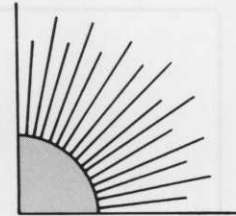


# South Florida Sunshine



By BRAD KOCHER  
Inverrary Country Club

## The Municipal Golf Course

South Florida has many municipal golf course operations. Depending on who you talk to, these operations are designed to provide recreational service to the residents and in some cases, provide both a service and a source of revenue.

Municipal courses are usually very crowded. Golf is one of the most popular leisure sports in Florida and there are many retired people who have the time to enjoy a lot of golf. As a result, many muni-courses open at dawn's early light and close when the sun goes down. In this manner, the course can be enjoyed by more residents thus minimizing complaints that not enough people can play and enjoy the public service.

Early tee times do present some maintenance problems. It is difficult to do a lot of maintenance work ahead of the morning tee times, when golfers tee off at dawn. Mowing,

watering, fertilizing and spraying is difficult enough to get accomplished ahead of play in the morning with a 7:30 or 8:00 A.M. tee off typical of private clubs, let alone the 6:30 or 7:00 A.M. tee off time at municipal courses. This can severely hamper the efficiency and productivity of a maintenance operation.

Most municipal operations do not adhere to the highest standards of maintenance typical of private clubs. The reason for this is there is generally not a demand for highly manicured turf areas by the golfer. The rates charged are much lower by comparison to private clubs and the price to deliver a highly manicured course would cause green fees and cart fees to be more than most golfers are willing to pay. It's not that muni operations cannot have high standards. There are a lot of very talented superintendents who are capable of delivering a high quality product. However, the expense of maintenance to cost of product (green fee and cart) would be excessive by most golfers standards.

Probably the two biggest problems that plague public fee courses are the efficiency problems created by governmental bureaucracy and purchasing limitations. To begin with, the chain of command often involves a multitude of public officials. It can start with the City Manager, go through several councilmen, commissioners, head of parks and recreation, course manager, then superintendent. With this many officials to approve budgets and purchases, the course superintendent almost needs to be politically motivated and oriented to be able to get his job objectives accomplished.

Of equal consideration to some municipal operations are their involvement with unions. The wages that are paid at these courses are generally higher than competitive market rates in the industry, and the benefits as well are also excessive. This causes labor costs at most muni operations to be out of competition with the courses they must compete against.

The biggest drawback at union controlled courses is the difficulty in managing their workers effectively. Just like any operation, there are good and bad employees. The time it takes to discharge a bad employee is excessive and usually puts an undo amount of strain on both supervisor and fellow workers. It is commonly stated that it can take up to a year to fire a bad employee. There is an inordinate amount of warnings, grievance procedures, arbitration, etc. that take up the productive

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time of many people. I happen to believe there should always be proper warning and documentations of improper work performance before an employee is discharged, but the union procedures are much longer than what could be considered reasonable. I guess the real losers are the other employees who see how long an unproductive employee can keep his job.

Also at most municipal operations, 40 hours a week is the limit for an employee. This does pose scheduling problems for weekend work (grass does not quit growing on Saturday and Sunday). In addition, studies have shown that a little overtime is not only productive, but very motivating for employees both from having a greater sense of involvement and from a financial standpoint.

Purchasing is the other area that inhibits many municipal operations from working effectively. Budgets must be prepared a year to a year and a half in advance and are usually strictly followed. Budgets at many courses are guidelines, and allow for the unpredictability of weather, new insect problems, and other extremes that can affect turfgrass management. It would be a slow reaction by most municipal operations to the emergencies that can frequently occur.

Additionally, superintendents must go through a long chain of command and extensive bid procedures for capital expenditures. Bid specifications must allow for these competitive bids on equipment without specifying any manufacturers. One, three or five gang reel mower may be unequivocally superior or unique, yet the specifications must be written in terms that allow for these bids. The types of requirements usually result in the lowest bid being the major criterion for purchase. Quite often a less desirable piece of equipment ends up being purchased because it is the lowest on the bid sheet.

Municipal courses, like any other course, have problems. It takes a special superintendent or manager to be able to deal effectively with the agronomic, personnel and purchasing considerations particular to his operation. He must be able to relate them to the governmental red tape that must be overcome to operate effectively. The business of "selling programs and ideas" to commissions and city managers becomes a full time consideration and one that takes a different talent, patience and perception than most superintendents possess.

As a last observation, I find it somewhat controversial that municipalities and county governments find it desirable to get involved in golf course operations. In most every area of governmental involvement, they are providing a public service that does not conflict with private enterprise. Parks, public beaches and recreation facilities rarely compete with the private sector dollar for business. However, municipal golf courses compete directly with other public course operations that are held individually.

I usually get the answer that municipal courses make it affordable for more people to enjoy golf. The question arises - at who's expense? If all the costs (including admini-

nistrative) were tallied up for the cost of a municipal operation, I doubt that most would be at a break-even status. Then the questions surface, (1) how many residents in the area served by municipal courses use them? and (2) should taxpayers be underwriting the cost of an operation that serves so few?■



"Who says a tornado cannot strike twice in the same place." On Tuesday, April the 9th, a tornado struck the Boca Greens Country Club, taking the roof off the house in (photo 1) not to mention knocking down, snapping or destroying over 200 trees within the project (photo 2). Over the next four days, extra crews and overtime within the maintenance department had put back up those trees downed and hauled away and cleaned up the trees unsalvageable. Just as the crew headed for home on the afternoon of Friday the 13th at 2:16 p.m. another tornado swept thru the West Boca Raton area, only to find most every tree that had been previously staked back up to be blown down once again! Yes, the wind can really be blown out of your sail - however, we knew surely a tornado would not strike ... a third time???

