

# Los Angeles County Acts to Save Public Courses

By **VERNE WICKHAM**

(Based on an interview with Kenneth Hahn, Supervisor, Second District, Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors)

**W**HEN in the short space of about 90 days three public golf courses in Southern California appeared to be doomed to subdivision, the golfers, local civic groups, and the general public became aroused and demanded action. The Los Angeles metropolitan area had already lost far too many golf courses. In 1930 there were 47 golf courses. Now there were 29, and three of those were announced for sale and subdivision.

It was into this picture that the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors stepped—five men strong. All five members of the Board are in dead earnest in the program of saving the golf courses.

In the organization of the County Board of Supervisors, each of the five members has the administration of various county departments under his personal supervision. Kenneth Hahn drew the Parks and Recreation Department, which operates the county golf courses, and is that department's official representative on the Board. He is the youngest man on the Board, being only 32, and ironically enough has never played a game of golf in his life. However, that hasn't dampened his enthusiasm for seeing that the golfers get a run for their money in Los Angeles County.

Hahn has spear-headed the drive to "save the golf courses" although it is practically impossible for him to have a golf course in his own district since it embraces highly developed and well built up areas in the residential district of Los Angeles. That's one reason he is so interested—to see that the entire metropolitan area of Los Angeles is not built up into a sea of stucco and black-top from the mountains to the ocean. He, like the other supervisors, is anxious to preserve golf courses and open spots as breathing spaces for the millions now resident in the area and the millions to come.

## One Course Per 176,897 People

"In 1930 this area had but one golf course for every 46,862 persons. This was

still under the desired nation-wide pattern of one golf course for every 20,000 people. Then in 1947 we had one golf course for every 123,118 people, and today, based on the 1952 Los Angeles County population, it is one golf course for every 176,897 people," Hahn explained.

Already gone from the Southern California golf scene are such famous golf courses as the California CC, Midwick CC, the El Caballero CC, St. Andrews public course, the Clover Field course in Santa Monica, Sunset Fields with its two public courses, Flintridge CC, and others.

"If Southern California is to retain its popularity as a tourist center, and be attractive to new residents as well as supplying the recreation needs of its present population, not only must all present golf courses be retained but new ones must be built," Hahn said.

On motion of Supervisor Hahn golf rates on all county-operated golf courses were recently raised by the Board of Supervisors and are expected to bring into the county golf fund an additional \$75,000 to \$100,000 in golf funds to be used for further expansion and to aid in the overall campaign to "save our golf courses."

Los Angeles County got into the golf business in 1935-36 when in cooperation with the Federal Government it built Arcadia County Park, an 185-acre park within the corporate limits of the city of Arcadia. The park contains in addition to a swimming pool, tennis courts, two bowling greens and other recreational facilities, the 18-hole Santa Anita course.

In 1947 the County took over 54 acres of the former Pasadena GC property in Altadena. With Supervisor Roger Jessup as its champion, the Altadena public golf course was built and opened to the public as a nine-hole golf course. It met instant acceptance from the golf-starved public and within a year after its opening it became self-sustaining.

Also about that time in 1947, over in

Supervisor Raymond V. Darby's district, the Alondra Park course was being developed on a different theory. In this case, private capital financed and built the golf course on public lands at a cost of well over \$200,000 under a ground lease arrangement. At the end of the lease the golf course will revert to the County of Los Angeles.

Last year the steam shovels and the tractors of the huge Lakewood Park development were within a mashie shot of the beautiful Lakewood CC in the Lakewood development near Long Beach. Public sentiment was aroused and Supervisor Herbert Legg, in whose district Lakewood is located, stepped into the picture and after considerable negotiation a 25-year lease was arranged in which the county pays the bill and the public golf course has been saved. It is too early in the operation to tell what the future policy of operation will be, but at the present time it appears that the golf course will produce sufficient revenue from green fees alone to pay the rent, with maintenance and other expenses possibly being met by clubhouse and concession arrangements. This much is true: Lakewood—one of the West's finest golf facilities—has been saved for public use.

At the present time negotiations are advancing to save the Western Avenue Golf Course, a public golf course which is on the borderline between Supervisor Hahn's and Supervisor Darby's districts. In cooperation with Board Chairman, John Anson Ford, proceedings are under way which show promise of saving this golf course for public use on a condemnation and purchase plan.

#### **Oil Revenues for Golf**

The County is far-seeing in its program of golf development and is doing everything possible to keep these tourist attractions and recreational facilities in the picture. A recent action was to earmark oil revenues for golf purposes.

The resolution as presented by Supervisor Roger Jessup points out the fact that the County at the present time has a lease with an oil producing company on county-owned property at Wayside Honor Rancho at Castaic under which 23 wells are now producing oil with royalties for the first six months totaling \$409,925. It is expected that these oil royalties will increase and produce in the neighborhood of \$1,000,000 annually, earmarked for recreational purposes. The resolution becomes operative July 1, 1953 and says, in

part ". . . that such monies are to be used for the purpose of purchasing golf courses and regional parks, improving parks, and other similar purposes and that a citizens committee of prominent people be appointed by the Board of Supervisors to make recommendations on how the money should be disbursed within the limits outlined above and that the Chief Administrative Officer be requested to further and implement this policy."

The members of the committee include: Larry Crosby, Darsie L. Darsie, O. E. Ferber, Louis J. Pfau, Jr., Paul W. Green, George Hjelte, A. T. Jergins, B. Paul Gruendyke, George Johnson, Donald Metz and Melvin Oster.

The Board of Supervisors feels that it should be in a position when subdivision faces recreational facilities to step in and negotiate with the land owner to the end that the facility will remain for public use. This takes money, and by the accumulation of oil revenue from wells on county property and by impounding golf revenue paid by the golfing public, they will be in a position to act promptly and quickly when the occasion arises.

The actions of the Board of Supervisors in purchasing and leasing golf courses to the end that they will be preserved for the public good has precedent in action by governmental agencies in England.

A recent example is the action of the Croydon Corporation (a similar agency to the Los Angeles county government) in buying Addington Palace Golf Club, the clubhouse of which was formerly the residence of the Archbishop of Canterbury. This action, along with others, has been for the preservation of open spaces or a "green belt" in tightly-knit urban developments so that these historic and famous golf courses will not be taken over by other types of residential or commercial development and lost for all time.

Another measure aimed at saving the present golf courses is the recent order instructing the Regional Planning Commission to study the possible zoning of golf courses as recreational areas in order to save them from future subdivision purposes.

Where there's a very small town club there usually is a quick market for traded-in clubs. A high percent of players at these courses are new to the game and there are others who'd like to play but don't want to spend much for new equipment.

—Lenny Calderwood, St. Joseph (Mo.) CC