

New York Water Shortage Drives Clubs to Wells

By JOHN M. BRENNAN

It took a severe water shortage scare in the world's largest city to shock officials and owners of New York City's golf courses to the realization that a well, almost regardless of cost, can pay dividends within a few years.

Last winter, when New York city officials clamped down on the use of water within the five boroughs that constitute the metropolis, there was talk of banning use of aqua pura for all but essential purposes. Commissioner Stephen Carney of the Water Supply Department restricted the use of water for lawns and golf courses early in the spring.

Hardly had the commissioner announced his ban on the use of water than the officials of golf courses within the New York area began discussing means of solving what might have resulted in a loss of fine courses due to an arid summer for which the district is famous.

Courses that had wells unused for years immediately petitioned the Board of Standards and Appeals for licenses to reactivate the dormant wells. These were readily granted and at a dozen spots digging began to strike precious water. Courses without abandoned wells encountered considerable resistance when seeking permission to dig but eventually the city fathers yielded to their requests for permits to go for water.

"And after all the trouble and fuss, everybody here at North Hills feels it was a great idea to install a well with a 300,000-gallon tank if for no other reason than to eliminate those \$5,000 water bills that we get every year for watering our fairways," said Larry King, the highly efficient course superintendent at swank North Hills GC in Douglaston, one of the few remaining private clubs within the city's limits.

Eric G. Koch, general manager at North Hills who served for two years as president of the Club Managers Association of America, strongly endorsed King's words and said a club was taking too much of a risk if it did not install a well in the event city authorities would give their consent.

"Our installation will cost in the neighborhood of \$25,000, but we'll have a system that will be of the finest and will write itself off by savings in our water bills within seven or eight years," Koch declared.

Eric spanned pages on which were written the cost of the water bills of the past 14 years that he has managed the club and the average was \$3,500. In 1939 the high mark was reached when a summer almost devoid of rain cost North Hills \$5,500 for water. The lowest for water was in 1945 when the cost was \$1,800.

Of course, in some other sections of the country, the cost of water is a lot less than in New York City, where most of the water is brought from upstate in the Kensico and Croton areas.

Essential to Good Condition

With the better part of 50 years' experience to his credit, veteran Larry King of North Hills insists that without artificial water it would be virtually impossible to maintain a highly satisfactory course within the New York district.

"Talk about fescues not needing water during the summer doesn't stand up when it comes to answering the complaints of members during the summer when tees, fairways and other areas that were emerald green in the spring turn brown and gray from lack of rain and water," said King.

"I used to work — for 35 years — at Old Country Club in Flushing, where we had to use hand pumps to water the greens and tees and the fairways depended solely on rainfall. And at North Hills I have had one of the finest watering systems in the country. The judicious use of water, such as has been our fortune to make at North Hills, assures the members of a highly satisfactory course all through the summer. Of course, overwatering, like anything else done to excess, is extravagant in money and turf, but when one learns the knack of watering correctly, there's nothing like it."

King will never forget the day the Board of Health of New York City stepped into North Hills last spring and cut his pipes leading to the watering system. "Of course, we wouldn't have used them so long as the water scare lasted, even though our greens turned white," said Larry. "Fortunately, our own well became available during the second week of July, when the New York version of desert weather sets in. We have been most lucky to get the big well and tank done in time."

North Hills, located 250 feet above sea level, faced a big digging problem which



The giant 300,000-gallon tank installed by Bethlehem Steel at the North Hills Golf Club, Long Island, within New York City, is seen above back of the eighteenth green, with the Moorish clubhouse in the left rear. It required more than two months of constant digging before the plumbers, electricians and welders moved in to complete the \$25,000 operation. The New York City courses have been denied the use of water except for their clubhouses.

was made more precarious because of the geological conditions around the club.

Starting the digging operation in the spring, when rains are frequent in the Metropolitan New York area, hampered the operation at North Hills. Then, when the welders began their task of rigging up the 300,000-gallon tank hot weather set in and it was almost impossible for them to work in the 115-degree temperature of the tank for more than a few hours at a time.

"If clubs intend installing wells, I would suggest, after our experience at North Hills, to pick out some time during the early fall or late summer when rain and hot weather will be eliminated," cautioned King. "We encountered just about every handicap that could possibly have been faced in installing our well."

Robert O'Rourke, who inherited Walter Grego's job of managing the popular Bayside Links, a short distance from North Hills and closest course to the Empire State Building, reported that water was reached after digging 150 feet.

"Our costs will be a lot less than at North Hills principally because we had a lot less digging and because of several other factors," said O'Rourke. "Bayside has been world famous as one of the top fee courses and the Cord Meyer interests, which own the course and operate it, spared no expense in equipping the layout with the most modern tanks and well. We'll have about the same layout as North Hills, with a capacity of 300,000 gallons on our tank."

Glen Oaks GC, which stretches over the New York City boundary into sprawling Nassau County, had the benefit of getting

its water supply from the latter district, which faced no water shortage.

Glen Oaks, chiefly because it constructed a new swimming pool last season, dug a second well at the insistence of director Charles Margett. The two wells afford Glen Oaks an ample supply of well water for both its 18-hole course and large swimming pool. Glen Oaks' pool is within the New York City limits, but the water is drawn from Nassau.

Fresh Meadow CC, formerly known as Lakeville CC, located in Great Neck, a short distance from Glen Oaks, is located in Nassau, but officials of that organization recently reactivated an ancient well at the suggestion of Supt. Jim Kehoe.

The Fresh Meadow storage, as a result of the construction of the new pool, now has a capacity of 175,000 gallons and requires seven hours to refill. The original well at old Lakeville was abandoned about 15 years ago. Kehoe, who performed a remarkable job of transforming Lakeville into a great championship course can water the new course in 10 hours.

A majority of the Nassau courses, located a few miles over the New York City line, either have been using well water or are contemplating the installation of wells in an effort to eventually eliminate the cost of water purchased from the county.

The city intends building a 27-hole course in Marine Park, Brooklyn, on reclaimed land, and officials indicate that a well will be dug to provide water for its fairways.

Several courses in Westchester County and Connecticut, faced with acute water shortage, started digging wells, but few have been successful in reaching water.