

# \$ \$ \$ AFTER DARK



Colonial Palms in Miami is lighted by 100 1,000-watt and 18 400-watt Wide-Lite mercury vapor floods mounted on palm trees. The 1,000-watt fixtures are used for lighting greens and fairways and the lower power units for tees.

## *Golf Centers Need Economic Aid That Lights Provide*

By **JOHN E. O'CONNOR, JR.**

Golf Consultant, Miami, Fla.

One of the most exciting recent golf business developments is what I call the "compact illuminated golf center."

This relatively new development is what the term implies. Its facilities include an 18-hole short course, miniature course, putting green, practice range and allied services such as a pro shop, snack bar, lounge and clubhouse. Most important, it is open after dark when the greatest number of people have the most leisure time.

A good example of the golf center is the 3,400-yard, 42-acre Colonial Palms Golf Center in Miami, the first of its kind in the country, which I designed, built and

put into operation during 1960-61. The specially planted palm trees dotting the course serve a dual purpose by providing aesthetic appeal during the day and serving as attractive "poles" for the mercury vapor floodlights at night.

Before installing the lighting system, I traveled the country to study existing systems at other courses. Quite frankly, I was anything but encouraged by what I found. Most were inadequate and did little to encourage night golf growth. However, after consulting with two major lighting fixture manufacturers, I decided that a mercury vapor lighting system was not only economically feasible but would do a very adequate job.

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I installed a 120-fixture Wide-Lite mercury vapor system in the strategically placed palm trees. Because of the extremely broad coverage and smooth illumination they provide, it was necessary to install fewer of these fixtures than other types. They are sturdily constructed, having a heavy gauge cast aluminum housing and a tempered glass lens for protection against flying golf balls and to seal out dust and moisture.

My selection of mercury vapor lighting was influenced by both economic and aesthetic considerations. They have a greater output than incandescent lamps and the quality of their light enhances the color of the greens and fairways. The lamp is rated at 16,000 hours, which means that it can stay in service eight years or more when operated five hours every night of the year.

In addition to the 18-hole course, Colonial Palms has a seven-acre, 40-tee practice range with ten sheltered tees; a one-acre, 36-hole miniature layout; two-acre paved parking lot; pro shop; snack bar; lounge; and clubhouse. Mercury vapor serves the entire playing areas.

Normally, players at unlighted courses stop teeing off about two hours before

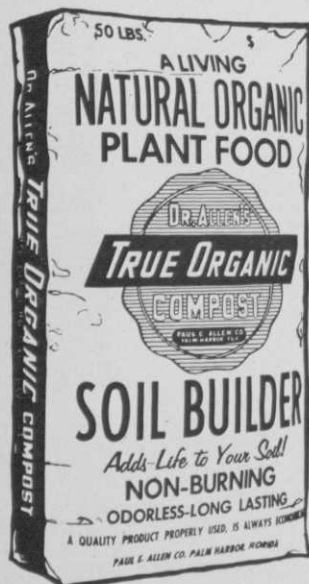
dusk because they don't have time to finish nine holes before dark. However, at Colonial Palms the first tee remains active well past this period because a round can be finished under the lights which are turned on approximately half an hour before dark.

Already more than 650 compact or Par-3 courses have been built in the U.S. and this number is being increased by 100 each year. If night golf is so marketable and unlighted compact courses represent a potentially great growth market, what are some of the economic factors that the prospective investor should consider?

The first, of course, is how well the course is doing without lights. Contrary to general belief, unlighted golf enterprises quite often do not live up to expectations. According to a National Golf Foundation survey of several years ago, the national average earnings of municipally-owned courses in prime areas with over 500,000 population runs from about \$10,000 annually for 9-hole courses to \$15,000 for 18-hole courses. Now, these are municipally-owned courses which pay no real estate taxes, and are operated as a community recreational service, not for

*(Continued on page 98)*

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## \$\$\$ After Dark

(Continued from page 74)

a profit. Privately-owned courses have the problem of paying taxes, making a profit and still remaining competitive with the many courses.

### Having Their Troubles

Miami, my home territory, is a prime golf location with a 12-month season. Of the seven privately-owned regulation courses built between 1960 and 1962, two have been refinanced, four are barely making expenses, and the other one, ideally situated near the beach hotels, does well only in the winter season.

With revenue erosion caused by real estate taxes, the higher cost of land and rising labor, material and other expenses, it is evident that a golf enterprise needs all possible financial assistance to be successful. I believe that the two most effective and productive means of providing such economic aid are to offer good lighting and to include allied facilities. The dramatic revenue increases I have seen at such compact illuminated centers after lighting and other facilities were added are proof that such investments are sound.

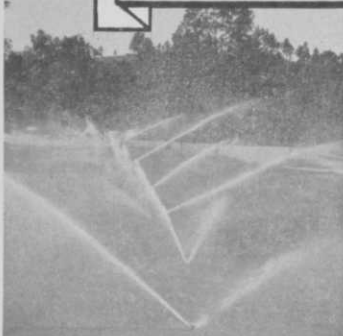
### Interplay Promoted

Well lighted practice ranges, miniature courses and allied features are business boosters because they promote interplay between facilities. This combination appeals to all family members including the non-golfers because they can enjoy them together. During certain periods, combined revenues of the driving range and miniature course may exceed total golf course fees!

Of the two major aids, good lighting is the most important. Under proper conditions, it has extended golf facility use as much as 40 per cent without increasing maintenance costs! Because golf is a service enterprise, receipts above overhead are largely profit. The additional revenue derived from extra play at night can make the difference between a successful or failing operation. The lighted centers I studied are netting from 15 to 25 per cent on the initial investment. Capital spent for lighting, usually less than 10 per cent of the course value, is most productive and good "insurance" for the center.

A compact illuminated center is the most profitable golf investment for sev-

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eral reasons. It requires only a third of the land required for a full-sized course, permitting it to be located closer to densely populated areas. Maintenance requires a labor and material cost only half as large as a regulation course. Furthermore, it is the ideal layout for efficient, effective and economical illumination.

The importance of good lighting cannot be overemphasized. There is only one way to light a golf course — properly. I know of several courses that spent large sums for lights but ended up discontinuing night play because lighting was poorly designed and installed. Such failures make it difficult to promote night golf, but these design and installation difficulties have been overcome with quality equipment and technical knowhow.

## Ratings for Casual Players

(Continued from page 55)

"We have an inducement plan for professionals," Brown states. "Our selling methods are aimed at providing a cash bonus for the shop personnel. At one northern California course, we have aimed our commission program at the assistant professionals. So far, this has gained the approval of leading head profes-

sionals who are interested in seeing their assistants get a break."

For Bill Brown, USGH is a fulfillment of a life's dream that has centered on golf activities, sales, and promotions. A one-time furniture and appliance salesman, Brown a few years ago became associated with Sprawkins Downtown Golf Shop in San Francisco, the largest merchandiser of golf goods in northern California. That made him a permanent convert to golf, if nothing else did. He has been working in the business end of the game ever since.

### Poor Man's Crosby

Brown has gained added recognition as a promoter through his creation of a golf safari called "The Poor Man's Crosby." This soiree was styled after the famous clambake, only the appeal was directed to Bay Area country club players who were lured into the Monterey peninsula for a sophisticated summertime golf tournament.

Bill Brown's ultimate aim is to put a handicap into every golf bag. He wants to make golf a game for the handicapped and by the handicapped. To Brown and the many people who only occasionally play the game, the only handicap in golf is no handicap at all.