PRIVATE VS. PUBLIC

Burlington, N.C. owners fight city course

A fight by 10 owners and pros of daily fee courses in Burlington, N.C., and surrounding Alamance County against the low fees and occasional no markup of pro shop merchandise at a municipal course has spurred an investigation of that course’s business practices by the Burlington recreation commission.

The fight envelops many of the traditional issues that daily fee owners normally object to, specifically low rates. But there are also a number of deviations from the norm that make the Burlington situation unique.

The city of about 50,000 persons purchased the golf course in 1975, even though there were already too many golf courses in Alamance and the three surrounding counties for all to be profitable, according to National Golf Foundation figures. The new course, Indian Valley Golf Club, lies about 4 miles north of the city limits and draws numerous players from outside of Burlington who do not support the course with taxes.

And now, in reaction to the charges of cut-rate greens fees, an ad hoc committee of the recreation commission will recommend that rates be raised to match those at daily fee courses. If the city council approves the increase, one major reason for establishing a municipal golf course has become nullified.

The daily fee operators and pros joined forces and hired an attorney after an advertisement December 17, 1977, in the Burlington Times-News. The city said in the ad that numerous pro shop items would be sold at discounts for Christmas specials; all golf balls were sold at $11 a dozen, gloves at $4, sweaters from $6.50 to $13.

But it also advertised that all shoes, golf bags, and accessory items would be sold at $1 over cost and golf clubs at cost plus tax. Sets of Wilson model 1200 woods and irons were sold at $265, Wilson LD woods and irons at $155, Wilson Staff woods and irons at $250 and

realtor in Lansing, Mich., told GOLF BUSINESS he had tried to sell the course for $472,000 before the city bought it, but had no takers after more than 30 inquiries. Prospective buyers complained that the second nine was not complete and that course equipment and the clubhouse were inadequate.

City officials told residents that the federal government would pay for half of the purchase cost when attempting to sell the idea, according to Walker. Once the property was purchased, the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation, an agency of the U.S. Interior Department, turned down the city’s bid since there was no public need; there already were enough courses.

The reason for the purchase is still hazy. Some residents and daily fee officials blame former mayor and councilman Paul Andrews. He was accused at a public meeting of playing golf for free at the course with a guest pass and also waiving fees for his guests. The city does allot 19 free passes for its officials and the media, but no one has been able to prove that Andrews is guilty of any wrongdoing concerning the purchase.

The cries of the daily fee owners have brought some preliminary recommendations from a committee of the recreation commission that should please them.

The committee has agreed to increase fees 50 cents, which raises rates to $4 on weekdays and $5 on weekends, the same as those at many daily fee courses.

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