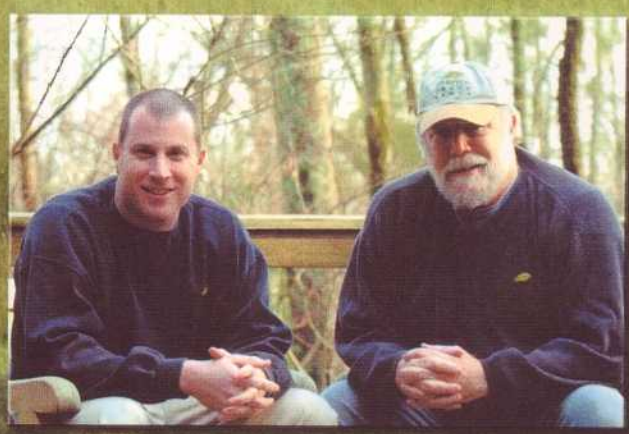
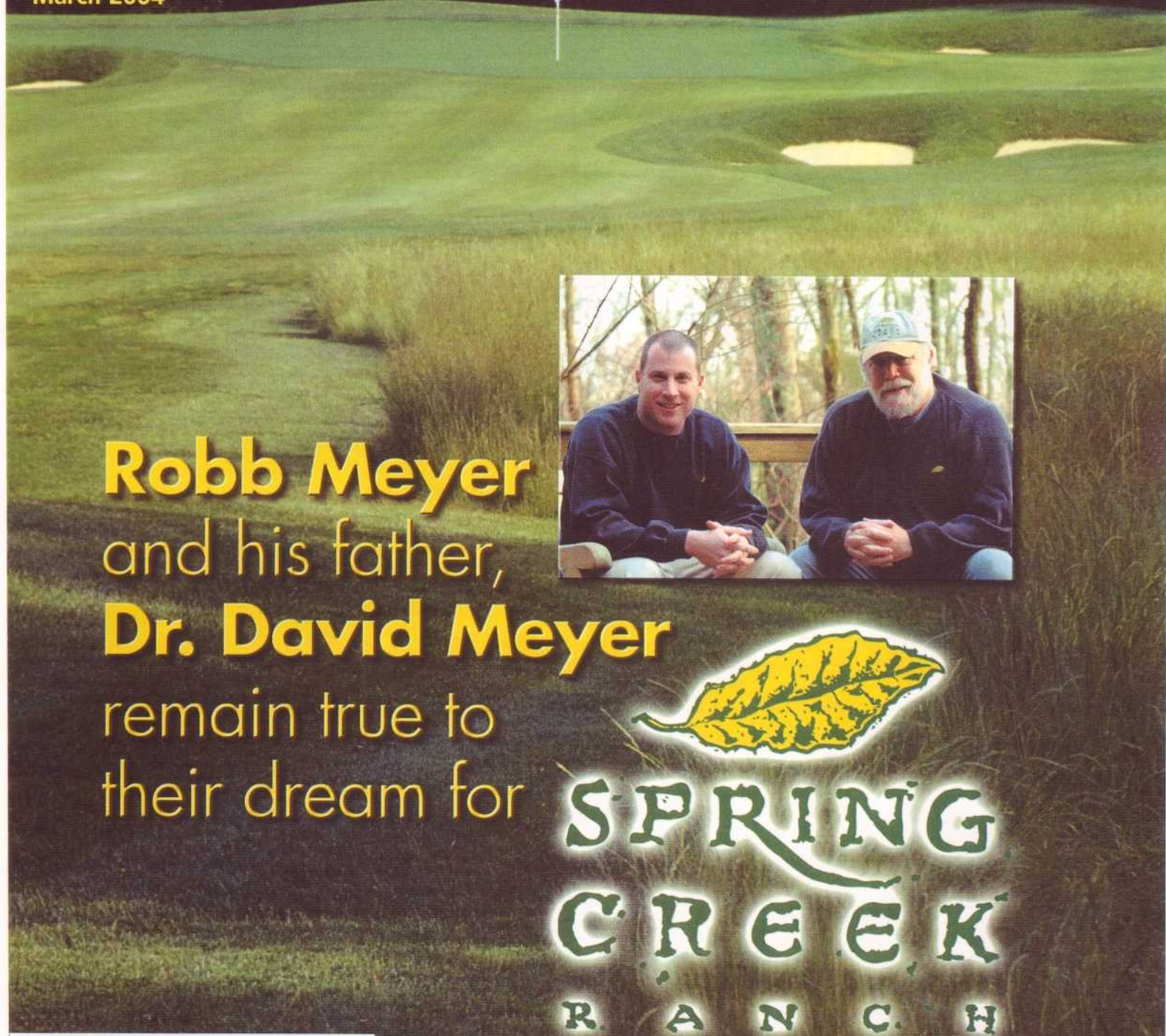


# MID-SOUTH GOLFER



www.midsouthgolfer.com  
March 2004

Volume XVII • Number 1



**Robb Meyer**  
and his father,  
**Dr. David Meyer**  
remain true to  
their dream for



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# The Meyer Family Dream Is Still The Guiding Force Behind...



