

Workers inspect a new green being built at the municipal Blue Hill Golf Course in Orangeburg, N.Y. Project architect Stephen Kay of Bronxville, N.Y., said communities are updating existing municipal courses to meet the needs for better quality, more play and safety.

Photo courtesy of Stephen Kay



Low supply, high demand ideal mix at Salt Lake City

By Bob Seligman

When officials of Salt Lake City, Utah, began planning to build the city's newest municipal golf courses — Winged Point and Mountain Dell — they were faced with a low-supply, high-demand situation.

Scott Gardner, the city's director of golf and recreation, said all four of the city's 18-hole municipal courses were doing more than 100,000 nine-hole rounds annually. The city's two nine-hole courses totaled 50,000 to 70,000 rounds a year. With a population of 165,000 in Salt Lake City, and 800,000 to 900,000 people within a 20-square-mile radius, there weren't enough golf holes.

"In Salt Lake City, you can hardly get a tee time," said Gardner. "Years ago, it pretty much slacked off after Labor Day. Now, people will play in November if there's no snow on the ground, no matter how cold it is. We just ran out of golf courses."

Gardner added that Winged Point also was built to improve the city's west side region, and to attract new businesses.

The new courses are being funded by municipal revenue bonds under the Municipal Building Authority of Salt Lake City, thereby keeping taxpayers from being responsible for payment of the bond. The debt payment is \$7.75 million over the next 10 years.

Despite the demand for public golf, Gardner doubts the courses would have been built if they were tax-supported.

Yet the public, or at least the golfing public, still is paying the way. To be eligible for the bonds, the municipality had to show that enough money was being generated by the existing "munis."

So, greens fees were raised two years ago by \$1 per nine holes.

"The greens fees are paying back the bond. If our revenue doesn't best our expenditures, we'll have to raise the greens fees," said Gardner. "We can not go after the renewal fund to bail us out if we don't make our payments."

Winged Point, an 18-hole course, opened last July. Mountain Dell, which opened in 1968, is adding 18 holes. The first nine is expected to open this spring, and the second nine is expected to open by July 1. Gardner said Salt Lake City will not build a new course for 10 years because of the debt. Existing courses also will be affected, at least for the time being, he added.

"Right now, all the money is going to pay off the debt," Gardner said. "We are still grooming and taking care of the other courses, but you won't see any major capital improvements until we make sure we're bringing in the revenue to pay off the debt."

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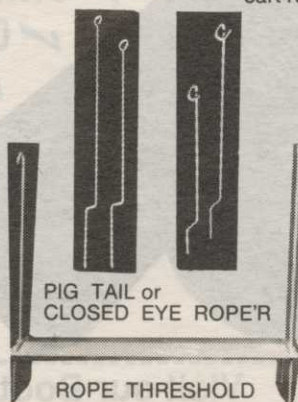
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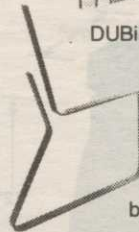


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