

# Rebuttals To: The

## A Rebuttal "The Municipal Golf Course"

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The article in the Fall 1984 issue of *The Florida Green* is full of erroneous and, at times, ludicrous, generalities which are an affront to the many dedicated golf course superintendents and operators of the so-called municipal golf courses. It is an unwarranted put-down of all municipal golf course operations which, as evidenced by the many successful operations in the State, provide a much needed opportunity for thousands of golfers in the communities in which they are located. Some support for this opinion can be found in practically every paragraph of the article.

For example, the opening statement in the second paragraph - "Municipal courses are usually very crowded", and the reasons supporting this observation. How many courses, privately owned, municipal, or private (except the very private) are not "crowded" especially during the winter season. And isn't that what the game is all about - providing more and more facilities so that more and more people can enjoy their favorite pastime? If not, why the steadily increasing number of the the above classes of courses? And what about the tourists, not all of whom come to Florida to lay on the beaches or visit Disney World? In addition to the other millions of dollars they bring into the State, the tourists creates 65 to 70% of the total yearly revenue for daily-play courses.

"Early tee times do present some maintenance problems" - a very astute observation! Does the one hour difference in starting times between daily-play courses and private courses create insurmountable problems in the maintenance of a course? Most golfers will patiently wait for operators of greens and fairway mowers to perform their duties on all classes of courses and most of these operators are cooperative, considerate and dedicated to the performance of these duties.

As for the statement regarding the standards of maintenance between municipal and private facilities, obviously most golfers would prefer to play on a highly manicured course if it were economically possible. Unfortunately, not everyone who enjoys the game can afford the exorbitant initiation fees, the sky-rocketing monthly dues and the frequently unexpected year-end assessments which are becoming more and more a part of the private course operations. Golf is fast becoming a pas-

time which, were it not for municipal courses, many could not afford. And, in spite of the implications to the contrary, there are many well-kept municipal courses which provide this opportunity at a reasonable rate while still operating on a no-loss basis. Not all private courses are in first-class condition and many would welcome more revenue from outsiders.

Is the governmental bureaucracy referred to in the article too much more complicated to deal with than a membership of 300-400 people whose only experience is maintaining their own lawns (heaven forbid) and a Board of Governors, each of whom are agronomical wizards and have their own expert opinions about how high the greens and fairways should be cut and where the greens budget should be spent - on the golf course or on the clubhouse grounds so they can impress their business associates and friends?

How the golf course superintendent gets the job done is related very slightly to whether or not an employee is carrying a union card. As long as time tested human relations principles are applied in the supervision of all employees and accurate and complete records are kept for employees there should be no basis for "strained relationships" between employees just because one is a member of a union. Normal discharge proceedings can generally be followed in eliminating the so-called "bad" employee with a reasonable time period.

Budgets - Is there a great deal of difference in preparing a guideline for anticipated yearly revenues and expenditures for a municipal, a daily-play public, and private golf course? Certainly not. And don't many golf course superintendents at the private course have many of the same problems justifying the selection and purchasing of their choices of equipment when, perhaps, some members of the club and/or Board of Governors have their own preferences as to which piece of equipment should be purchased and from whom, very often at a higher price than would be spent for equally good or even superior equipment from a reputable distributor?

Finally, most county and city governments do not become involved in enterprise agencies such as golf courses to compete with other public golf course operations. In many cases they have done so to make recreational use of a site which was either not suitable for residential development, such as a sanitary landfill, or land which was donated for recreational use only. Unfortunately, in many cases such facilities have been constructed by a governmental agency and subsequently leased to a private individual or group. The result is usually higher daily fees at the expense or the elimination of privileges for the ones the facilities were built for in the first place.

There are not too many municipal golf courses and these courses do provide an affordable opportunity for thou-

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sands of low income people to enjoy the game. But it is possible, and it should be imperative that such courses be operated on a self-supporting basis and not be an added burden on non-golfing tax payers.