## SPRING CREEK RANCH

By **Jimmy Darr**

**W**hen I confirmed my appointment to meet with Dr. David Meyer recently regarding the latest developments at Spring Creek Ranch, I was excited about the opportunity to finally hear the first-hand account of how the unique golf facility came to fruition.

I, like many, had heard sensational accounts of how the idea was born out of a chance meeting with Jack Nicklaus during a hunting trip. Or, how initially the renowned course designer Pete Dye was involved with the project, then later Tom Fazio.

In fact there is some truth to all of these accounts but as most word

of mouth passages go, the details had been somewhat skewed.

What I took from my meeting with Dr. Meyer was an undeniable understanding that nothing that has occurred with regards to Spring Creek Ranch was by chance.

“When we completed what we wanted to accomplish with the property as a cattle breeding and research facility I did not want the land, and what it meant to our family, to be lost” stated Dr. Meyer. “We wanted to turn it into something special, something that reflected our passion for the environment and preserved this special piece of land.”

The Meyers acquired the base property in the late 70’s in order to enhance their existing cattle breeding business. “We had ranches in Mississippi and Arkansas and we needed a facility closer to home in order to accomplish our goals in that industry,” Dr. Meyer explained. “We purchased adjoining parcels over time, and ultimately settled in to the approximately 1000 acres that now make up Spring Creek Ranch.”

The story of the ranch itself is fascinating, from its original mission to develop and maintain one of the premier pure-bred Brangus herds, to the establishment

PHOTO BY JIM MANDEVILLE

of the SCR Reproductive Center utilizing the only National Institute of Health financial grant to be given to a cattle farm.

The facility was a catalyst in the advancement of bovine embryo transfer methods, and pioneered the study of cryo-protection methods. This fostered embryo freezing techniques that allowed for the delayed and distant transfer of the most elite bloodlines throughout the world - most notably to developing (third world) countries.

"It was a fantastic project," recalled Dr. Meyer, "and I truly miss the cattle. I am certainly much more of a cattle person than a golfer."

Dr. Meyer is most widely known for founding the Vitreoretinal Foundation in 1968 and later the Vitreoretinal Research Foundation in 1970, as well as his service to St. Jude Children's Research Hospital as the director of Retinoblastoma Services within their Solid Tumor division.

In fact he was a self-proclaimed "non-golfer" when the prospect of building a golf course presented itself.

"We had been approached by developers once we had ceased operating as a cattle farm, but we didn't want to let the land go," explained Dr. Meyer. "And Mr. Dye as well as Mr. Fazio had seen the property as friends," he continued. "They both



**Bravo was the most celebrated bull at Spring Creek Ranch - hence the championship tees are known as the "Bravo Tees"**

PHOTO PROVIDED BY THE MEYER FAMILY

thought the location was perfect for a golf course, in fact I sat with Mr. Dye at this very table while he sketched a layout."

"We also looked at drawings by Mr. Fazio's group," said Dr. Meyer, "but it was a conversation with Jack Nicklaus (while indeed on a hunting trip) that started the real ball rolling toward building the course."

Nicklaus was apparently intrigued by Dr. Meyer's description of the land that did not sound like the typical flat offering usually found in the delta region, and eagerly offered to come to Memphis to view the property.

"He was supposed to leave town that evening but we stayed at the property until after dark. We messed up his schedule so he ultimately

stayed at my house. We decided that night to build a course. He fell in love with the land immediately and he fully embraced our dream to build the finest facility possible."

