

Flatt institutes program for 'budget-conscious' communities

By Mark Leslie

Larry Flatt saw a need for public golf when he was an Overland Park, Kan., official for 18 years. Now the former course superintendent, who two years ago ended a long hiatus from the world of golf, has instituted a program he feels will help fill the need for more public golf courses.

Flatt Golf Services, a design and development consulting firm, has initiated a program for "budget-conscious golf clubs, community

associations and smaller communities," the company president said.

Its thrust, Flatt said, is to provide professional design assistance to smaller clubs, associations and communities in their efforts to develop or expand a course on a modest budget. The cost? He estimates \$350,000 to \$400,000 for construction and design services, minus any donations the client can get.

"I enjoy doing these," said Flatt, who has two courses under construction and has completed master plans for six or seven others.



Larry Flatt

Referring to his \$12,000 to \$13,000 fee, plus a per-visit charge under this program, Flatt said: "I didn't get into this to make a lot of money. Rather to get back to what I enjoy."

Flatt, who serves on the U.S. Golf Association and Kansas Golf Association's Public Golf committees, was a superintendent in Kansas City, Mo., and Overland Park for six years. He became Overland Park's director of parks and recreation in 1971 and community development director in 1980. He is a

former secretary of the Heart of America Golf Course Superintendents Association and has seen golf from a variety of angles.

His new approach reflects that experience. It is essentially a three-step process:

- Locating an appropriate piece of property and preparing a master plan. The master plan typically includes information regarding the feasibility of a course, a routing plan, detailed construction cost estimate, a narrative description of each hole and how it will play, a description of the necessary construction techniques, a list of maintenance equipment needed for the completed course, and a projected first-year maintenance and operational budget. The plan provides the community, club or association a road map to pursue membership sales, financing and/or local government support or commitment.

- Developing a step-by-step process and timetable for building the course. The client is provided with detailed greens designs, irrigation, grading and planting plans, and a complete list of materials. The construction guidelines cover earthwork and grading including dams and reservoirs; greens, tees and bunkers construction; irrigation system and pump station; planting; such miscellaneous items as bridges, cart paths and halfway house; and a grow-in section to help the client meet the projected opening date.

- Inspecting and consulting. This includes visiting the course weekly during construction to check progress of work, planning and scheduling work that needs to be started, training volunteers or local contractors, and helping stake and lay out greens, tees, bunkers, and the irrigation system.

"This doesn't work in urban areas. But in small communities, with more community spirit, it can work," Flatt said. "It's a lot of work. I tell them they are in for a couple of years of work."

In exchange, the client gets two things: a golf course at low cost and "quality where it is most needed: the layout, greens, flat tees, and good irrigation system," Flatt said.

Cimarron Valley Golf Club will cost the community of Satanta, Kansas, \$350,000 to \$400,000, while Nora Springs, Iowa, will pay closer to \$200,000 for Western Hills Golf Club because area businesses contributed so much work.

Under this plan, Flatt designs a course "in skeleton fashion," he said. "I don't do full-blown drawings. Each is different. I try to get them (clients) involved with a superintendent who has good background. I show them how to build it step by step.

That assistance comes in many forms. "I don't get the permits for them, but show them how to," Flatt said.

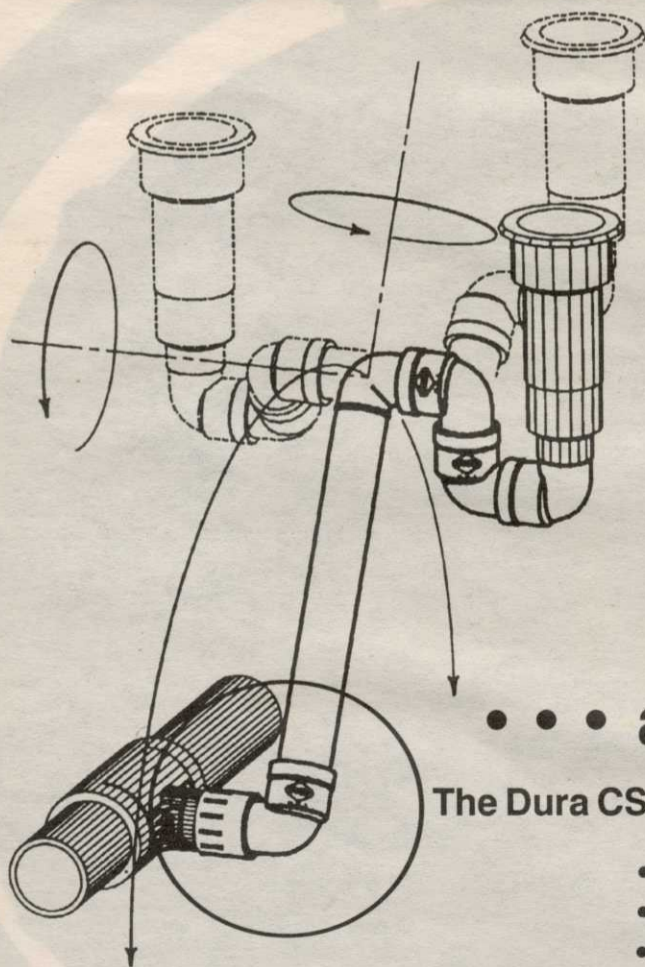
And, he draws up applications for matching grants from the Land and Water Conservation Fund — a federal program administered by

