College of Golf moving to new Keiser campus

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WEST PALM BEACH —

The College of Golf is coming to West Palm Beach, and a veritable United Nations of golf students seems sure to follow.

Located in Port St. Lucie for the past five years, the College of Golf and Sport Management will move this fall into the Keiser University complex on Military Trail that formerly was the home of Northwood University.

Longtime teacher and golf program instructor Donna Horton White said the countries that will be represented in the program, which will include 400 students, will run the gamut from the Far East to Europe to South America.

“I met a Korean student five years ago who is coming next spring and bringing six friends with her,” White said. “We also have people coming from China, South America, Puerto Rico and Poland.

“There aren’t many programs like ours — maybe a dozen. If they all had 400 students, you’re talking about 4,800 students (annually) going into a $68 billion industry. That’s not a lot for an industry that big.”
Dr. Arthur Keiser, Chancellor and CEO of the 17 Keiser University schools in Florida, had his eye on building a campus in the Avenir Project in Palm Beach Gardens for years, but repeated delays left him frustrated until last August. That’s when former Florida Sen. George Lemieux informed him the Northwood administrators were closing their West Palm campus and moving back to Michigan and asked if he was interested in the property.

“This is a gorgeous campus; an oasis right in the middle of Palm Beach,” said Keiser, who completed the paperwork to change Northwood to Keiser on June 30. “So we negotiated and came to an agreement. And part of what made it work is they have an athletic program, which we never had.”

A significant part of that program was the golf team. The Northwood women won the NAIA championship and were ranked No. 1 this past spring, while the men were ranked 13th. Add in dozens of potential new candidates from the College of Golf program and both teams figure to be even better.

“I definitely see this as any easy transition,” Athletic Director Nick Davidson said. “And what gets the golfers most excited is the on-campus facilities and equipment that will help with their golf games.”

Jimmy Terry, general manager of the PGA Golf Club in Port St. Lucie, said he was disappointed to see the program leave his facility.

“Keiser has been a client and good friend of our club for many years,” Terry said. “We certainly will miss their students on our courses and practice facilities.”

Keiser is not only bringing equipment, ranging from Trackman launch monitors to interactive simulators, down from Port St. Lucie, but also is spending $250,000 to construct a 20,000-square-foot facility on the south end of campus that will feature a driving range, 1,500-square foot indoor putting green and outdoor chipping green.

Add that to a faculty featuring five Master professionals, including White, Dr. Eric Wilson and Golf Magazine Top 100 teacher T.J. Tomasi, and access to many of Palm Beach County’s top courses, and it’s a combination many of the nation’s top golf schools would envy.

Not that building a golf powerhouse is the goal. White points to 32 different disciplines as part of the program ranging from event management to insurance to community relations as avenues students can take, though it should be noted that even a four-year degree doesn’t come with any status with the PGA of America.
“I tell the students,” White said, “you’re the future leaders in our game. Look where a golf ball can take you.”

The PGA Tour’s Honda Classic at PGA National is one of the benefactors; Executive Director Ken Kennerly and Tournament Director Ed McEnroe have used Keiser graduates and interns in recent years.

“Keiser has been a wonderful feeder system for us,” Kennerly said.

So far, the only significant problem Keiser officials have encountered has been with housing; some students signed one-year leases in Port St. Lucie and thus will have to make the two-hour round trip until that commitment ends and they can move into on-campus housing. Otherwise, while time is of the essence, the transition has gone smoothly.

“Right now, the goal is to get everybody in here and going without a hitch,” White said. “The kids are here and they’re excited about it. Overall, it’s been a positive response.”