GOLF BUSINESS PROFILE

Seay and Palmer design a county course

by David J. Slaybaugh, editor

Sign outside the Spessard Holland clubhouse attests to financial involvement of a variety of government bodies.

Consider the courses golf architect Ed Seay has designed in collaboration with Arnold Palmer: Broadmoor South, Mission Hills, Sawgrass, Grenelefe, Cherry Hills, Oakmont, Spessard Holland. . . .

Spessard Holland? Is that a new resort in the Antilles? Actually, the official name is the Spessard Holland Golf Course; the location is Melbourne Beach, Fla.; the Brevard County Recreation & Parks Division operates it; and the Seay-Palmer team did design it.

But perhaps even more unusual than the fact that Seay and Palmer did a county golf course is the fact that it was built with a matching funds grant under Title 10 of the U.S. Public Works and Development Act.

How it was built

Spessard Holland Park had occupied a site between the Atlantic Ocean and the Intercoastal Waterway in Melbourne Beach for many years, and there had been many plans for its further development — including a recent plan incorporating a golf course.

Along about 1975, the Economic Development Administration of the

Layout of Spessard Holland shows how Seay packed an interesting golf course into a fairly compact site. Clubhouse is at bottom center.

U.S. Department of Commerce made Title 10 funds available through the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation for the construction of outdoor recreation facilities. The purpose was economic development via the creation of jobs. The BOR Southeast regional office in turn made some of the money available to the state of Florida.

At this point, it is necessary to understand that the long-standing policy of Florida, like many state governments, is to not use BOR money to build golf courses. That is normally left to private enterprise.

When Brevard County Development Coordinator John Hannah found out about these special funds, however, he reasoned that "this grant didn't come under the normal state BOR funding plan because it was actually EDA money."

He then proceeded to convince the state to apply the money to golf course construction.

"I had to talk a mile a minute giving a thousand reasons why this wouldn't set a precedent," Hannah explained. "It was a one-shot, extra-money deal. The state is not in the business of building golf courses and didn't want to look like it had changed its policy.

"I put them in a position where they didn't have an excuse not to give us the money. This was not in their regular yearly funding program. The state merely acted as a middleman."
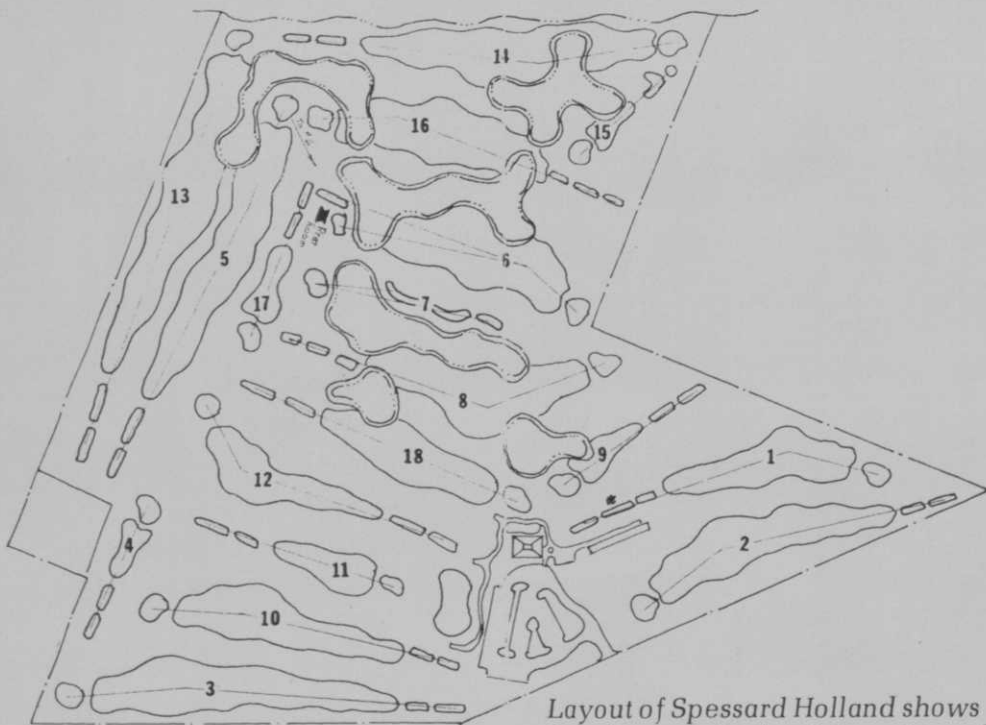
After several months of talking and maneuvering "just to get things arranged so we could apply for the grant," Hannah said, Brevard County made application through the state of Florida to the Southeast regional office of BOR to EDA for a grant. The result was $1,269,500 for the development of Spessard Holland Park, including building a golf course and more than $400,000 worth of work on the beachfront facilities across highway A1A from the golf course site. Half of the financing came from a Brevard County bond issue to be repaid from golf course revenues.

