

# Golf Digest Ireland

Issue 37 December 2007 Price €6.25 Stg £3.50

**GOLF & BUSINESS**  
THE PEOPLE  
BEHIND THE  
MONEY



**NEXT  
GENERATION  
HYBRIDS**  
P.119

## HIT IT MILES DOWN THE MIDDLE

BY ERNIE ELS

THE GDI INTERVIEW  
**RORY SABBATINI**

**HIT MORE  
FAIRWAYS**  
BY TREVOR IMMELMAN

**BREAKING  
100/90/80/70**  
Master the impact zone

FREE INSIDE



**"Golf has become  
a scarily competitive  
business," Carr  
acknowledged.**

**"Bringing people to  
Ireland has become  
very expensive, quite  
apart from the vagaries  
of the Irish weather".**



of the Irish weather. The fact is that travel now represents only about 25 per cent of what we do now. And there's a lot of cross-selling within our group. If you buy into one section of the company, another section can help you out. I like to think that, effectively, we've now got a diversified group of companies working in the leisure

at TPC Sawgrass.

"By way of international recognition, the tournament has been transmitted on CNN, The Golf Channel, Aer Lingus and Continental Airlines, Sky, Setanta and from small beginnings, it's pretty much impossible to get into it now. Still, I believe it remains very good value for money. For €2,500 a head, we offer an incredible show over four days, with accommodation, four rounds of golf, meals, events, entertainment, fireworks and a gala dinner. I like to think that we have taken it to a whole new level, with many new friendships being forged. In fact Dermot Desmond and America's Burch Riber rate it a better event than either Alfred Dunhill Championship at St Andrews or the AT&T at Pebble Beach."

For a man who claims not to have wanted to branch into the golf travel market, he has achieved considerable prominence, stemming from the launch of Carr Golf Services in 1993, to add to Eurogolf Services which, as the name suggests, was a golf management and services company.

In his capacity as chairman of the Irish Golf Tour Operators Association (ITGOA), Marty was instrumental in commissioning a survey from Ernst and Young which published its findings early in 2005. "We were concerned about the negative impression in the market concerning the numbers of golfers coming into this country and the price of golf in Ireland," he said at the time. "While acknowledging that price remains a big issue and that we're facing greater competition from our near neighbours, the top of the market is holding up remarkably well, especially from the US. And we can look back on estimated revenue of €23 million, generated by IGTOA on behalf of the Irish golf industry during 2004."

More than two years on from that survey, the Carr Group employs 50 people, 40 of them full-time while the others are seasonal and part-time. The travel company brings about 3,500 visitors a year into Ireland and Scotland to play golf, apart from looking after a number of major, corporate clients. The company now offers bespoke travel to several destinations worldwide. On the services side, they manage six golf courses, mainly pay-and-play municipal facilities - Corballis, Sillogue, Elmgreen, Navan, Stepside and Marlay.

The recently-branded Carr Group incorporates: Carr Golf Travel, Carr Corporate Events, Online Golf Travel, Eurogolf Services and Carr Golf Services. There is also the management of Links Helicopters which they own jointly with the wealthy American, Wayne Huizenga, owner of the Miami Dolphins.

"Golf has become a scarily competitive business," Carr acknowledged. "Bringing people to Ireland has become very expensive, quite apart from the vagaries

sector." A key part of these activities is the developing of Zala Springs in Hungary. As Carr put it: "This is a pretty significant undertaking, involving a 500-acre estate with a golf course designed by Robert Trent Jones Jr. and a 200 bedroom Thermal Spa Hotel. Hungary is now where Ireland was 25 years ago and we see huge potential in the emerging golf and leisure market there."

He continued: "I believe the Irish market is now at saturation point. Which is one of the reasons the services side of our business has taken off. In today's competitive climate, people in the industry need good, solid guidance. And we're advising Lough Erne, Manor Park Homes, Waterville and Dromoland Castle. I believe we can offer a unique service in terms of assessing exactly where a particular business is, and providing help in areas such as golf course management & design, golf operations, sales & marketing, HR and web-development."

Apart from Hungary, the overseas activities of the Group take in the Irish and European promotion of the Sawgrass Marriott Golf Resort & Spa for its new owners. Elsewhere, by putting together a marketing and sales plan for Europe and the US, they're involved in promoting the White Oak Golf & Equestrian Community at the foot of the picturesque Blue Ridge Mountains in North Carolina. This is an Irish-owned development incorporating real estate, an equestrian centre and an Arnold Palmer-designed golf course.

With all of these balls in the air, does he find time to swat a little white one in a pursuit which touched his life from earliest memory? "I always say that I have the name, but not the game," he replied. "I play off 11 which makes me the worst golfer in the family, by far. Thankfully I don't take it too seriously, because my game comes in and out like the tide. I can't expect anything better since I don't play a lot and I currently spend more time on golf courses in the US than in Ireland."

Still, any lacking on a personal level has been more than compensated for by the extraordinary career of his late father. And with other members of the Carr family, Marty was in Florida on November 12th for Joe's posthumous induction into golf's Hall of Fame.

