

Growth Of Municipal Golf Courses

BY ALAN WEITZEL

In 1931, when the National Golf Foundation started keeping records, there were 5,691 golf facilities in the United States; of these only 543 or 9.5% were municipal facilities. Over the next 30 years the growth of golf in the United States was rather slow. By 1960, the number of golf facilities in the United States had only increased by 12% with 6,385 golf facilities being recorded. Municipal golf courses however showed substantial gains with a 65% increase in golf facilities. In 1960, municipal golf courses represented 14% of the total golf facilities in the United States. The decade 1960 to 1970 is generally regarded as the period of greatest growth for golf. During this period of time, the total golf facilities in the United States increased by 37%. Municipal golf facilities experienced a similar record setting growth with a 48% increase in golf facilities. By 1980, the growth in golf facilities started tapering off. Only 1,817 new golf facilities were opened, 26% being municipal golf courses.

Today, according to the National Golf Foundation, there are 12,197 golf facilities in the United States of these, 15% are municipal facilities. There are municipal golf courses in every state of the Union, except for Vermont. The top 5 states are California with 138, Texas 123, Illinois 117, New York 99, and Ohio 70. Florida is ranked 9th with 59 facilities.

Now that we have looked at the National trend, lets look at the State of Florida. In 1946, when the National Golf Foundation first started breaking courses down by states, Florida had only 100 golf facilities of which 23 were classified as municipal. By 1960, Florida had only 31 municipal golf facilities, an increase of 35%. The nation had experienced only a 21% increase in municipal golf courses; however, the State of Florida had experienced a 75% increase in total golf facilities while the national growth was only 32%.

During the boom years of the 60's, Florida added 211 more golf facilities of which 10 were municipal. The growth rate of total golf facilities in Florida grew by 120%, exceeding the national growth rate of 37%. During the 1970's when the national growth rate had slowed to 18%, Florida still experienced boom times with a growth rate of 57% in total golf facilities. Municipal golf courses had a 44% growth rate which was by far the largest increase in Florida. The national growth rate of municipal golf courses was also fairly high with a 36% increase in facilities.

How do we account for this rapid growth in municipal golf courses in Florida, as well as the rest of the nation, in the last 13 years? I can only surmise what I have seen in Florida in the last 10 years. Where you have golf courses closely linked to real estate projects, you have an ideal situation for growth in municipal golf courses. For example, a developer owns a large tract of land which he plans to develop into a planned community. He usually will build many of the amenities such as the golf course first to attract potential home buyers or builders. At some point in time, the project is either successful or fails. If the project is unsuccessful, the developer will obviously try to sell the golf course, and in comes the local government to bail the developer out. The other course of action is the developer who is successful and completely sells out the project, now wants to move on, but still has a golf course tying him to the project. He will usually try to get the project's homeowners to buy the course and turn it private. If this does not work, he will try to sell the course on the open market. Often a municipality will buy the course to preserve green space. In rare occasions the developer, due to restrictive covenants on the property, may be forced to donate the course to local government in exchange for tax write offs.

(Continued on page 36)



Florida Silica Sand Co., INC.

Special
**GOLF COURSE
MIXES**

Sterilization Available

Complete Line of
**NURSERY AND
LANDSCAPE**

Materials

Dade County

949-3521

Broward County

923-8323

Since
1948

(Continued from page 35)

But what about the future growth of municipal golf facilities, with taxpayers becoming increasingly concerned about taxes and government spending, will growth continue? In Florida, with more and more retired people moving here each year, small towns are quickly becoming cities. Despite the tax consequences, these newly emerging cities want to provide their citizens with as good, if not better, facilities than where they came from. This aides in the growth of the cities by attracting new people as well as industry to the community. As cities become large, there are increasing environmental concerns, such as preserving natural habitats. A golf course becomes an ideal solution by providing green space, and at the same time if efficiently operated, provides revenue to the city. Finally, there is the human factor that affects the growth of municipal golf courses no matter how large the city. As long as you have government officials who like to play golf, you will probably always have a continued growth of municipal golf facilities.■



Ransomes Expands Into Florida

Responding to the requirements of the growing market, Ransomes, Inc. has established a wholly owned Distributorship, Ransomes Florida, Inc., to address the commercial lawnmower market in Florida. Heading a very experienced and qualified staff will be Lou Oxnevad, a Florida Golf Course Superintendent for the past 16 years. Lou will serve as General Manager for the West Palm Beach based operation.

Ransomes Florida, Inc. will address the needs of the golf course and municipal market offering the wide range of commercial rotary and reel mowers manufactured by Ransomes, Inc. and Ransomes Sim and Jeffries.■

Now, You Can Control The Weather

"We can send a man to the moon and back, but we cannot do anything about the weather." That phrase used to be the case, but now there is something that you can do about it. You cannot control mother nature, but you can work with her. With the advent of cable TV and super stations such as the National Weather Channel, it is possible in some regions to tell what is going on with the weather and you can feel like a meteorologist.

Such is the case at Boca Greens, where I have been blessed to be in a region where Cable TV is accessible to my office. Via the local cable network, I have access to the National Weather Channel, a station which observes the weather, on a national basis, 24 hours a day. If local storms exist, a segment during the color radar program will reveal: where the rain is falling, they will observe the direction of movement, discuss the cloud tops to reveal the intensity and advise on weather bulletins should severe weather be imminent.

If this is not enough, sometimes your local cable network will be hooked into the U.S. Weather Bureau Radar System, such as in my case. I have a direct hook-up to the Miami Radar with a sweep of a 100 mile radius. I can observe from the Bahamas, to the Keys, to Fort Meyers, to Vero and anywhere else in between. I can actually sit in my office and predict when it might rain in Boca. By observing the movement of a front, I often have observed fronts to intensify, disipate, or even become stationary.

An important item to consider, if you actually pursue cable, is to buy a color TV. At first my boss said "why not buy just a black & white" - however the color of radar denotes its intensity, so a color TV is a must! A small unit can be purchased for approximately \$200. I can absorb that cost a hundred times over by a reduction in the cost of effective chemical applications, the knowledge of when to keep the crew on payroll, or to concede to a rain day and send the crew home.

Quite often a maintenance building complex is located in a remote corner of a project. If this is the case, then consider an installation into a more accessible cable area such as the clubhouse. A cable TV with color would be a hit in the lounge or the locker rooms and if severe weather should occur, the channel can always be changed to the radar weather channel.

I must admit, I am so impressed with the luxury of this management tool, I have become spoiled. To predict the weather in South Florida is nearly impossible. I pity our local meterologist. They are forced to predict the unpredictable.

Obviously, there is very little that I can do about the weather, but I can be made aware of what is going on within my world. Any by the way, there is one big benefit to such a convenience, "I can always catch a good movie during my lunch break."■