Continued on page 31

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Flatt

Continued from page 30

the state.

"In most states the priority for that money is acquisition of recreational and open space," and property for a golf course qualifies, he said.

"I design greens to detail. I stake and survey and whatever needs to be done. They have to get somebody to coordinate it, and I'll train them," Flatt said.

"The rest depends on how much money they have."

Often, a major ingredient is community spirit. It takes many forms, from land or financial donations to bulldozer work.

"First, always, is the land," Flatt said. "You start with no cost for the land, if possible. We work with local bankers. We can go to local businesses for grants, for them to be a good neighbor. In west Kansas, where oil and gas has been a good business, oil and gas companies give back to the community. The Cimarron Valley clubhouse was donated by an oil company that had used it as a training house..."

Cimarron Valley Golf Course is owned by an association that plans to give the course to the city of Satanta eventually. As a fund-raiser, it is selling holes. "You can get your name on the hole," Flatt said.

In addition to land and money, a lot of work can be done by local citizens.

"A lot of farmers have scrapers and dozers and do that work. They are the general contractor. They will bid out the irrigation system and well-drilling," Flatt said. "These guys are golfers, farmers, people with community spirit."

Another community, Nora Springs in north central Iowa, is similar. An association of community leaders founded a non-profit association. It did its own feasibility study.

It sold memberships — "for which buyers got nothing" — and raised the money to hire Flatt.

The association bought some low-cost property and received solid community support, said Flatt, who drafted the master plan and agreed to visit the site whenever needed.

The association hired a farmer, who had two scrapers and a bulldozer, to grade the course. Flatt hired a premier dozer operator, who had never seen a golf course, as the shaper.

Local people built a lake for irrigation and contracted out the irrigation system.

All trucking of sand (3,000 tons) was contributed.

Flatt said greens are built to USGA specifications, minus the choker layer.

"In west Kansas we used native soil. It's great sandy soil," he said. "In Iowa we had too much clay, so we brought in sand."

Flatt budgets automatic, single-row irrigation systems, and suggests his clients lease their maintenance equipment.

Flatt said he is also designing a "conventional course, but I really enjoy the challenge and uniqueness of doing these."

GOLF COURSE NEWS

NGF seminars planned for developers, owners

Series of five aims to address issues affecting successful building, operating

JUPITER, Fla. — The National Golf Foundation has five seminars set for 1992 that will illustrate how critical issues facing golf course developers and operators are being successfully managed and surmounted.

The first two in the series will

address environmental regulations, increasing expenses and other issues impacting the success of golf course operations, now and in the future. Two others will focus on how public-private partnerships are successfully being employed in acquiring development capital and overcoming other obstacles to golf course development.

The fifth will look at how some are taking advantage of the growing market for alternative golf facilities, such as golf ranges, executive and other non-regulation courses. All of

the programs will be presented using a case study approach.

The series includes:

- March 15-17 — "Golf Course Operations in the 1990s-Obstacles Overcome by Successful Golf Course Operators," at Marriott at Sawgrass resort in Ponte Vedra Beach, Fla.

- April 5-7 — "Golf Course Operations in the '90s - Issues Affecting the Future of Successful Operations," at Newport Beach (Calif.) Marriott Hotel & Tennis Club.

- May 3-5 — "Public-Private Joint

Ventures in Golf Course Development," at Dallas Marriott Mandalay at Las Colinas in Irving, Texas.

- June 7-9 — "Alternative Golf Facilities - The Development and Operation of Ranges and Non-Regulation Golf Courses," at Fairview Park Marriott in Falls Church, Va.

- Sept. 20-22 - "Public-Private Joint Ventures in Golf Course Development," at Boston Marriott in Newton, Mass.

For further information, contact Roger Yaffe at 407-774-6006.

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