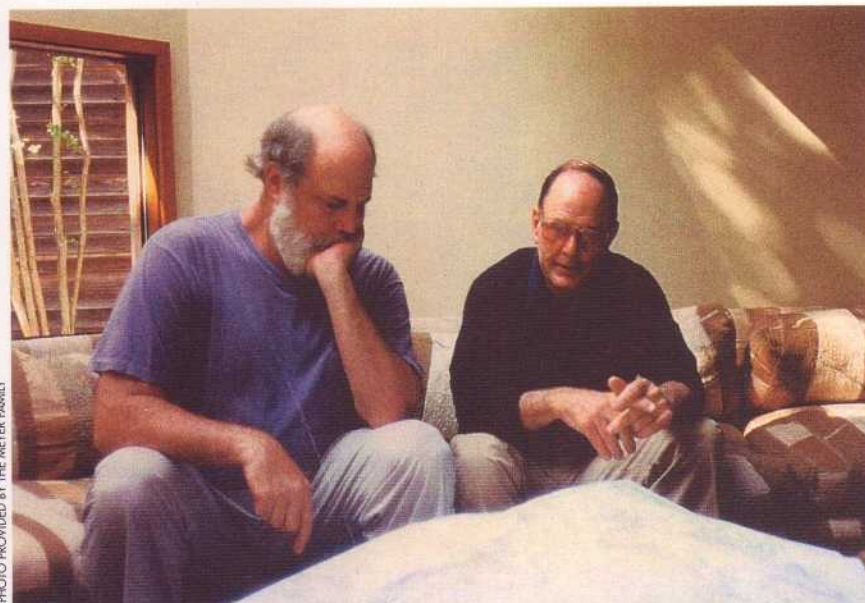
The drawings that the Nicklaus group produced were different than what Dye and Fazio had envisioned. "Jack really studied that land," said Meyer. "It was an amazing process to witness the evolution of that golf course."

And apparently it all started with a simple directive by Dr. Meyer - to build the finest golf course possible.

"That sums up my father's vision", said Robb Meyer, who serves as the operation's General Manager, during a separate conversation at Spring Creek Ranch. "I know it sounds over simplified but in everything he does, he states 'let's make it the best,' and he never loses sight of that ultimate goal."

It is a passion that clearly runs in the family as one would learn after any time spent with Robb Meyer. He earned degrees in Art Education and Art History from the University of Arizona and also was an avowed non-golfer.

"I'm certain that people questioned my ability when they heard about Spring Creek Ranch," he said. "None of us knew a thing about the process that we had to go through, so there was a huge learning curve. I made mistakes and learned from every one of them, but we have never lost sight of what Spring Creek Ranch was meant to be."



**Dr. David Meyer (left) and Pete Dye discuss a potential course layout at Dr. Meyer's home in Memphis**

PHOTO PROVIDED BY THE MEYER FAMILY



*All of the holes at Spring Creek Ranch are named for trees on, or near the hole. The 457 yard par four 9th, rated as the toughest on the course, is named "Cherry Bark Oak"*

PHOTO BY JIM MANDVILLE

That learning curve began quickly for Robb Meyer after the general contractor hired for the project went bankrupt only one third of the way into the construction process.

"We never missed a day after they were gone," he remembered. "We stepped in to manage the construction ourselves, and it was rough. Basically myself, Eric Bauer (the superintendent at that time) and Jon Garner (The Nicklaus Co. Design Coordinator) met every morning and every night and planned as we moved the construction process forward. Jon Garner helped me immensely and I learned a lot during that time."

The Wadsworth Golf Construction Company was ultimately brought in to complete the project, about 1/3 of the total construction job. They are the same organization that built Greyhawk and Troon North in Arizona, as well as the Bear Trace courses in Tennessee.

"I've always been proud to say that Spring Creek Ranch was a key part of the construction process," stated Robb Meyer. "And I'm also proud of our relationship with the Wadsworth Company, they did a fantastic job."

After the course opened to rave reviews, like Loren Roberts calling it one of the 10 best he's ever played, there were more setbacks that were beyond the Meyers' control.

During the first summer they noticed the fescue grass that they decided upon for the rough areas was not holding up in the punishing heat. Despite repeated assurances that the grass could flourish in this area, they found themselves in a winless battle to maintain the growth.

"We did everything that we were advised to do," said Robb Meyer. "We reacted immediately to try and

maintain the fescue, but it didn't matter how much money we spent on chemicals, water and labor. The next summer was even worse. That's when we did what we have always done here - we took action."

After extensive research and information gathering, the decision was made that all of the rough areas previously covered in fescue would be converted to Palisades Zoysia. It is not the same as the Meyer Zoysia (no family connection) that covers the fairways. It is a less dense version of the popular grass that can be grown to standard rough heights and still be playable.

"It gives us the ability to adjust the widths of our fairways if necessary, which could make the golf course extremely difficult," Robb Meyer added. "We will keep it relatively short for our member play, but if we need to toughen the course for a competitive event, it will be very easy to do. It will also be much faster to return the course to its normal playing conditions."

While the conversion to Palisades Zoysia was underway a combination of factors occurred that put the putting greens in serious jeopardy.