He said of his father: "For me this is the final accolade; an extraordinary distinction snatched from the grave. I thought being Captain of the R and A was the ultimate, but this is pretty incredible. That he's the only Irishman to be there. I can imagine his delight at pulling this one off."

Standards in Sutton's most famous golfing family have always been formidable. So, the fact they're now being reflected in the Carr Group, shouldn't surprise us at all.

Ireland  
**Golf Digest**



# It's a family affair

DERMOT GILLEECE TALKS TO MARTY CARR, ONE OF IRELAND'S MOST POPULAR BUSINESSMEN.

Seeing them together, there was the inescapable feeling that Joe Carr had a special affection for his son, Marty. Being the youngest of his six children may have had something to do with it. Either way, in the wake of Joe's passing, the company which carries his illustrious surname, has become a very serious player on the golfing scene, at home and abroad.

And it has all happened relatively quickly. In fact Marty Carr, CEO of the Carr Group, permits himself a quiet chuckle when he remembers how things were less than 20 years ago. When he set himself up in a room in the Abbey Street offices of his brother-in-law, Declan Branagan, in Dublin.

"After my time in America, where I went to college in San Francisco and then worked for five years as a stockbroker in New York, I came back to Ireland in 1989," he recalled. "At first, it seemed a fairly smooth transition, working for Dermot Desmond's company, NCB, but gradually I concluded that the Irish stockmarket scene wasn't for me."

He went on: "That was when myself and my brother John decided to set up a little company which would operate in the golf business. Precisely what we were going to do, was somewhat unclear at that stage, but for me, the important thing was that I had made the break." Carr Golf was about to take its first, faltering steps. Whether the name would go on to enjoy the sort of success which had come to Joe, Roddy and John on the fairways of the game's amateur circuits, however, only time would tell.

"My first year was spent trying to establish a solid, business base for the company," Marty added. "Then the



"I always say that I have the name, but not the game," he replied. "I play off 11 which makes me the worst golfer in the family, by far".

breakthrough came when I noticed that in the UK, the Conservative government had embarked on a policy of privatising all the public golf courses. The view was that the government, through its local authorities, had no business in being involved in such an activity.

"It gave me the idea of looking at what the Irish local authorities were doing in golf. And I discovered that at the time, they were responsible for three facilities in the greater Dublin area - Corballis, Stepside and Leopardstown. With the help of my father, who was a school friend of the City Manager, I was introduced to Frank

Feeley. Through him, I learned that Dublin Corporation (now the City Council) had acquired or earmarked three sites for public golf facilities. Their plan to bring the game to disadvantaged areas of the metropolis made a huge impression on me. One of the designated sites was Elmgreen, in the Castleknock area of Dublin."

So, in what was then a rare, private-public partnership in this country, Carr Golf entered into a three-year deal with Fingal County Council, advising on the commercial viability of public golf. In Carr's view, the Council weren't ready for a full-blown joint-venture deal at that stage.

Through the involvement of the country's veteran golf-course architect, Eddie Hackett, the Parks Department and the 1991 Golfing Union of Ireland President, Des Rea O'Kelly, wearing his architect's hat as designer of the clubhouse, Elmgreen was officially opened in 1995. With the arrival of other, similar ventures, Marty also became aware of the importance of the golf travel business. Indeed there was a certain inevitability about this development, given the experience of his brothers Roddy and Jody in the US, quite apart from his father's intimate knowledge of the international golf scene.

Family friends and acquaintances had been coming to Ireland from the US, asking the Carrs for pointers towards an enjoyable golfing holiday. It was a gap demanding to be filled, and the company's strategy was determined by events in Waterville, some years previously. The inaugural Kerrygold Classic at Waterville in October 1974, became something of a Carr family affair.



As it happened, the event took place only a month before Joe had a near-fatal heart attack, prompting him to remark later: "If there was to be a competitive swansong to my career, I could hardly have wished for better."

It was the occasion when Roddy, then in professional ranks, finished runner-up to Liam Higgins in the main tournament, for a reward of £1,250, and when Joe had a hand in earning him further cash. As it happened, Roddy headed a team in which the three amateurs were Joe, Jody and another brother, Gerry. And their winning effort ensured a further prize of £750 for Roddy, from the pro-am section

of the 72-hole tournament.

In 1991, Carr Golf launched their Father and Son Tournament with a modest complement of 20 teams. "It was an idea conceived by myself and Terry O'Neill, a New York publican who had connections with a company called Ireland Golf Tours at that time," he said. "The intention was that it would be essentially a fun tournament, mainly involving Irish and American teams. And when it came to choosing a venue, Waterville seemed a natural to me. Apart from the Kerrygold, J B (Joe) really loved the place. And it has always been one of my favourite locations in the entire world.

"I remember going to the GPO in Dublin and licking about 500 stamps which went on entry forms and letters sent to possible competitors all over the place. It was a hard sell in the early days. Now, six countries were represented in the last staging which had a limit of 90 teams of which about 55 per cent American. We've had such notables as American footballer, Dan Marino, and former US vice-president, Dan Quayle, apart from such prominent Irish businessmen as Dermot Desmond, J P McManus and John Magnier. So Successful is the event the company has launched a Father & Daughter, the Joe Carr Invitational and an Invitational event