

have more amenities in the way of a pro shop and foodservice than do municipal facilities, and private clubs normally have a good-size clubhouse to maintain (and may include locker and shower rooms, saunas and steam-baths, tennis courts, and a swimming pool) — which would account for a greater amount of their expenditures.

But the biggest reason municipal facilities spend more on course maintenance is probably because they simply have to. They get more play, and the players are often more careless and less accomplished than those golfing on other courses.

Such players do, however, have a right to play and deserve a place to

learn and develop their golf game. That is perhaps the fundamental role of municipal golf courses: to provide facilities for those golfers who do not have the skill or the money to play elsewhere. Municipal courses can and should play an important role in developing junior golf as well, by providing public facilities for young golfers and by serving as the arena for school golf programs.

No one begins as a scratch golfer; everyone should have a place to improve his game without being embarrassed or disparaged while doing it. We cannot afford to discourage any potential golfer. □

GOVERNMENTAL GOLF

Time to stop giving it away

by Gene Burress, CGCS

There are several categories of governmental operated golf courses, which could be referred to as city, town, township, county, state, and federal. The common complaint taxpayers hear from all of these forms of government is the "money crunch,"

"At many courses, green fees are structured to a bygone era."

and a very large percentage of government-operated golf courses do operate "in the red." The unsatisfactory conditions expressed in the April issue of GOLF BUSINESS concerning the City of San Francisco municipal golf courses are not unusual. The success of the City of Cincinnati golf program (GOLFDOM, June 1974) has re-

sulted in many inquiries to that city concerning their unique City Ordinance. The question most often raised is this: "How long can government-operated golf courses be permitted to give golf away and operate at a deficit at the expense of the nongolfing taxpayer?"

Basically, governmental golf courses have not kept pace with changes in the golf industry. Green fees have gone up in some cases to keep up with rising costs of maintaining the golf course, but elsewhere they have not, and either the taxpayer or the condition of the golf course has borne the burden. The failure of government golf courses has been in their organizational and management applications, especially funds management.

Golf is no longer referred to as the "rich man's game," but the public

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golfer is still a "second class citizen." The United States Golf Association has fostered this concept by decreeing that to belong to their organization as a full member, one must operate a private club. The Professional Golfer's Association and the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America are primarily oriented towards private clubs. Their orientation is somewhat more understandable than the USGA's, because there are many more private than public courses. However, the PGA and the GCSAA should devote many more of their programs to assisting public golf. Of our professional associations, the National Golf Foundation is doing the most for the management of public golf facilities.

Those that can, should

There are some fine public golf courses, in spite of the system under which they are supported, but governmental golf courses are not supporting themselves. Those that could, are not, because their funds are put back into the general fund to support other agencies.

There are others that could and are not because they give golf away. Their green fees are structured to a bygone era. There are segments of our society which could not play golf if they had to pay the going rate. In these cases, golf still cannot be given away, but fees can be structured to permit these golfers the opportunity to play and they will know that they are doing their part to support their golf program.

To find a governmental golf course where the fee, management, and fund structure permit a 'self-sustaining' operation is a rarity. One of the biggest give away programs in governmental golf is the federal government's military golf program. Fees are ridiculously low to highly paid officers and senior enlisted personnel, and generally fees collected are returned to a nonappropriated fund which includes all aspects of recreation. Then the military golf course has to fight for — and normally loses — its needed share of the money. Course condition at many military locations has deteriorated. Some state and county golf courses find the golf



Senior citizens provide a real conundrum for golf course operators. Although they make up a good percentage of the municipal golfers and often are a course's most regular customers, they usually cannot afford to pay high green fees. Many municipalities offer a special rate for senior citizens, but author Burress suggests that it should not be less than 50 percent of the regular green fee.

fees supporting the park system at the expense and neglect of the golf course.

The solution to this problem is to structure a concept whereby the golf program will produce a "self-sustaining" operation. Note, though, that this will probably mean a change in local law.

Half a million left over?!

The first 2 or 3 years may mean a lean or leaner budget, but in the future there is a very bright picture. This was the case in the City of Cincinnati. The first few years produced a barely break-even operation. Since its inception the Cincinnati Golf Fund has been self-sustaining in a sense of the word — that is, considering certain "givens" such as real estate taxes and water. Under this concept, with several fee increases to keep stride with inflation and annual wage increases, the Cincinnati Golf Fund finished 1976 with over \$500,000 in the reserve fund.

