

Golf promoter returns to face inquiry

By JONATHAN MILNE
and KENT GRAY

THE promoter of the failed New Zealand Women's Golf Classic is back in New Zealand and preparing to tell his side of the story to police investigating complaints involving about \$200,000 of missing charity money.

Frank Burgess had promised an appearance from world women's golf No 1 Karrie Webb and a record \$650,000 prize purse next month, but his lawyer has now confirmed the tournament's cancellation.

Mr Burgess told *The Dominion* he had just returned to Wellington from the United States, where he has been holidaying with his wife and children since mid-December.

He had hired lawyer Bruce Davidson, because "apparently I have said too much without legal advice in the past".

Detective Senior Sergeant Hugh MacRae, the inquiry head, confirmed he was investigating two complaints: one from from charitable organisation New Zealand Community Trust, just

before Christmas, and one from Sports Services Ltd, dating back to August 1999.

The new complaint from Community Trust related to \$168,000 funds allegedly granted to Mr Burgess on behalf of Sports Services — money that Sports Services Ltd says it never applied for or received.

Mr Burgess had resigned from Sports Services Ltd in August 1999. Its directors laid a complaint with Wellington police at the time, about missing money, which will also be investigated by Mr MacRae.

"There's quite a bit of background work to do before any decisions are made," Mr MacRae said.

"All the documentation hasn't been unearthed from the source yet, but it [the missing money] is believed to be a substantial amount."

Mr MacRae said the Serious Fraud Office was aware of the investigation: "I'll get back in touch with them when their office reopens on January 15, and we'll decide between us where the police or the SFO go from there."

SFO director David Bradshaw would not comment on whether the office was investigating Mr Burgess.

Mr Davidson said yesterday that his client would cooperate with the police inquiry.

"His intention is to, through me, make contact with the police and cooperate as fully as possible with the police investigation."

"His concern was really that he would get on with getting a relatively swift resolution of the matter."

Mr Davidson said the investigation was distressing for Mr Burgess, who had already borne the blow of the golf tournament's cancellation, and for his wife and children.

"The golf tournament is effectively cancelled," he said. "He's gravely disappointed. It was a passion that he had, and he's extremely disappointed about that."

Sports Services Ltd director Roger Wood said Mr Burgess had resigned as administrator in 1999 after about \$65,000 went missing and its rent remained unpaid.

The company had laid a complaint with police on August 6, 1999, but had subsequently negotiated the return of about half the missing money.

Mr Wood said that repayment would enable Sports Services Ltd to clear a \$22,000 rent debt, owed to Wellington City Council.

Council spokeswoman Trina Saffioti confirmed that an agreement for the money's payment had been negotiated with Sports Services Ltd.

Sports Services Ltd knew nothing of last year's \$168,000 in Community Trust grants till the list of grants was published. "We

didn't see the money," Mr Wood said. "We went and saw the Community Trust and said, 'Hey, this isn't us', and left it in their hands."

Community Trust spokesman Bil Day confirmed that a complaint had been laid with police just before Christmas.

He said the \$25,000 granted to New Zealand Women's Golf Classic Ltd had been transferred to Hutt Golf Club, to help cover course alterations that had already been made for the cancelled tournament.

Community Trust paid \$25,000 to New Zealand Women's Golf Classic Inc — Mr Burgess's company — and \$168,000 to "Sports Services", money that Sports Services Ltd says it did not receive or know about.

Hutt Golf Club has ceased its preparations for the defunct women's gold tournament, but Community Trust has indicated the money might have to be repaid if the tournament does not go ahead.

Promoter may have to repay community funds

By KENT GRAY

we'll have to have a good look into what's happening."

Day confirmed the trust grant was to assist the "amateur element of the tournament".

As tournament director Burgess is the only person who can officially cancel the event but it seems increasingly unlikely that it will go ahead after the withdrawal of co-promoter Bob Tuohy, the Ladies European Tour (which was to co-sanction the event) and most of its confirmed overseas players.

tournament, which appears doomed.

Trust spokesman Bill Day said yesterday he would investigate the matter when the organisation reopened for work today.

Asked whether Burgess would be required to pay the money back if the tournament was not played, Day said: "Obviously we'd have to recover it as anyone would."

"I wouldn't like to speculate at this stage but