A fitting design

Because of the compactness of the site and the fact that it contains six ponds

and lakes, the Spessard Holland Golf Course was designed by Seay and Palmer as a "stretched executive course." Its overall length is 4,916 yards from the blue tees, 4,410 yards from the white, and 3,654 from the red markers. Six of the holes are par 3's, though Hannah claims that "there's only one hole that I would call 'Mickey Mouse' " — the 128-yard number 4. The remaining dozen holes are all par 4's, including one that goes 430 yards from the back tee.

Par for the course if 66; the best score by any golfer so far is 64 — though Arnold Palmer shot a 31 on the par-33 front nine on the day of the official opening, October 31, 1977.

Spessard Holland might be called a "semi-links"-type course because of its sandy soil, windy oceanfront location, and many traps and water hazards. The hills roll gently and are not too high, the trees are mostly palms and not too close together, but even these things are a tribute to the creativity of the architects and builders, for they were not there before.

As Hannah pointed out, the course was designed to provide interesting golf for most players — but especially for golfers of average ability and for the senior golfers who comprise about 90 percent of the play on the course.

According to pro-manager Mike Skovran, the course averages about 125 rounds per day and should be self-sustaining. The 30 Club Car electric golf cars average one round per day apiece, he said, at a price of $6.00 for 18 holes. Greens fees are $2.50 for 9 holes and $4.00 for 18 on weekdays, $3.50 and $6.00 on weekends and holidays.
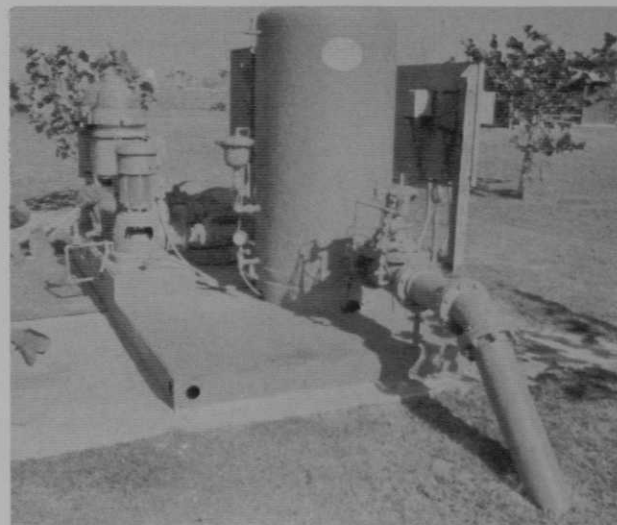
Pro shop attendant Joe Student told GOLF BUSINESS that although Melbourne Beach has only about 4,000 residents, Spessard Holland draws from other nearby towns and cities that total about 100,000 persons. The closest other golf courses open to the public, he said, are 15 miles away.

The clubhouse at Spessard Holland contains a modest pro shop and a snack bar operation which also serves liquor and beer. The whole facility is owned and operated by the county, which is why practically all merchandise in the pro shop is sold at a standardized 20 percent markup.

Photo above, of the first tee at Spessard Holland, portrays the essential flatness and openness of the site. Note new housing development and Inter-coastal Waterway in background.

PSI pumping system on the course draws lake water for irrigation. Part of that water is effluent from nearby sewage treatment plant.

A unique feature of the clubhouse is the use of solar collector panels to heat all of the water used in the food and beverage service.

Hannah agreed that the course should be self-sustaining, but added that "summer will really tell the tale." Since the course hasn't been in operation for a full year yet, the county doesn't know if play will fall off very much in the hot summer months. Hannah also pointed out that the revenue goes 1) to pay off the bond issue, 2) for course operating expenses, 3) for golf facility improvements, and (if anything is left over) 4) back to the commission for the general recreation fund.

Effluent for irrigation
Another modern idea was incorporated into the design of the facility, this time on the course itself. Water for irrigation is brought in from the local sewage treatment plant.

Effluent water is pumped about 2,-000 feet from the post-treatment ponds at the plant to two lakes on the golf course. It is then circulated through the lakes, and a pumping station on the course pulls it up into the irrigation system. This way the golf course always has a reliable supply of water, even in dry weather, and the irrigation water has additional nutrient value for the turf.

As a matter of fact, Hannah credits the use of effluent water for irrigation

with being primarily responsible for the quick way the grass caught on.

Construction began about the first of July 1976, and the course was stolonized about the first of November. Bermudagrass 419 was used on the tees and fairways, and 328 on the greens. A tough winter followed, wiping out a lot of the trees and landscaping, but the grass held on. In the spring, Hannah said, the combination of warm Florida sun and effluent water irrigation caused the turf's growth to "take off."

The course was ready for play in June and opened unofficially in July.

Lessons for the future
Even though Spessard Holland was designed and built with funds obtained through channels which ordinarily might not be open to others, it does show that diligence and persuasiveness can pay off in seeking government assistance.

There is probably also a lesson to be learned from the way the Spessard Holland Golf Course was designed to fit the site as well as to fit the kind of golfers who would play on it. Indeed, Hannah feels that Arnold Palmer was willing to get involved in the project because he wanted to return something to the game of golf and to the average golfer — and he believes that executive-length courses are an excellent way to serve the people.   □