

# Municipal Golf Course Operations

## AREAS OF CONCERN

by GROVER C. KEETON, Superintendent of Special Activities, City of Dallas Park and Recreation Department, Dallas, Texas

In operating a municipal recreation facility, the facility should be designed to meet the recreational needs of the community. A municipal golf course should follow this philosophy if it is to fulfill the requirements of golfers of all age groups. Figures compiled by the National Golf Foundation indicate that municipal golf operations represent only 14 per cent of the nation's golf courses, and yet they serve about 40 per cent of the country's players. Play is increasing, and the greatest increase is from juniors and lady players.

The number of players has grown to the extent that public golf course operators must adapt their thinking and operations toward the design of the course, the construction, the rules and policies regulating play, and the training of operating personnel. Increase in leisure time means an increase in play and traffic.

Some of the major areas of concern which we have experienced in operating a municipal golf course in order to welcome this traffic includes:

*Design*

*Construction*

*Maintenance*

*Personnel*

*Player Educational Programs*

*Record-keeping*

### DESIGN

Golf facilities today are being designed and constructed on land which is less desirable for other types of development, and yet many times a golf course will beautify and convert a rugged real estate problem into an attractive open-space area for the community.

Designers of municipal courses should consider the attractiveness of a course to 250 or

more players per day. Designers must also consider the time available for playing the course. It must not be too difficult; it should allow the player to have an encouraging score. Concern for the safety of players and for the movement of traffic on the course are also a part of the designer's job.

### CONSTRUCTION

It is most desirable to use a golf course architect in planning and designing. If it is necessary to reduce cost, reduce it in areas other than in the construction of the greens and irrigation system. A definite plan should be followed in the construction of greens. These plans should include specifications for size, soil mixture, drainage, seed bed, surface drainage and contours. These are all essential items regardless of who is to operate the course. On a municipal golf course, as well as on all others, the putting green is the principal attraction. It should receive the principal attention during construction.

The tees may be designed, constructed and maintained as a part of the fairway. They should blend with the natural terrain and slope of the fairway. Such a layout will enable placement of tee markers at many locations and will better distribute the traffic.

As in the case of tees, the fairways may also be constructed to be played with a minimum of hazards and a continuous, safe movement of play. As noted previously, it is not practical to reduce drastically construction costs in the fairway irrigation system.

One of the most controversial features of a municipal golf course is the location and number of bunkers. This presents a condition which



*Tenison Memorial Park Municipal Golf Course - West Course, showing No. 17 fairway in foreground and approach to green; upper left is adjacent fairway No. 11 with three trees protecting green. This view illustrates a typical layout of adjoining fairway screening with trees, rapid fairway mowing, attractive relaxing view by public links player, and faster movement of traffic on the course.*

is, in all probability, unique to each golf course operation.

### MAINTENANCE

Maintenance of any golf course will include such items as mowing, aerifying, vertical mowing, tree maintenance, irrigation, fertilizing, equipment care, chemical treatment, etc. However, on a municipal course these responsibilities are increased to include the maintenance of the clubhouse area, parking lot area, curbs and gutters. These areas receive heavy use and must be maintained while the golf course is being played seven days a week with an average daily play of 250 to 300 rounds.

It is difficult in a municipal operation to establish different standards of maintenance for greens, collars, aprons, tees, and bunkers. Therefore, we concentrate on greens, tees, fairways and roughs. The secondary areas such as aprons and collars cannot be treated separately.

Golf cars have become an added service to the golfer, and public golf course maintenance must adjust accordingly. We have made provisions for golf car paths, signs and housing facilities.

Today, public golf operations must also be concerned with course beautification. For exam-

ple, trees and shrubs may not contribute to lowering scores, but they do affect the attractiveness of the course and add to greater enjoyment of play.

Trees offer an additional safety advantage on public golf courses by providing barriers between fairways.

We emphasize in turf management that soil is the foundation of the golf course. Soil has four functions to perform for the grass plant. It provides support, serves as a source of nutrients, air, and water. While performing these functions, soil must also resist compaction under daily traffic and/or adverse weather conditions.

