

PUBLIC GOLF DEVELOPMENT IN THE 1960'S

by Harry C. Eckhoff, Director, Eastern Region, National Golf Foundation. Col. Eckhoff presented this paper at the Twelfth Annual Governor's Conference on Recreation and Parks held at the Washingtonian Country Club, Gaithersburg, Maryland, April 4-6, 1963.

The United States is in the midst of a recreational splurge never before equalled in its history. Americans, as a whole, no longer seem to be content to sit on the sidelines and enjoy their leisure as spectators. A growing number is actively participating in recreational activities and the game of golf, once regarded as only for an exclusive group, has become a favorite pastime enjoyed by individuals at almost all economic levels.

Cities, counties and states throughout the nation are becoming increasingly aware of the importance of golf as a national recreational activity. Many municipalities are initiating action for construction of public golf courses in order to alleviate the current shortage of such facilities.

National Golf Foundation records reveal there were 931 city, county and state operated golf courses in the nation as of November 1, 1962. This includes 872 regulation length courses and 59 par-3 layouts. While municipal golf operations represent only about 14% of the nation's total golf courses (7070), they serve about 40% of the country's golf play.

The number of rounds of golf played each year on municipal courses is staggering. Play ranges anywhere from 40,000 to 115,000 18-hole rounds on each 18-hole course annually. An excellent example of municipal golf growth in the City of Baltimore, Maryland, which has four 18-hole courses and one 9-hole course in operation. A recent letter from L. Edgar Myerly, Superintendent of Parks of Baltimore, says in part: "In 1961 we played 286,150 rounds on our courses. This past year, 1962, every indication pointed to our exceeding 300,000 for the first time. However, we had no golf after December 20 because of snow. Our final figure, 296,131 rounds. This is, by far, the greatest play in any one year on public courses in Baltimore. Golf seems to continue to become more popular every year."

WHY IS GOLF SO POPULAR

Why has golf become such a popular sport? There are numerous reasons. Major golf tournaments and golf television programs have had an influencing effect. National Broadcasting Company last season presented 115 hours of golf programs—up from 11 hours only two years ago. An executive of another network estimates that total network coverage of golf has increased 50% in the last two years. The results of these TV programs can best be stated by a recent quote of a noted columnist (Bob Considine) who said: "The only knock I can put on TV golf is that it is so good it drives new thousands of players into the game each week."

Newspapers and magazines continue to give greater coverage of golf. Reader interest has never been higher.

The greatest increase in golfers in the past five years has been among women—an increase of over 35%. More women and junior golfers are largely the factors that keep golf courses busy on weekdays.

Older people are taking up golf. They are finding it a game they can play at a time in life when they have to give up most other sports. The powered golf car has been a factor here; so have the shorter par-3 and par 60 courses which have tended to equalize competition for those who may find a full length course a bit too strenuous. As pointed out in a recent book. "Recreation in The Senior Years", by Arthur Williams, "Recreation is an extremely important aid in growing old gracefully. People who stay young despite their years do so because of an active interest which provides satisfaction through participation." Perhaps that is why senior citizens are finding golf so interesting and challenging.

NEED FOR MORE GOLF COURSES

With 7,000 golf courses of all types (nines, eighteens, standard lengths and par-3's) and a population of around 185,000,000, the nation now has a golf course of some sort for every 26,400 persons. There are probably seven million golfers in the United States today playing the 7,000 courses in existence—about 1,000 golfers per course. This definitely indicates a need for more courses.

There is every indication that there will be an even greater need for more golf facilities. At this time I would like to discuss certain factors and trends which will affect golf in the years immediately ahead.

First is the anticipated growth of population in the United States during the 10-year period 1960-1970. Reliable studies reveal that 250,000,000, or more, additional people will be added to our population by 1970. While there is expected to be an overall increase of about 19%, the 18 to 21 age group is expected to increase 56%.

Another segment of the nation's society—the over 60 age group—is constantly increasing. In the 1950's this group increased about 33-1/3%. It is believed it will increase another 20% during the 1960's. In the United States and Canada one of every seven persons is past sixty (about 14%).

Another factor which should increase golf play is more leisure time. At the turn of the century the work week was 60 hours. Shortly after World War II it was reduced to 40 hours. Today it has been reduced to 35 hours in some areas and there is every indication that it will continue to be lowered. Some studies indicate a 30 hour work week may be the general rule in the 1970's. With automation aiding both manufacturing and office workers, today's jobs are no longer as tiring as they formerly were. Likewise the migration to the suburbs is providing impetus for more outdoor recreational activity.

Family incomes are expected to increase about 20% by 1970 and almost half the families in the nation will have annual incomes over \$7,500 after taxes. With more leisure time and larger pay checks, it can be assumed that Americans will be spending a much higher percentage on recreation. Why not spend it on golf—a healthful outdoor game that can be played during one's entire lifetime.

THE MARYLAND PICTURE

Since most of the conferees here, I believe, represent Maryland communities, perhaps you may be interested in the status of golf courses in Maryland.

As of November 1, 1962, Maryland had a total of 91 golf course in play of which 83 are regulation length and 8 are par-3 layouts. A further study of the state's golfing facilities reveals that there are twenty-six

9-hole layouts and fifty-seven 18-hole operations in the following categories: 55 private clubs; 14 semi-private, and 14 municipal operations.