The answers to the questions posed at the conclusion of the article are readily available from the National Golf Foundation or, more readily, from the Florida Municipal Golf Course Association. ■

Dear Editor:

The article "The Municipal Golf Course" written by Brad Kocher which appeared in the Fall Issue of *The Florida Green* is representative of the uniformed mentality that plagues golf course operations.

Municipal golf courses are crowded, and for good reasons. The municipal golf courses provide a service to the faction of golfers that the private sector obviously chooses to forget. If the private sector addressed the needs of the limited income golfer, who cannot afford the outlay for exorbitant annual or daily fees, the need for municipal golf courses would be eliminated.

The majority of the municipal golf courses in the state operate as an Enterprise Fund. Basically this means that the golf course must operate on a self sustaining basis *Totally* supported by users fees. We receive no general funds or tax revenues and in fact, return to the city coffers substantial payments for administrative services performed by other City departments as well as payments in the lieu of taxes. In many cases golf course revenues are used to subsidize facilities that are not self sustaining thereby, somewhat relieving the tax burden for those persons who do not utilize the golf course.

Budgets for the City of Orlando are prepared only six months in advance and reflect anticipated increases in materials and supplies. Most municipal golf course budgets include contingency funding that allow for weather, insects or other unforeseen problems that may arise.

The lead time required for purchasing of maintenance materials is greater than that of private clubs. This requires the superintendent to do advance planning in order to provide the purchasing agent with sufficient lead time. However, superintendents are only human, and at times, may forget to order an item or through no fault of the superintendent, conditions may change rapidly creating an immediate need for a special fungicide or insecticide. On occasions such as these, most municipalities have emergency provisions in which items can be obtained immediately. The purchasing procedures, though somewhat cumbersome, does not have the crippling effect that is presented in Mr. Kocher's article.

Capital expenditures for equipment are handled on a bid basis, however, contrary to Mr. Kocher's observations, municipal superintendents can specify brand names or specific manufactures when requisiting equipment. The bid procedure requires the superintendent to be very

familiar with the specifications of particular equipment in order to justify the brand of mower etc. he wants. If the superintendent does his homework, he will get the piece of equipment he wants.

The competitive bid process also provides substantial savings on equipment from vendors desiring to do business with cities.

The purchasing procedures for municipalities are established to insure that tax payers' money is spent wisely and impartially resulting in the City receiving maximum benefit from the money it spends. I believe that when membership assessments become necessary at private clubs, some members wish that better fiscal management existed at their club.

Mr. Kocher's article appears contradictory when in one paragraph he cites that municipal employees are not motivated financially due to the lack of overtime and in another paragraph points out that municipal employees make higher salaries than private clubs.

Of the 20 municipal courses responding to the Florida Municipal Golf Course Association's Annual Survey, 17 courses have overtime on a scheduled basis with the average budget for overtime being \$4,724 per year.

It is true that municipal employees are paid better than the private clubs. Its also true that municipalities benefit packages are excellent. However, rather than being a burden on my operation, I feel this salary package helps add stability to the maintenance operation by aiding in the recruitment and retention of quality employees.

Labor Unions are a fact of life with municipal operations. They provide employees with protection and insure that employees are treated fair and impartial. Unions set strict procedures in which disciplinary action is administered and superintendents are bound to follow these procedures. However, when it becomes necessary to discipline and/or terminate an employee, it can be done almost as quickly as most private clubs. I do not follow the belief that good employees are losers when it comes to Labor Unions. It's a general consensus among our crew that the union protects them from being terminated for minor mistakes as well as removing personality conflicts from disciplinary action.

In closing, it is my opinion that Mr. Kocher's article presents an inaccurate, one side view of municipal operations. many municipalities are striving to eliminate the stigma associated with municipal golf courses by providing a quality golf facility at affordable prices while operating on a self sustaining basis, so as not to be a burden to the tax payer. Most municipal courses are successful and will continue to be as long as the private sector chooses not to serve the needs of the low to moderate income golfer.

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