

Golf promoter admits \$1m fraud charges

THE man behind the failed New Zealand Women's Golf Classic was convicted yesterday of fraud charges involving \$1 million.

Frank Burgess, 46, unemployed, of Wellington, pleaded guilty to two charges of fraudulently using a document and one of forgery.

Serious Fraud Office prosecutor Shane Walsh told Wellington District Court that in 1993 Burgess was employed as an administrator with Sport Services Ltd, which administered the affairs of a group of sporting bodies resident in the central library building in Wellington.

The Wellington City Council was the landlord, and Sport Services held a head lease on behalf of the sporting bodies, paying rent and other outgoings on their behalf. Each month the sporting bodies would pay rent to Sport Services by automatic payment.

The lease expired on January 18, 2000. In April 1999, the council queried the rent arrears, and the directors of Sport Services met Burgess about the unpaid amount.

Burgess said that it must have been a bank error, Mr Walsh said.

A financial analysis by the Serious Fraud Office confirmed that cheques totaling \$99,221.17 had been paid by the sports bodies and banked into an account in the name of Sport Services operated by Burgess. He had paid back \$37,976.43.

Burgess also made 188 false applications for funds from gaming machine trusts. The applications purported to be on behalf of Marist Amateur Football Club, Sport Services and the Women's Golf Classic and resulted in grants of \$976,990 being paid to Burgess.

Mr Walsh said seven of the false applications had signatures pur-

porting to be from Bronwyn Little, named in the applications as the golf classic secretary.

Ms Little, a Hutt City Council employee, was not on the classic committee and did not sign the applications.

Two applications had a supporting document purporting to be the minutes of a meeting of the committee organising the classic. Three of the people named in the minutes were not at such a meeting and did not approve the motions in those minutes.

The forgery charge related to a letter Burgess sent to the New Zealand Community Trust, after the trust queried grant applications Sport Services had forwarded.

The letter, which purported to be signed by Burgess and Pat O'Rourke, chairman of New Zealand Tennis, said Sport Services was liable for rent till August 2000 even though the sporting bodies had moved. Mr O'Rourke had not signed the letter and said much of its detail was incorrect.

Mr Walsh said Burgess admitted fabricating the letter's contents and signature hoping it would satisfy the trust. Burgess used the money for his own benefit, including travel and personal expenses.

He cooperated with the Serious Fraud Office and admitted the offending. Judge Patrick Mahony ordered pre-sentence and reparation reports, and remanded Burgess on bail to May 3 for sentencing.

Another man, Suresh Dayal, 47, company director, of Hataitai, is facing two charges of fraudulently using funding applications.

He has been remanded to appear in Auckland District Court for a depositions hearing today.

Allport left to face music over golf classic

□ From back page

"But I'd have to say, no, the tournament won't go ahead. I can't talk for him, but I guess over the next few days things will, no doubt, come out."

The seemingly inevitable cancellation of the tournament has caused Allport and Wellington professional Lynnette Brooky considerable embarrassment.

Allport caddies for Brooky on the European Tour and the pair worked tirelessly to lure a world class field to Wellington on Burgess's behalf during Brooky's recently completed campaign.

"We, along with many others, are feeling very let down right now ... it's kind of painful," Allport said.

"We didn't have anything to do with the inner workings of the tournament but it is embarrassing for us because Europe is where Lynnette plays."

"We've worked so long to bring a tournament here to show the world what we [New Zealand] have to offer, but he's been unable to keep his end of the scales up ... it's one hell of a Christmas present I can tell you."

Gillespie said the tournament's probable demise was a blow for the club but would not elaborate on the club's reasons for suspending its preparations.

"We are very disappointed to take this action. A small, dedicated committee has worked extremely hard to recruit more than 400 volunteers to act as course marshalls, scorers and caddies. Additionally our staff have been working long hours to prepare the course to the required standard," he said.

Allport still hopes some of the confirmed European stars will play in Wellington.

The New Zealand Classic was to have been the first event of the European Tour season but the Australian Ladies Masters, scheduled a week after the proposed Hutt event, will now enjoy that honour.

"A lot of the [European] girls have non-refundable airline tickets so hopefully we can run some pro-ams or something ... it's just so damn disappointing," Allport said.