A good fertilization program is also stressed because it is one of the equalizers to traffic damage on turfgrasses. The use of three R's is an important guide—RIGHT AMOUNT OF THE RIGHT KIND AT THE RIGHT TIME. Depending upon a number of factors, such as the fertility

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### Correction

A caption under a picture on Page 13 of the September issue of the Green Section Record incorrectly identified injury to the turf pictured there as "fungicide injury." The caption should have read "herbicide injury."



*Tenison Memorial Park Municipal Golf Course showing clubhouse and one of two parking lots and park drive. Note approximately 150 parked cars which would indicate approximately 450 players on 36-hole course on a week-day at 4:00 p.m.*

level of the soil, species grown, clipping management, leaching losses and others, turfgrasses need relatively large amounts of nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium to meet the increased play on public golf courses today.

It has been said that irrigation is so important that the golf course should be constructed where the water is, rather than bring water to the golf course. However, it is noted that you can do as much damage to turfgrasses by watering too much as by watering too little. Too much water in areas of heavy traffic aggra-

vates compaction. Therefore, overwatering, plus heavy traffic is a double dose of compaction to the turf. The soil probe used to check the desired amount of moisture in the root zone is one of the most important instruments on the municipal course.

#### **PERSONNEL**

It is impossible to mention special areas of concern on a municipal course without mentioning personnel, employment, training, and supervision. I suppose this is equally important in

any golf operation, but there is a special emphasis in the case of public course work because we are serving many people of all ages, with varied interests and with varied economic backgrounds.

The personnel in the clubhouse and on the course must operate as a team and as a unit with complete and thorough communication with one another through proper channels. Because of these conditions, we have found it desirable to publish a golf course operator's manual outlining rules, regulations, fees, and policies which apply to the golf course. It is made available to all personnel.

### PLAYER EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM

An important area of concern today, and this is possibly unique in public golf course operation, is an educational program to encourage public links players to take care of the golf course by replacing divots, observing course etiquette and using the putting greens properly. New golfers should not only learn how to play the game, but also learn how to use the course through this educational program.

Particular emphasis is given to a litter control program. All golf course personnel must learn that this is an area of concern, and yet one that we must live with. A golf course with no litter does not have many players. Our player educational program also disseminates information to the players through brief notices on score cards, signs on the course and in the clubhouse.

I don't know of any golf course which can completely eliminate vandalism—either thoughtless (majority of such acts) or malicious. Our experience shows that most vandalism involves the putting surface, drinking fountains, and restroom facilities. The best approach we have found to vandalism is to recognize that it will occasionally occur, to remove the evidence as quickly as possible, and to have a preventive program in order to minimize these acts.

### RECORD-KEEPING

Written records and reports are a necessity! This is not a task to be done annually, semi-annually or monthly, but, in most cases, daily. Record-keeping should encompass items such as labor, materials, equipment, rounds of golf, and receipts. The advantages are many. Of primary importance is determining how maintenance money is spent, and assembling data for annual planning and annual reports. These reports be-

come increasingly important for future comparative studies. Written reports and record forms should be prepared so that they can be easily compiled and used as a reference for operating conditions.

A few years ago we had the pleasant experience of participating with the USGA in standardizing golf course record-keeping. This was a valuable experience. We now use the following standard measurements in preparing and submitting written records:

1. Labor—man hours to determine the amount of work on any part of the course.
2. Fairways and roughs—use "one acre" as a unit of measurement.
3. Putting greens—use a standard measurement of "1,000 square feet."
4. Liquids—liquid ounces, pints, quarts and gallons.
5. Solids—ounces and pounds.

In conclusion, public golf course operations do not present problems simply because they are public. The problems we have are the result of increased play from all age groups: from 7 to 87. Of course, our concern would be even greater if we did not have this kind of problem. So, let's just say that municipal operations today present a challenge; and we aim to meet it!

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### ABOUT THE AUTHOR



*Grover C. Keeton, Superintendent of Special Activities, has been with the City of Dallas Park and Recreation Department for 22 years. He is a member of the USGA Green Section Committee, a member of the National Parks and Recreation Association and is a former President of the Texas Turfgrass Association.*