

Golfers at the 36-hole The Shoals course in Muscle Shoals, the 54-hole Hampton Cove course at Owens Cross Roads or other resorts on the Trail no longer have GPS devices on golf carts.

\$2 million to replace

Cannon said the \$2 million price tag to replace outdated GPS equipment on 1,700 golf carts was not worth the expense. "We could do that, but we decided it was better to spend it on the core product, the courses," he said.

Bronner said while cost was an issue in removing the devices with 11-year-old technology, disagreement with the manufacturer was the biggest reason.

Only the upscale Ross Bridge course in Hoover, where greens fees for a round of golf run \$80 to \$120, has GPS. Bronner said RSA installed new devices with the latest technology on the carts.

In other locations, where fees average \$50 per player, it's not financially realistic to add GPS, Cannon said.

Alabama Department of Tourism and Travel markets Robert Trent Jones resorts and other state courses at golfing shows across the country.

Avid golfer Kerry Flowers, Tourism and Travel financial services director, pitches the Trail at some of the largest golf shows.

Golfers at shows in Chicago, Detroit, Minneapolis and Indianapolis know about Alabama's courses and come here to relax and escape harsh winters, he said.

"This year I gave out about 10 percent fewer brochures than in the past because of the recession," Flowers said.

Bill Lange, public relations director for the golf trail and hotels, said he's pushing the "over-the-top experience in under-the-radar places" the state resorts offer.

No. 2 attraction

The Trail was second to the U.S. Space and Rocket Center in Huntsville in tourist attraction attendance in 2008.

Lange said marketing stresses value and luxury "unsurpassed anywhere." He pointed to top rankings the Trail earned from the PGA, golf magazines and hotel and restaurant raters.

The Trail Golf Card, available only to Alabama residents, allows golfers to play at a discount. The new Trail Spa Card, which gives in- and out-of-state purchasers discounts at the Trail's resort hotel spas and restaurants, is surprisingly popular, he said.

"We set a goal to sell \$2,000 of the spa cards during 2009. We've already sold over \$2,000 the first five months of the year," Lange said.

Alabama's golf trail

Statewide Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail

--Top attraction for 2007

--No. 2 attraction in 2008

--2008 rounds of golf: 504,579

--2007 rounds of golf: 535,215

--2008 rounds of golf reflects courses closed for work in Huntsville area and Mobile.

SOURCE: ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF TOURISM AND TRAVEL

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