

FLINT

Its expertly organized
muny setup pleases the
players, reaps a profit



By Jack Whitmoyer

Golf is big business and gets bigger every year. Municipal golf is catering to 40 per cent of the golfers in the U.S. on an estimated 15 per cent of the total number of the country's golf courses.

Flint, Michigan's municipal golf operation has enjoyed a substantial share of the game's growth. It has gone from a deficit in 1956 to a gross total of \$275,000 in capital improvements plus operating expenses between 1957 to 1963. It has been estimated that the national growth of golf is approximately six per cent annually. Flint's growth has been at an annual rate of 12 per cent. There are several reasons for this increase. Generally, they can be classified in this way:

- A. Public relations
- B. Advertising and promotion
- C. Facilities

The first step in Flint's approach to good public relations was the organization of a citizens golf advisory committee. The committee consists of members of municipal, semi-private and private clubs. They have been instrumental in promot-

ing the cause of municipal golf by their personal contacts and enthusiastic support of every phase of the city's golfing program. Their initial duty was to study the city's golf courses and determine what was needed to upgrade facilities and operations to get the support of municipal golfers.

Capital Improvement Fund

At the same time, Flint's citizens' administration board established the muny golf courses as a separate division of the city's recreation and park board and decided to put 10 per cent of gross golf revenue, plus any annual overrun, into a capital improvement fund solely for the purpose of improving golf facilities.

Until this time, Flint's golf operation has been, as many other cities have found out, a facility that had been constructed and left up to the initiative of the individual to use. There was no real organized program to increase or encourage participation.

Golf managers at each course are continuously instructed on the techniques of good public relations and practice them very enthusiastically. This has been



Fair size crowds always turn out for Flint's City Amateur. Here is 9th green scene at last year's event at Kearsley GC.

greeted with great public acceptance and satisfaction. Dick Sincerbeau directs the city's golf operations. His course managers are Andy Vert, Ed La Rose and George Fox.

Indoor Classes Started

The second phase of the reorganized operation has been a stepped up program of promotion and advertising. A first step in promotion was the organizing of indoor golf classes through the city recreation department during the early spring months. These were originally taught by the golf supervisor and golf managers. Increased demand has made it necessary to add instructors to this program. Now, the limiting factor is lack of available space and time in the recreation department's community houses.

The next step was to provide outdoor group classes at each of the muny golf courses. These have been doubled for each of the last three years and it will be necessary to increase the number of classes again in 1964. To make this possible, night classes will be held.

Juniors Get A Break

The next step in Flint's promotion program was to make Junior golfers a part of the complete plan. Junior players are given reduced rates on weekdays. They are encouraged to use course facilities on a scheduled basis for golf team and intra-

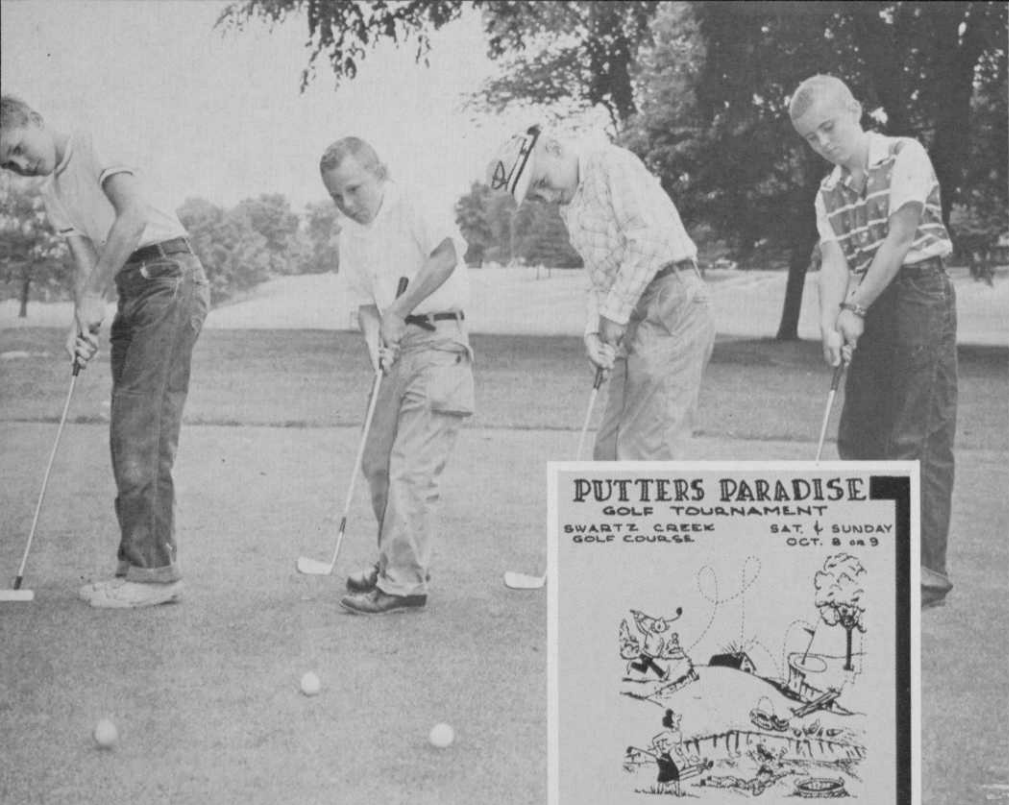
mural activities in cooperation with the school system's physical education program.

