledges not all Kemper regulars are pleased with the change, admitting some long-time players will lose their favorite course because they can't, or don't want to, join a private club.

## Private/public golf courses

**Area's total:** 222 public; 111 private; 17 semiprivate

**Cook County:** 78 public; 41 private; 4 semiprivate

**DuPage County:** 55 public; 23 private; 2 semiprivate

**Kane County:** 21 public; 10 private

**Lake County:** 35 public; 24 private\*

**McHenry County:** 11 public; 5 private; 4 semiprivate

**Will County:** 22 public; 8 private; 7 semiprivate

\*Includes the soon-to-be privatized Kemper Lakes Golf Club.

Source: [www.golffable.com](http://www.golffable.com)



DAILY HERALD FILE PHOTO

Michael Jordan is part of a long list of professional players and local celebrities who have played at Kemper Lakes Golf Course since it opened in 1979 and gained national prominence.

# Final Sign Up!

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