A healthy reserve fund is important to allow for contingencies, such as a year of bad golfing weather, causing reduced revenues. The golf reserve fund was used in 1977 to provide \$70,000 to repave entrance roads and \$412,000 to furnish new clubhouses. The Golf Fund supports two capital

improvement bonds, one of \$1 million and the other \$1.5 million. A heavy bond debt service of \$150,000 starts each year. Overhead expenses to support 51 annual employees in retirement contributions, hospital care, workmen's compensation, and a general fund charge for administrative supports bites heavily into the \$1.9 million budget for 1977. With seven golf courses (126 holes), four driving ranges, and two miniature golf courses, budget cuts must be made to meet anticipated revenues. The capital improvement program is virtually complete and 1978 should produce a budget based on accurate predictions for revenues. With green fees, electric cars, and other rentals remaining at a reasonable level, less than most privately owned daily fee golf courses, this must be a sound operational and management system not permitting "free" or "semi-free" rides at the expense of the Golf Fund.

What sound premises must be developed to insure a self-supporting operation?

> All revenues must remain in a designated Golf Fund, with course management having responsibility for all aspects of its administration.

> A contract with a vendor or concessionaire can only be entered into when it is a solidly proven asset to the Golf Fund and at the same time fills the needs of the public golfer at the highest level obtainable. Pro shops, food concessions, golf cars, rental equipment, and lessons must be strictly profit-making business operations. Besides green fees, the golf car operations is the highest revenue producer, yet this is lost revenue in many opera-

tions. Pros or managers should be salaried, not receiving any percentage of rental equipment or fees.

> Fees are structured to a realistic level to permit a profit situation of reasonable level considering current year budget and past year's expenses. Certain fees may be reduced for senior citizens and youth, but to not less than 50 percent of the regular fee, and two-thirds or 75 percent of the regular fee is best. Annual fees or memberships should never be permitted.

> Minimum annual staff should form a solid nucleus which the seasonal part-time staff can complement. Job specifications, promotions, titles, and salaries should be structured to permit only the highest caliber of golf course maintenance personnel. Civil service and unions must be educated and "buy into" the changes that are required for a successful maintenance operation. Equal Employment Opportunity and Affirmative Action requirements can be met. Titles such as "greenskeepers" should be eliminated and replaced with "golf course superintendent" or "golf turf manager." This will improve image and stature among peers.

> Excellent turf management practices with knowledgeable and skilled supervisors have to be maintained. Standards of golf course maintenance must be comparable to that of the finest privately owned daily fee courses and most private courses. Traffic can be controlled and fine turf established and maintained. A well-manicured golf course free of debris and

unsightly tall grass, with fresh cups and ballwashers, well-managed grass tees, neatly raked sand traps and good greens is expected. This is your greatest commodity and sells your facility above anything else.

> The latest state of the art in mechanized equipment is required to enable a fast, efficient maintenance crew to get on and off the golf course in minimum time. Establish tables of allowance for equipment, then purchase required equipment. A good preventive maintenance program for equipment, a comprehensive training program, and a responsive equipment repair system are imperative.

> Promotional golf clinics, private lessons, tournaments, special events, outings, and availability of public speakers to citizens groups are essential to attracting golfers. Development of a league program not alienating the walk-on golfer will form the heart of your play. Tee time reservation system should be fair and honest.

What of the future?

Governmental golf courses which do not provide the facilities and charge

"Can the golfer expect his nongolfing neighbor to pay the way?"

the "going rate" for green fees and rentals should be subjected to irate citizen golf groups. Pressure ought to be levied against governmental management and politicians for a change. On the other hand, those programs which give golf away on nonsupportive green fees, annual fees, or membership plans — thereby causing a deficit program — should be forced by the nongolfing taxpayer to correct this situation. Sure, the golfer enjoys these rates and for the most part will accept a poor or marginal golf course, but can he expect his nongolfing neighbor to pay the way?

The lack of green-belt legislation in some States is spelling doom to many private clubs due to excessive real estate taxes. Couple taxes with inflation, and many private clubs are going bankrupt. Governmental golf courses can and have gone bankrupt. How long will the taxpayer underwrite a "giveaway" nonsupporting golf program? Without a separate and restrictive Golf Fund, the public golfer may see green fees rise to the point where golf is prohibitively costly, appearing once again as a "rich man's game." It can no longer be subsidized!

With a sound, revenue-producing golf program, municipalities should buy those private clubs which go bankrupt, as Cincinnati did in 1972-73. This preserves golf and dwindling green-belt areas. This concept needs to be brought to the attention of public golf administrators, influential citizen's golf organizations, and elected officials to bring governmental golf programs out of the dark ages in order to provide for good public golfing facilities in the future. □

