

City Course Operated As Valuable Public Utility

By **RUSS IVERSON**

Professional, Johnson Park Golf Course, Racine, Wis.

SEVEN YEARS AGO one of the main purposes of the Johnson Park municipal course in Racine, Wis., was that of providing hay for the Racine zoo. The course rough was cut at the end of each season to feed zoological specimens.

During about half of the golf season Johnson Park rough looked like the native haunts of some of the zoo beasts. It was nothing to charm a golfer unless a golfer wanted to combine hunting for a ball with hunting for wild game.

Then the Racine Park Board appointed Floyd Carlson superintendent of parks. Carlson came from Kenosha, Wis., 10 miles south of Racine, where he'd been park superintendent.

Now Racine has what we believe to be (after considerable investigation) the fifth finest public golf establishment in the United States. The population of Racine is about 72,000. In 1953 there were 62,933 9-hole rounds played on the course and a fee income of \$21,900. In 1945, the course fee income was \$12,590.

The course is a tough par 70. In 1951 and 1952 par never was broken. Last year par was broken 5 times. Most of the better players in southern Wisconsin and many from northern Illinois have competed against the lures and tests of the Johnson Park layout which makes sound use of natural hazards. The course always is in good condition despite heavy play. It earns the high approval of golfers who are accustomed to private course play and at the same time has exciting and satisfying attraction for Racine's men and women golf-

ers — from juniors to the lively elders — who score from 90 to 120.

Racine Proud of Course

I've been around golf some years myself and I've never seen or heard, or have been told by other professionals, of a public attitude of pride about a municipal course any stronger or higher than we have in Racine.

And this rating is no accident. It's a result of Carlson's thoughtful planning and the development of teamwork among course employees and city officials.

From every fellow working on the course up to Mayor Gothner the idea is to have the Johnson Park course a valuable civic asset that in its operation will rate alongside the most efficient operation of a city's water supply and sanitation facilities, its school system, its police and fire departments, its street system and other factors of first-class municipal essential services.

Another responsibility in the Johnson Park operation is that of making the operation one to realize the hopes of Herbert Fisk Johnson, founder of the Johnson Wax Co., who gave the course and its buildings to the city. It seems to us that anyone who makes such a gift to a community deserves to have the gift made an enjoyable, well utilized and grateful endorsement of his civic spirit.

The first job Carlson had after he appraised the Johnson Park course problem was to get a first-class course superintendent. He did that with great good judgment and good luck when he engaged Howard Gabbey. Gabbey, by the way, is pres.,



Russ Iverson, Johnson Park pro, and L to R, two of his assistants, Steve Edwards and John Powers. Edwards and Powers are University of Wisconsin students on the Iverson staff in the summer. Frank Kasper, the other of the quartette supplying private club service at a public course, is missing from this picture.

Wisconsin Golf Course Supts.' Assn., a position that is a recommendation of ability by men who are experts in golf course work.

City Officials OK Modernization

The course equipment was inadequate and in bad condition. Carlson got the mayor and the aldermen to approve a \$25,000 budget for new equipment, and that's been economical city management in improving a civic asset.

The rough was cut. The fairways were fertilized and weeds eliminated. The greens were transformed from hard patches of crabgrass and clover into greens equal to those of many of the best private clubs. Aerification and other operating procedures have maintained good condition despite heavy traffic and other wear from enthusiastic and uninformed players to which public courses are heir.

Paths and roads around the course, in the vicinity of the pro shop, the clubhouse, from greens to tees and areas around the

tee benches and ballwashers were put in good condition and black-topped for standing up under traffic.

The year Carlson took over Hank Kaiser who had been professional at Johnson Park decided to switch to the pro job at the Galveston (Tex.) CC and I was hired as Johnson Park's pro.

Pro Shop Is Service Station

The pro shop was a "natural" for making a golfers' service station that would give public course players the attractive and convenient supply and service facilities golfers get at the best equipped and most expertly conducted private clubs.

The shop is large and light and I picked out of GOLFDOM many ideas for making the shop very attractive and stocking it so our players would be served as well as if they were paying \$300 a year for private club dues.

I put in an extensive stock of clubs, bags, balls and other playing equipment, bag carts, shirts and other apparel and shoes.

The public course professional, unlike the



Players at Racine, Wis., Johnson Park municipal course, get perfectly fitted with fine clubs from Iverson's large stock. He's got a balanced stock of top quality clubs as well as clubs of a wide price range. Here golfers are invited to make themselves at home.

pro at the private club, doesn't have to worry about the caddy problem.

I think that if child labor laws and caddy rates were favorable to use of far more caddies on public courses we professionals at public courses would be able to take on some more valuable work and would aid in helping to reduce the juvenile delinquency problem and extend our services to our communities.

But, as long as the prevailing situation calls for bag cart rental service we must adjust to the condition. One public course pro department service that must be introduced, or increased where it is available, is that of bag cart repair. With repair parts and repair equipment on hand we can repair carts in one day and save golfers shipping costs and many days without use of their carts.

When Carlson came to Racine he'd had experience with the "manager" system of public course service which is a limited operation that only makes available a comparatively small stock of balls, tees, gloves

and a few other minor items to the players. This system is a long way from providing public course players with the private club sort of service they expect from a modern, efficiently operated public recreation facility.

Give Public Top Service

Carlson studied the "manager" and the pro-operated systems and had experience with both methods. He decided that to give Racine what the city officials could point to as providing the community's golfers with comprehensive and excellent pro department service — and at lower operating cost — the pro-operated policy obviously was the logical one.

And it does work very effectively for the common good and community satisfaction and pride. We have public course golfers coming from Milwaukee, 20 miles to the north, where the limitations of "manager" service at public courses prevent the development of private club atmosphere and they say in amazement, "Why haven't we got something like this? This place is run



A high ceiling, good lighting and attractive paneling in the Johnson Park shop provide better conditions for good selling display than there are in many private club shops. Customers get to see what they want to buy for greater enjoyment of golf.

like the Milwaukee Country Club or Blue Mound!"

And you know what that spreading talk means to the reputation of Racine as a desirable and well-run place for enjoying life. It's civic advertising worth thousands of dollars.

That also puts it up to me to be constantly at work thinking and doing something for the improvement of service to Racine's golfers. They must get demonstrations of first-class city service from me and my staff — demonstrations that will give a good strong hunch about the city administration's eagerness to have every phase of its operations conducted in a modern, competent manner for complete and pleasant service to the taxpayers.

I am confident that the Johnson Park operation has proved to the citizens, the mayor and the aldermen that Carlson, Gabbey and I have made Johnson Park's golf course an extremely valuable asset to the city. The citizens' recognition of this effort, and the par we think we have established for municipal golf course operations, have

had a definite effect on those few who at times past have considered switching the operating policy of Racine's public courses away from the high standard of pro department service that compares very favorably with that received by members of exclusive country clubs.

George Lamphear Southern California Supts.' Chief

Southern California Golf Course Supts. Assn. elected George Lamphear, Riviera CC supt., president to succeed Wm. Stewart of Hillcrest, at their annual meeting. Jack Baker of Valley Club, Santa Barbara, was elected vp, and Don Foelger, Alondra Park GC, sec.-treas.

Directors elected were Wm. H. Johnson, E. B. Marzolf, Wm. Beresford, L. Foss, C. Hollingsworth and Allen McDonald. Committee chmn. also were appointed.

Following the annual election the Turf Advisory committee meeting was held with Charles Wilson, USGA Green section and Robt. M. Hagan, associate professor of irrigation at Davis college, as speakers.