"We were mowing the greens at very low heights that spring," explained Richard Hurt an assistant superintendent. "Then the summer

*The 392 yard par four 16th hole is known as "Sycamore"*

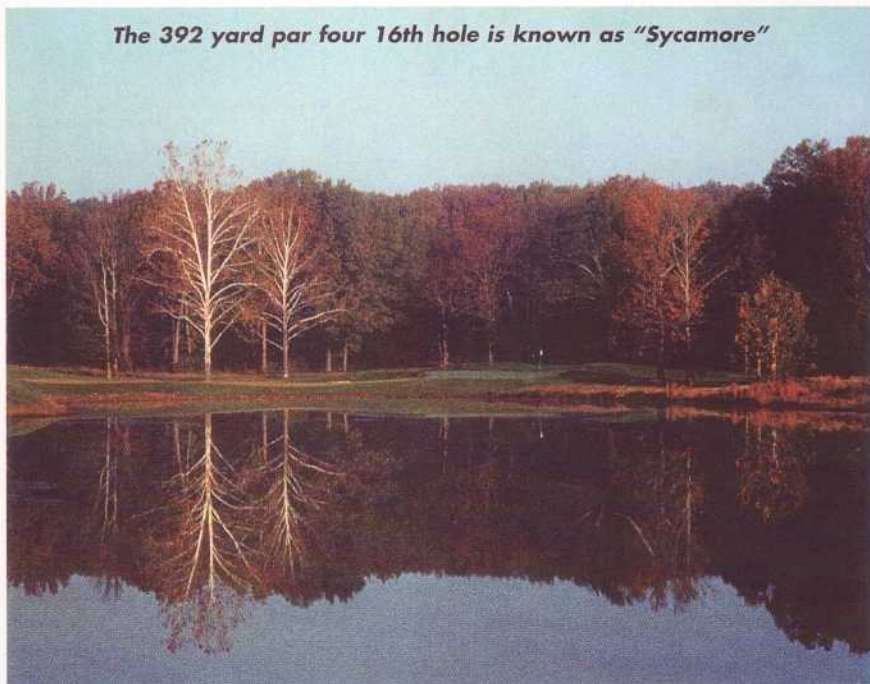


PHOTO BY JIM MANDVILLE

heat came very fast. The root structure was very shallow and the greens began to suffer.”

To compound the matter, the G2 Creeping Bentgrass surfaces contracted a disease known as “take-all patch” (similar to pythium).

“We took action again,” said Robb Meyer. “Through aggressive aerification, altered mowing heights and the addition of fans to foster airflow we made it through to the fall.”

After a re-seeding program the greens returned to their former superior condition.

“They were fantastic this past summer,” said Meyer, “but that was a very difficult time.”

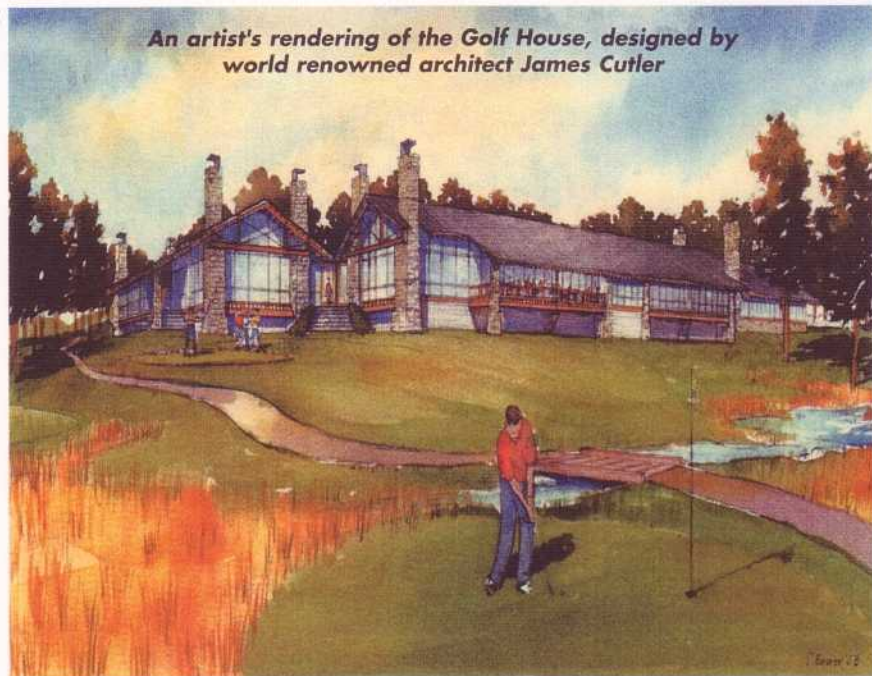
I was interested to know how the downturn in the economy and the crippling declines in the golf industry following the attacks of September 11th had affected progress at Spring Creek Ranch.