According to National Golf Foundation statistics, the combined areas of the District of Columbia and Maryland now have one golf course for every 42,468 persons. As stated previously, the national average is a golf course for about every 26,000 people. Maryland and the District of Columbia combined rank 49th among the states in ratio of golf courses to population. Only Alaska has fewer courses per capita.

The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission is taking action to alleviate the public golf course shortage. Four new municipal courses are either under construction or in late planning in Montgomery and Prince Georges Counties, according to John P. Hewitt, Director of the MNCPP Commission.

ACTION FOR MORE PUBLIC COURSES

What is being done throughout the nation to ease the lack of public golf playing facilities and meet the needs for the future? As stated previously, more and more communities are initiating action for construction of tax supported golf facilities. As of November 1, 1962, there were 60 new municipal courses or additions under construction. Leading states were: California 9; New York 8; Florida and Kentucky - each 4. Fifty-four new municipal courses and additions (including par-3's opened for play in the nation during 1962.

In some instances, where suitable open space areas are not available for construction of facilities, municipalities are purchasing existing country clubs and converting them to a public operation. Westport, Connecticut, provides an excellent example. About three years ago Westport purchased the existing 18-hole Longshore Country Club for \$1,925,000. The 182-acre facility was renamed Longshore Club Park when it became a municipal operation. With a \$10 annual family membership fee plus \$2 green fee each time a member played, it netted the city \$60,000 during its first year of operation.

Many counties in the United States are building and operating successful golf ventures. Montgomery County, Maryland, with its two year old Falls Road Golf Course is an excellent example. In some instances city and county park and recreation departments are merging in an effort to plan and operate needed recreational facilities (including golf) more effectively.

State parks, too, are adding golf courses. An outstanding example is Bethpage State Park, New York, where five 18-hole public golf courses are operating out of the same clubhouse. Among the existing state parks are New York, Kentucky, and Tennessee.

Some communities (among them Greensboro, N.C.) that had closed their city owned golf courses because of integration problems are now county park type areas of 400 to 1,000 acres each. Current plans call for an 18-hole golf course in each park, according to Manley C. Lewis of the City Department of Planning.

FEDERAL GOVERNMENT ASSISTS

In certain instances federal or state funds may be available to assist municipalities in developing needed golf facilities. The Area Redevelopment Program, recently initiated by the U. S. Department of Commerce, is designed to alleviate conditions of substantial unemployment in certain economically distressed areas and, among other things, encourages the creation of recreational tourists facilities in locations where such are deemed feasible. Such a recreational complex might well include golf courses. Should a public body (such as a county, city, or state) or

a local non-profit corporation have such a project approved under this program, it might be eligible for loans up to 80% of the cost for as long as 40 years at an annual interest rate of 3-3/8%. In some instances they might receive an outright grant for up to 50% of the cost.

Municipal and other local governmental bodies seeking to acquire "open space" for preservation from encroaching development may be eligible for federal aid from the Housing and Home Finance Agency for outright grants for a proportion of the land costs.

The Farmers Home Administration of the Department of Agriculture is also implementing a new loan program to associations for shifts in land use. Eligible for consideration of such loans are recreation associations, small country towns and other rural political subdivisions. Loan funds may be used to finance shifts in land use from farming to numerous other things, among them recreation and sports areas, golf courses, ski slopes, and camping facilities. Loans from appropriated funds may be made up to \$500,000. Maximum term is 40 years and interest rates may not exceed 5%.

NATIONAL GOLF FOUNDATION AIDS

Municipalities planning new golf facilities or desiring suggestions on operational procedures may find the services of the National Golf Foundation, (804 Merchandise Mart, Chicago, Ill.) helpful. The Foundation - a non profit corporation founded in 1936 by the major manufacturers of golf equipment—was organized to meet the need for a national clearing house for information essential to the planning construction, operation, and maintenance of golf courses and to increase public interest in the game.

By 1953 the need for new facilities became so critical that the Foundation's sponsors decided to establish a field service to directly assist in the development of all types of golf courses. In my capacity as the Foundation's Director for the Eastern Region (territory Maine to Florida) I met with almost 300 planning groups last year to give assistance on overall organizational, operational, and maintenance problems.

No discussion of public golf facilities would be complete without mention of the profit motive semi-private operations (privately owned but open to the public on a daily green fee basis). This group comprises about 34% of the nation's golfing facilities. The greatest growth in golf courses during the past 12 years has been this type: the number has more than doubled—up from 1141 in 1950 to over 2,600 today. This is a good indication that golf courses can be and are profitable operations.

ADVANTAGES OF MUNICIPAL GOLF

Municipal golf operations, too, may be profitable if such is the desire of the administrators in office. Many cities, however, have a policy of not making a profit on their golf operations. They do feel, however, that the golf course revenue should pay all operating costs and charge green fees accordingly. A nationally recognized standard for municipal golf courses is one 18-hole course for the first 20,000 population plus one 18-hole course for each 30,000 additional. Municipal golf courses are proving to be tremendous assets to their respective communities. Not only do such courses provide to their respective communities. Not only do such courses provide healthful, enjoyable recreation for all; increase property values in the surrounding areas; attract new industry; stimulate civic pride and create new business, but they also can be profitable.

