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Dallas Morning News Article on the Course

City-run Chase links seem out of the woods

Allen aimed to break par when it took over course

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By ED HOUSEWRIGHT / The Dallas Morning News

No comparison.



Photos by BRANDON THIBODEAUX/DMN

Co-workers Jose Quinones and Quentin Gafford (right) finish up a hole at Chase Oaks during their weekly Friday morning outing. Allen bought the course last year for \$5 million and has invested in improvements.

That's how Gus Koroneos describes the conditions at Chase Oaks Golf Club today vs. a year ago, when the city of Allen bought it.

"It's absolutely great," said Mr. Koroneos, a frequent player of the Chase links. "It's a lot better."

The city's first attempt at running a golf course is proving successful, officials say. The number playing is up slightly, and the city has completed close to \$1 million in improvements.

"I'm very pleased with where we are," said Tim Dentler, parks and recreation director. "It's really coming along."

Chase Oaks, which borders Central Expressway at Legacy Drive, opened in 1986 as a high-end public course. Its layout was more challenging and its fairways better manicured than most city-owned courses.

Soon, however, a rash of public and private courses opened in the area, draining business from Chase Oaks. The 27-hole course went through several owners and was in foreclosure when Allen bought it last year for \$5 million.

Officials called it a steal. By comparison, they said, it would cost \$10 million to \$12 million to build a municipal course.

Allen's population has exploded to more than 60,000, and officials thought it needed a golf course to complement a growing list of park and recreation facilities.

The city lost \$100,000 to \$150,000 on the course in the first year, but officials expect it to break even in a few years and even turn a slight profit.

"We approached it with the attitude that we're going to make it affordable," City Manager Peter Vargas said.

"The council's philosophy was that, at least initially, it might need to be subsidized, which is not any different than any other recreational facility."

The city dropped greens fees about \$5 to attract more residents. Fees now range from \$12 to \$45, depending on the day and time. Seniors and Allen residents get a price break.

Next, officials plan to increase activities at the course. For instance, they want to offer group lessons and golf camps for beginners – both kids and adults alike, Mr. Dentler said.

"We've got to make sure we promote this golf course as a family-oriented facility," he said. "We want people who have never played golf to come out and try golf."

"Golf is a very traditional sport, but we've got to adjust to the needs and wants of the community."

In the past year, the city has made a number of improvements, both visible and out of view. Serious erosion problems – the course is traversed by Rowlett and Russell creeks – have been corrected. City workers also upgraded the irrigation system, repaired cart paths and improved fairways and greens, said Bryan Rauscher, Chase Oaks general manager.

"I'm 100 percent confident that if people come out, they will see the changes in the course," he said. "We've made massive improvements, but we still have a lot of work to do."

Mark Tondera, who lives near the course and has played there for more than a decade, likes the changes.

"The greens are probably in the best shape they've been in in the last five or six years," he said. "The city has spent a lot of money doing things that needed to be done for a long time."

Chase Oaks is considered a tough course, in part, because of heavy woods and several water hazards. Golfers also face dozens of deep, intimidating sand traps.

In the next year, officials want to make the course a little easier for average players. They may shrink or eliminate some traps and smooth out some fairway mounds.

"We want it to be challenging," Mr. Vargas said. "As a friend of mine told me, he's going to come back till he beats that course."

"But at the same time, you also want to have more [people] play."

On Nov. 12, the city plans a grand-opening ceremony to highlight its ownership of the course. There will be activities and prizes for children and adults, Mr. Dentler said.

"We're trying to send the message that, yes, we're the new owners, and we want you to come out and try it," he said. "It's not the same Chase Oaks as three years ago."

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