

# New military base funding? All from consumers' on-base spending

By PETER BLAIS

PHOENIX — Falcon Dunes Golf Course at Luke Air Force Base, which opened Dec. 22 here, is a good example of the modern-day realities of military course funding.

No taxpayer dollars were used to build the Gary Panks-designed, 18-hole course, said Luke AFB Business Operations Chief John Beckett. Funding came from money spent by consumers at Luke facilities, particularly the base exchange, social clubs, bowling center and other recreational activities.

Profits from those operations go into a central construction fund. Various



Falcon Dunes, the Luke AFB course was built with no taxpayer funding.

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projects apply to the funding program and moneys are awarded based on the project's ability to pay back those funds. The \$8.7 million golf course project showed sufficient promise to receive funding. The course itself will be self-supporting, using no government employees or money in its daily operation.

"A lot of people don't realize that," Beckett said. "They see a golf course on an Air Force base and assume tax dollars paid for it. That's not true and we want people to realize it."

Taxpayer funds were commonly used to build courses prior to the late 1980s when massive military cutbacks were

instituted, Beckett explained. In most cases, any military course built today must be self-sufficient.

"I think we are the first new course built for the Air Force in quite a few years," Beckett said. "It's funny, because most of our bases have courses. Luke never had one because we never had the land, even though we are in a prime part of the country to play golf."

Parts of the base and nearby sections of Maricopa County flooded in 1992. As a result, the county and Air Force decided to build a flood detention basin. The county and military shared the expense. The Maricopa County Flood Control District deeded the land to Luke with the understanding the Air Force would maintain the integrity of the detention basin. Detention basins are suitable for recreation, so Luke AFB officials decided a golf course would be a perfect use for the property. Channels located throughout the course would carry any flood waters

away within 36 hours.

Falcon Dunes offers affordable golf for its customers, which consists of 5,000 active-duty and 40,000 retired military personnel, 1,000 civilian employees and their guests. The course should accommodate 60,000 rounds annually, with green fees ranging from \$8.75 for young, enlisted military personnel to a maximum of \$20. "A lot of the young guys can't afford golf in the Phoenix area," Beckett said, "particularly in the wintertime. We have a tiered fee structure so young guys can get involved in the game."

Falcon Dunes has an unrestricted walking policy, although carts are available. Plans are in the works to start a caddie program to give youngsters on the base a chance to play the game and make some money.

Despite low green fees, Luke cut no corners in building Falcon Dunes. There were few change orders and the course was completed 2 1/2 months

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ahead of schedule. It has all the bells and whistles found at other area courses such as continuous cart paths and a complete pro shop with fixtures designed by ProCraft, a well-known Oregon-based clubhouse accessories designer. Greens are planted with Tifdwarf Bermudagrass, fairways and roughs with 419 Bermudagrass, and 328 Bermudagrass on the bunker faces for contrast. Effluent irrigation water comes from the base's wastewater treatment plant, which lacked an adequate disposal site until the course was built.

"Overall it's a quality project," Beckett said. "You want the young active-duty folks, who have friends or relatives come out to visit, be able to bring them someplace of which they can be proud. I think we've accomplished that."

Profits from the course will help provide additional money to underfunded, quality-of-life programs such as daycare, arts and crafts and the like, Beckett explained. The course's fiscal year ends Oct. 1. Projections are that the course, driving range, pro shop and food and beverage operation will show a \$280,000 profit during the first nine months and \$400,000 annually thereafter.

## Strange joins muni design team

PORTSMOUTH, Va. — PGA Tour pro and local son Curtis Strange is lending his name, and expertise, as a design consultant, to improve the municipal Bide-A-Wee Golf Course and The Links at City Park here.

The city park facility will include a nine-hole executive course, lighted driving range, natural grass putting course and pro shop. The new learning center will offer youth programs, lessons, equipment, tournaments and affordable golf for every skill level.

Portsmouth City Manager Ronald W. Massie said: "Pros just don't put their names on shoddy products. Our courses will speak to quality."

Quality golf facilities improve the livability of a community for its residents and will attract business and spur commercial development nearby, he feels.

The Links at City Park opened in November. Bide-A-Wee closed in November, with a scheduled re-opening next summer.

Total improvements to the two courses total approximately \$5 million.

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