Another segment of the promotional program takes in Senior golfers. They have been organized into a weekly golf league that rotates among the municipal courses. A Seniors' tournament winds up the season. Seniors are given reduced rates during the same hours as the Juniors. Organized industrial and business leagues also are a vital part of Flint's golf operation and, of course, a part of each of the city's golf courses is kept open for individual players.

Another means of winning public approval has been the introduction of a putting green at the city's annual indoor yard and garden club show. The muny golf department also issues passes to the press, radio and television on a limited



Muny sponsors and officials get together every year for banquet in Swartz Creek clubhouse.



Everybody, including the kids, have a lot of fun at Putters' Paradise tourney, which climaxes the season. Most people figure they can't miss those eight-inch cups.

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GOLF TOURNAMENT

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basis and with definite controls. Coverage of special events and golf tournaments has improved immeasurably since this policy was inaugurated.

Tournaments, of course, are a good way of promoting golf operations. Tournaments for men, women, teenagers and Seniors are held through the summer. As a finale at the end of the season, a fun event called the "Putter's Paradise", in which 8-inch cups are used in place of approved 4¼-inch cups, is held.

Heavy on Publicity

Flint's golf department has used advertising to the fullest advantage. It buys advertising space and time in the newspaper and on the radio. In addition, the golf supervisor has conducted a daily golf program over two local radio stations for approximately five years. He also has conducted regularly scheduled TV instructional programs and has held interviews on both radio and TV to promote special golf events. The managers of the city's

courses have been encouraged to use the newspaper, radio and TV outlets, speak to local civic and social clubs and to get their pictures in the paper at every opportunity.

Posters are widely used in clubhouses, municipal buildings and local business firms in the downtown area, and in the suburban shopping centers for promotion of regularly scheduled or special events on the golf calendar.

Color in Score Cards

For the past three years the golf department has used brightly colored folder matches with golf department insignias emblazoned on them as a promotion piece. Score cards, brightly colored so they will be readily noticed wherever they are seen, have replaced the unimaginative white copies formerly used.

Flint's first step in providing complete golf facilities was to get a cross-section of opinion as to the things most frequent
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Flint Munny Operation

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ly used and urgently wanted by the golfing public. It developed that these were adequate lounge space, good food service, rest room facilities and social facilities.

A new clubhouse was constructed on the city's 27-hole layout, starting with a lunch counter type of food service with ample table and eating area. The primary aim in food service has been not to provide a wide variety of foods, but simple, frequently requested types of sandwiches and drinks and top quality lunches at reasonable prices. Another primary consideration has been adequate facilities for social functions. These are provided in interesting decor and are immaculately maintained.

Another prime consideration in the planning of the above mentioned clubhouse and the city's other two clubhouses was to include them in the winter sports program. This makes the buildings 12-month facilities. A warming room and food service setup is provided in these buildings for winter sports enthusiasts.

Vossler Returns to ABC's

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golf coach. That was in Ernie's Senior year at Paschal High in Ft. Worth.

By the end of that summer, Vossler was shooting in the 70s. On Labor Day he beat Joe Conrad, who later turned pro and played the circuit, in the final of a Junior tournament, and the following summer he won the Ft. Worth Amateur championship. Thereafter, Vossler claimed more than 25 amateur titles, including the 1954 Texas State.

Plumber's Apprentice

Meanwhile, Ernie was learning the plumbing business as an apprentice in his father's shop. His success as an amateur convinced him that there was certainly more glamor and possibly more money in working with a clubhead than a Stillson, and so in 1955 the young Texan transferred his journeyman's card from the plumbers' to the golf professionals' union. In June of that year, Vossler played in his first USGA Open at the Olympic Club in San Francisco and fin-