“I really thought that it would be very harsh on us,” Dr. Meyer admitted “just at the time when we had recovered from first learning to build the golf course, and then learning to meet the expectations while all of these grass elements were not coming together properly. But Robb and many others have done a marvelous job of convincing people that the ultimate dream will be realized.”

In fact they have added approximately 70 new members over the last year, which is astounding considering the rate at which the number of people playing golf has declined nationally. This was accomplished during a period when private country clubs everywhere have been staggered by the loss of members.

“We have made tremendous progress,” Robb Meyer added. “And we are ready to move forward with construction of the golf house.”

Referring to the structure that most people would recognize as the clubhouse, as “the golf house” is not something that appears contrived when you speak to the Meyers. They have main-



tained a commitment to developing a distinct experience for the members and their guests and they truly see the building as a golf house.

There will be no swimming pools or tennis courts, only intimate spaces within a stunningly understated structure that makes everyone feel at home.

There will be a room dedicated to the late Curtis Person, Sr. that will house some of his extensive collection of memorabilia from amateur golf. There will be a room dedicated to Jack Nicklaus who's friendship has become very dear to the Meyer family.

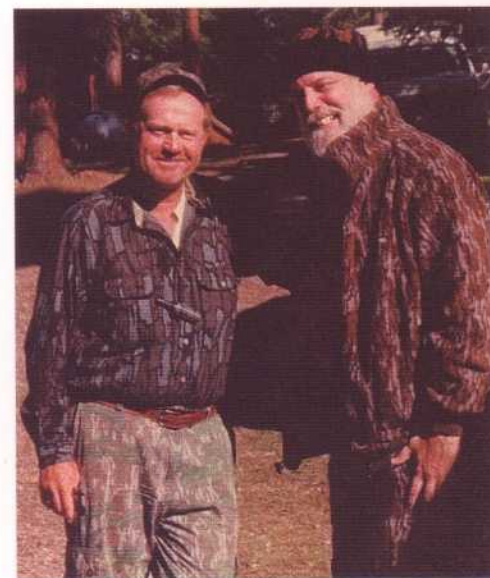
The golf house will also contain gathering areas in the locker rooms and intimate dining spaces for the members and their guests. In fact the schematic design has been finalized by the world renowned architect James Cutler and construction of the amenity-rich structure should begin in late spring or early summer of this year.

“Obviously everyone has been anxious to know when the golf house will be built,” said Robb Meyer. “I can only say that if it had been built before now it would not have been the right building. What we have learned along the way has brought us to the point where we

now have a design that fits with our overall dream.”

“We are very pleased with the final plan and are very fortunate to be working with Mr. Cutler,” said Dr. Meyer. “He is an environmentalist and has also embraced the vision that we have held on to throughout this process.”

Along with the golf house construction, this year will see the initial development of residential sights by the Boyle Investment Company. A roughly 57 acre span



Jack Nicklaus (left) and Dr. Meyer during the hunting trip when they first discussed Spring Creek Ranch

that fronts Collierville-Arlington Rd. on the west side of the property will be developed first.

As was the plan from the beginning, the houses will be buffered from the golf course. "The Boyle Company has been wonderful to work with," said Dr. Meyer, "and they will help create the unique residential experience that we first envisioned."

To say that the Spring Creek Ranch experience is special is indeed an understatement. The construction of cabins available for overnight lodging for members and their guests will also begin soon, and the level of service that the members now experience will only be enhanced.

"We try to extend the service to our members even after they leave the property," said Robb Meyer, "and that will grow along with us. From our catering services to the creation of the new SCR Landscapes Company we are reaching out to provide a unique experience. It is a



*The majestic 18th hole at Spring Creek Ranch, a 564 yard par five, is called "Post Oak"*

PHOTO BY JIM MANDEVILLE

very exciting time for us right now."

And what about the resounding question regarding hosting a major championship?

"We are working hard to bring a PGA Championship to Spring Creek Ranch," stated Dr. Meyer.

"We have begun the process," added Robb Meyer. "It could be as long as 15 years from now if it happens at all, but they have visited

the golf course, and are scheduled to visit again after construction of the golf house is completed."

If that occurs then the initial dream of what this former cattle farm could become would truly be realized. They don't host major championships at undeserving sites, and Spring Creek Ranch would be elevated to one of the more revered venues in the nation. What a dream indeed. ●



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