

## 7 New Public Courses for L.A. County

The Los Angeles County Department of Parks and Recreation has acquired or developed seven public golf courses by fiscal sleight-of-hand in a single package deal.

It has been done with virtually few precious, already over-extended tax dollars spent to date and without bonds or elections. The courses are being made available to the public now and not in some distant future.

"By acquiring these courses now we are able to save taxpayers an indeterminate but substantial sum of money," Norman S. Johnson, director of County Parks and Recreation, told *Golfdom*. "If we were to wait for available tax revenues, say 10 years from now, land costs could double or triple."

Johnson points out that his department, like so many similar agencies across the nation, is frustrated by what he calls "N.S.F. for V.I.P.'s—non-sufficient

funds for very important projects."

Los Angeles County is adding 188,000 residents annually and the growing demand for space has resulted in higher land prices. The county's golf playing public is looking more and more to the parks department to protect its recreation interests. Single and corporate private course owners are recognizing the investment potential of converting their valuable real estate to other ventures.

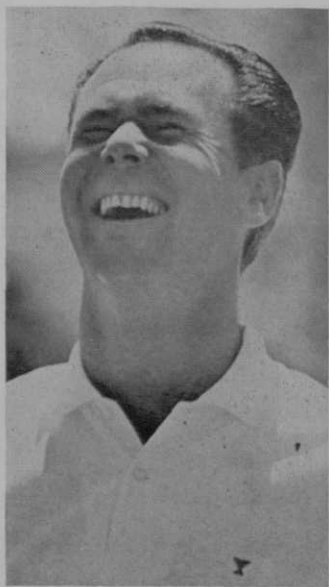
One of several solutions considered was outright purchase of existing privately owned courses before their conversion to business or residential developments resulted in loss to the playing public.

Ultimately, thanks to a bill signed in 1949 by then Governor Earl Warren permitting retirement associations to invest a maximum of 25 per cent of existing retirement funds in public works, a solution was found. Continued on next page

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Under California law, projects financed by retirement associations become their property. The associations in turn lease them back for a period of years to the public agency which operates them. This agency retains the option of gaining title anytime prior to or at the conclusion of the lease-term agreement.

Public works financed by the Los Angeles County Employees Retirement Association (LACERA) had included county administrative buildings, the county jail, and other facilities.

Upon the park department's recommendation, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors authorized negotiations with LACERA for outright purchase by the association of two existing private courses and sites of five planned golf courses, and subsequent early development of these latter facilities.

This approach became even more novel when private enterprise was invited to compete with LACERA for these projects.

Under the lease-purchase agreement finally negotiated, the retirement association purchased the two existing courses some time ago, and more recently, five future sites. The county immediately leased back these seven parcels for 4% per cent of the acquisition cost. Each course is leased to the county separately.

After construction on each new course gets underway, the lease rental is re-adjusted each six months to 4% per cent of the retirement association's mean investment to date. When completed, this

percentage figure is the base rental fee for the total project based upon a term of 20 years or longer, or whichever term has been determined by the Board of Supervisors.

The first two facilities acquired by the association were the Knollwood CC in San Fernando Valley and Western Avenue Golf Course in southwest Los Angeles. Since acquisition, Western Avenue has become the most heavily used known course in the country with nearly 144,000 rounds played annually.

Of the five planned courses, two are now open to the public. First to be finished was the Los Verdes Golf Course on a peacock-green promontory jutting into the Pacific Ocean at the tip of Palos Verdes Peninsula. Opened in December, 1964, was Diamond Bar Golf Course. Diamond Bar is the key recreation facility in the center of a mushrooming 8,000-acre planned community in eastern San Gabriel Valley.

In the planning stage are Victoria Golf Course, which will serve central and southwest Los Angeles County; Marshall Canyon Golf Course, located in the foothills of the Sierra Madre Mountains; and Los Amigos Golf Course, a pleasure font for players southeast of Los Angeles.

Diamond Bar and Los Verdes already are playing to near capacity, a clear indication of the great demand for new courses by the playing public.

Perhaps the L. A. solution, or a similarly ingenious financing system, could work for other park agencies in supplying critically needed recreation facilities.

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