

Efforts underway to jazz up local greens

Written by By Holly J. Wagner Sun Correspondent
Friday, 31 March 2023 04:13



A few seasons of irrigation problems during severe drought conditions with intermittent monsoon rain has left the Fox Run Golf Course in tatty condition, forcing staff to close the course for this year to reseed and get it back into shape.

“Every year for the last three or four years, it’s been [water] outage after outage. You are seeing the damage that the course took during that time. It takes a little while for that to show up,” the city’s Director of Golf, Matthew Alcala, explained during the March 14 city council meeting.

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The course will be closed starting March 27 until around October. The driving range and pro shop will remain open during the renovations, but the nearest course open for a round of golf is Coyote de Malpais in Grants.

“Ideally we can hopefully get at least nine holes open in October and the rest shortly thereafter,” Alcala said.

That will mean no tournaments this year, although the course will still be able to host events, such as a DWI awareness run scheduled for March 30.

Alcala considered the possibility of closing the course in halves, leaving nine holes at a time open while the other half was undergoing renovation. But that would stretch an already short staff, forcing them to split time between course renovation and daily maintenance at the same time they are connecting to a new effluent line that will provide gray water for the course.

Last year the course struggled to hire the four seasonal workers it needs just for regular operations, and Alcala isn’t optimistic that this year will be better. During last season the staff reseeded holes 10, 15 and 17 so they are in better shape this year, but eager golfers made that a challenge.

“We closed three holes and remained open during play,” Alcala said. “We restricted the drive to the green, we reminded them again. We put up ropes. Yet they were still trying to go out and play on freshly seeded areas.”

Those issues combined led to his recommendation to close the whole course at once to get it in shape.

“We want to get revenues up as fast as we can, but also make the course as nice as we can for the golfers, so there’s something for people to enjoy,” Alcala said. “This option will give us the fastest way to raise our revenues and get the course back on track and give us something nice.”

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In a rare split vote, the city council voted 3-2 to close the whole course for the year. Councilors Fran Palochak, Dist. 4, Linda Garcia, Dist. 1, and Michael Schaaf, Dist. 2, voted for the closure, while Mayor Louie Bonaguidi and Councilor Sarah Piano, Dist. 3, favored an option to close nine holes at a time.

“Closing nine holes and renovating is very common in the golf world,” Piano said. She was concerned about the loss of revenue from the course, as well as displacing charity tournaments hosted there during the summer. Alcala said the course hosted seven tournaments last year.

Piano and Bonaguidi are also concerned that closing the course will train golfers to go elsewhere.

“I’ve had a number of calls and the general consensus is ‘keep nine open,’” Bonaguidi said. “We don’t want to lose our customer base for sure. In my own business, if I ever had to remodel I would do whatever I could to stay open, even if it’s half the business.”

For their part, golfers remember when the course was redone in 2014, at a cost of \$5 million. They have mixed reactions to the closure, but agree it will be worthwhile if it brings the course back for future years.

“Do I have faith that they can turn it around? My faith is gone at this point. But I would definitely go back if they can turn it around,” Isaac Leyba, who gave up his membership as the course fell into disrepair, said.

Leyba thinks the problems are a management issue.

“I think management is hurting that golf course more than anything. With the management it has now, I don’t think it will ever get back to where it was,” he said. “There’s no leadership or accountability. The only time it seems to die is when they work on it or when they see a problem and they don’t work on it.”

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David Haynes, who plays with a group of fellow retirees, has similar concerns, but he's prepared to give Alcala the benefit of the doubt.

"We love playing golf and we want some activity in Gallup. I would like the course fixed, absolutely, but I can't see how they can manage to get this course back in condition," Haynes said.

The one thing golfers agree on is that they want a place to golf without having to drive for an hour or more to do it.

"We'd all rather play here if we could. The drive to Grants is an hour and it makes a long day," Haynes said.

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