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Bell named PGA's First Lady of Golf

Peggy Kirk Bell has received many awards during her storied career in golf.

And they just keep on coming.

Bell has been selected as the 2007 winner of the PGA First Lady of Golf Award. She will receive the award on May 23 at Kiawah Island (S.C.) Golf Club during the Senior PGA Championship.

"It was a big surprise and quite an honor," Bell said. "They tell me it's the highest honor the PGA gives to a woman.

"I know the other gals that have gotten this award and I'm honored to be on that list."

Bell joins other golf luminaries such as Barbara Nicklaus, Nancy Lopez, Judy Rankin and Kathy Whitworth in receiving the honor. The PGA First Lady of Golf Award started in 1998 to recognize a woman who has made significant contributions to the promotion of the game of golf.

Bell, 85, is the owner of Pine Needles Lodge & Golf Club, site of this year's U.S. Women's Open, and Mid Pines Golf Club, both in Southern Pines.

She is being honored as a pioneer in the development of the modern golf school and for her long career as a golf instructor.

"Peggy Kirk Bell embodies the word 'giver' when it comes to devoting one's life to the betterment of others in golf," said PGA of America President Brian Whitcomb in a statement. "Peggy elevated herself and developed the golf school concept into an industry that has extended the careers of teaching professionals and introduced golf to thousands."

Even at her advanced age, Bell is bustling around Pine Needles helping the resort get things ready for this summer's Women's Open. A sign in the pro shop counting down the days stands at 100 today.

It's a tribute to Bell's stature in the game that the USGA is bringing the Women's Open to Pine Needles for the third time in just 11 years.

"We're so excited about it," Bell said. "We've already sold more corporate sponsorships than any Women's Open before. And we're going to pass Denver in the pre-sale of tickets.

"We get so much support from this area because they all play golf. Over 2,000 people have signed up to help. They can't wait to volunteer. They want to see it and be part of it."

When Peggy and her late husband, Warren Bell, purchased Pine Needles in 1953, she began a unique series of golf schools called "Golfari," a project that blossomed into one of the most popular resort destinations for aspiring students of the game. When Warren Bell died in 1984, Peggy continued the momentum at the resort by attracting both students and some of the best PGA and LPGA teaching professionals.

Today, Pine Needles employs 25 golf instructors throughout the year, who guide three youth camps of approximately 80 junior boys and girls; and adult camps ranging from 100 to 150 students from February-September.

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Q&A with Reagan Parsons

Title: Town manager of Southern Pines

Age: 37

Home: New Lexington, Ohio

In the news because: Southern Pines is considering a change to its Unified Development Ordinance that could allow some of the most dense development the town has ever seen.

Southern Pines Town Manager Reagan Parsons says officials talked about a Planned Unit Development ordinance before a developer proposed the idea last year.

The ordinance would allow developers to build a mix of commercial, residential and light industrial buildings on tracts 50 acres or larger.

Some Southern Pines residents fear the ordinance could force businesses out of downtown and change the character of the community. They are circulating a petition that will be presented to the Town Council.

A company that's asking for the law sees things differently. It says it would force developers to lay out their plans early and would give town officials more control over what they approve.

The company, Pine Needles Village LLC, proposed building a Planned Unit Development near Pine Needles golf course last year. The company pulled its proposal to focus on getting the ordinance passed.

The Planning Board approved the proposal, and it's been forwarded to the Town Council. The council is scheduled to discuss the proposal again at a work session scheduled for 3 p.m. Monday at the Douglass Community Center.

A public hearing, which drew about 150 people March 13, will be reopened at the regular council meeting scheduled for 7 p.m. April 10 at the Douglass Community Center.

"It is by no means a done deal, as some have suggested," Parsons said.

Staff writer Sarah A. Reid talked with Parsons about the proposal. Here are excerpts:

Q: Did you all anticipate this much resistance to the planned unit development proposal?

A: I don't know that we anticipated the amount of resistance, no.

Q: From what I understand from talking to the developer, this was the town's idea. Can you tell people why this is a good idea, why the town would want something like this?

A: Planned Unit Development is really just adding one more item to our tool kit.

There's a lot of misunderstanding and a lot of misinformation out there. What really needs to be understood is all council is considering right now is adding one more tool to the UDO (Unified Development Ordinance). This doesn't rezone a single piece of property. This just sets up a process. It's a process that has been used in small and large communities across the United States for more than a decade. What it allows for is a lot more detail on the front end of projects.

Q: Have you ever been in a position where you rezoned something and the plan has change drastically from what was originally proposed?

A: Having only been here for two years myself, I have not experienced that with Southern Pines. I have certainly seen it with other jurisdictions. I couldn't speak to whether these council members or previous staff have run into these problems.

Q: Can you tell people what a planned unit development is?

A: Really, a planned unit development is a zoning district or a tool that requires a lot of up front information.

There's a lot of misunderstanding, again, because people have looked at what was the original Pine Needles Village application and they have taken for granted that that's everything that a PUD is. ... It's really about creating a mixed use on a tract of land and setting up the rules and regulations on which those uses will interact and exist.

It's not at all a misnomer to say the very core village of Southern Pines is an very early example of a PUD. Of course, that wasn't done with zoning in place, but it's a master planned area with office, with retail, with single and multi-family all within a planned area on a grid street system. It's exactly the type of development that PUD language is used to recreate all around the country.

Q: Are there any drawbacks to this plan?

A: Drawbacks, and again, that all depends on how you want to define a drawback. It does take a lot more time up front on behalf of the planning and zoning board members and also council members. ... This really involves a lot of discussion and contemplation of how the uses will interact, of how the transportation systems will work, of conservation and stormwater management