

## Non-profits

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non-profit entity to run their three Essex County layouts.

"I get calls from all over the country asking how we did it here," the Baltimore executive said. With cities having problems running their own facilities, and many 10-to-15-year management contracts with private firms set to expire, this is an alternative many cities are exploring, he added.

Fed up with the deteriorating condition of its facilities — Jefferson Park, Jackson Park and West Seattle — the Seattle golf community demanded the city do something, recalled Chris Redo, chief executive officer of Municipal Golf of Seattle, the non-profit group that took over the municipal courses July 1. Redo was also part of an 11-member, volunteer advisory board the city established last September to explore alternatives.

The board settled on four options, Redo explained. They were:

- Retain the concessionaire who had allowed the courses to deteriorate. "That wasn't acceptable," Redo said.

- Hire a national, for-profit management company, e.g. American Golf Corp. or ClubCorp. "They do a good job. But we didn't want the money generated by our courses leaving the community," Redo said.

- Establish a public development authority (PDA), which would seek private investors to put up money for renovations and operations in return for a hefty return on their investment. Seattle had a bad experience with a PDA that renovated Pike Place Market, a popular farmer's market. "They raised the rents so high that people were forced out of business," Redo said. The advisory board feared a PDA could dramatically increase green fees to recover its investment rather than keep fees affordable.

- Establish a non-profit organization that would keep fees affordable while re-investing profits toward the \$20 million in capital improvements that had been suggested in the city's master plan but were largely ignored by the previous operator.

The advisory board chose the non-profit route this past winter. Redo resigned from the board and was eventually named CEO of Municipal Golf of Seattle, which received a 10 1/2-year contract beginning July 1.

Redo is confident the company can turn the Seattle situation around. But one major roadblock exists, he admitted. The City Council required that unionized city employees continue to maintain the facilities. The city did assign a liaison to act as a conduit between the maintenance staff and the firm, and also agreed to place only employees who had expressed a genuine interest in course maintenance at the facilities. But city politicians would not give Municipal Golf the authority to replace city workers with the company's own employees.

"The city charter forbids anyone but municipal employees from working on city-owned facilities," Redo explained. "We basically have to buy our services from the city. Those unionized labor costs are much higher than a privately-owned, daily-fee operation would have to pay for the same services. It will be quite a challenge to keep our green fees low and our costs in line."

Baltimore Municipal Golf Corp. doesn't labor under such restrictions, Redo

pointed out. When it was first established, then-Mayor William Donald Schaefer and the City Council withstood considerable public and media pressure and freed BMGC to hire whoever it wished.

BMGC offered to retain the entire maintenance staff, although at reduced pay and benefits, Cooke explained. Of the 120 full-time employees, only three chose to stay. The full-time maintenance staff now stands at 64. But part-time employees have grown to 275. There were no part-timers when the city operated the facilities 10 years ago.

"Having to use city employees is going to be a nightmare for Seattle," Cooke said. "Maintenance costs make up at least 60 percent of a course budget. That means Seattle's non-profit company is controlling a minority of its own operational bud-

get. If they fail, it will be because of that, not because the advisory board or the company didn't do their jobs."

Apprised of Seattle's city charter requiring the use of municipal employees on all Seattle golf course facilities, Cooke responded:

"Charters are made by people and can be changed by people. Congress has amended the U.S. Constitution, so a city ought to be able to amend its own charter.

"We've been successful because we were able to eliminate politics from business decisions. Indianapolis Mayor Stephen Goldsmith asked me what was the single most important thing he could do in order to make this work in his city. Politicians must want to see a non-profit firm succeed and then be willing to get out of the way."

## Cost doesn't stop golfers from playing

Golfers are less likely to be deterred by the game's cost than people who participate in other kinds of outdoor activities, according to the 1994 Roper Survey for the Recreation Roundtable, *Outdoor Recreation in America*.

The report also noted that of all outdoor activities surveyed, golf ranked highest in the percentage of participants who began the sport after age 18. Fewer than half surveyed reported relatives introduced them to the game.

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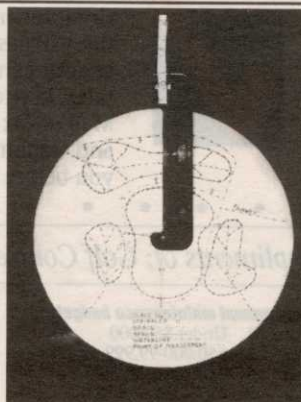
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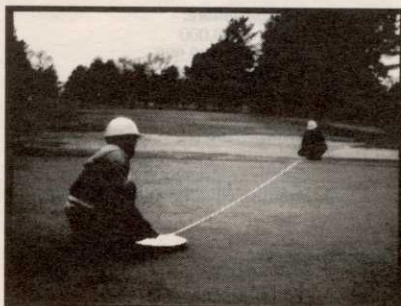
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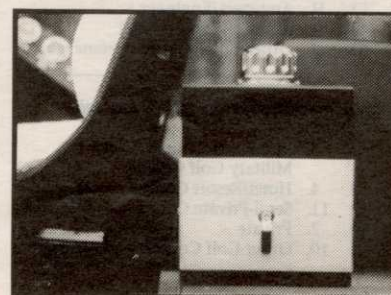
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