



Entry for the Agricultural, Environment & Natural Resources 2021 CSAC Challenge Award

Overview – San Luis Obispo County Parks developed facilities, partnerships, and programs to turn an under-performing municipal golf course into a diverse recreational center that generates revenue.

Challenge – Dairy Creek Golf Course, located in El Chorro Regional Park, struggled due to the lack of irrigation water provided by a local prison. AB 109 significantly reduced the prison population thereby reducing the available effluent water for the Park. Course conditions deteriorated from the lack of irrigation and therefore participation and revenue decreased by 36% and 50% respectively. A bond was originally issued to finance the construction of the course and the annual debt service of \$485,000 (includes principle and interest) remains due until 2027.

Solution – Staff looked at the various options to improve the financial position of the Golf Fund. We strongly believe that municipal golf is a core element of our mission and resolved to finding a solution that would not reduce that commitment to golf. Through public meetings and focus groups, the golf course reduced to a 9-hole course as the abandoned holes were converted into additional practice areas, walking trails, and a temporary disc golf course. By partnering with a local University, restaurateur, and Topgolf, we collectively developed a welcoming community facility that introduces people to the game of golf with a fun and inclusive Toptracer Range and learning center. The University golf teams now have a home where they develop connections with the local community and the community gained a quality practice area and Toptracer Range. The Toptracer Range is a golf facility where people hit golf balls into an open green space which are tracked with cameras and the shot data is portrayed onto a computer display just like PGA Tour events on TV. This data provides shot specific information and metrics instantly to players as they practice or compete against others in their group or across the world playing the various games or famous golf courses which are available. The bays are rented by the hour and include food and beverage service and TVs to watch sports or other programming. This has been so popular with all demographics of our community that it has dramatically changed the finances of our County Golf Program consisting of our three golf courses.

Innovation – Municipal golf is often perceived differently from other recreational activities such as basketball, softball, soccer, tennis, pickle ball, and many other programs that require infrastructure for participants. We believe that golf should be supported, as is the case with other rec programs, to promote a healthy community through outdoor activity, social connections, and personal well-being. We chose to support the game of golf by changing the culture of the facility as well as the innovative use of the Toptracer technology to create a conduit to get people to the golf course in a fun in a non-traditional golf environment.

Results –Through community involvement and the support of our County Board of supervisors, the conversion of Dairy Creek Golf Course has helped generate a Golf Fund net profit of \$413,000. More importantly, the Dairy Creek Golf Course is filled with more energy and excitement than ever before. A vibrant restaurant has reopened, a new short game practice facility is busy with lessons, and the Toptracer Range has been sold out and received very positive responses from the public as a fun new activity for families and groups to create memories.

Replicability – Many communities view golf as a service only provided by private golf courses and are ceasing the provision of municipal golf due to the costs involved and the result is a decline in a sport that provides many physical, economic, and social benefits to a wide range of the members in our communities. However, we often do not think twice about subsidizing soccer, basketball, tennis, softball, and other sports facilities which often are less utilized than the local “muni” golf course. San Luis Obispo County Parks put our focus on our entire community in this project in order to change our story. Municipalities everywhere can re-invent their golf courses by looking at their opportunities a bit differently in an effort to attract more users to their golf course(s) by engaging their community members and not being afraid to take a chance with something new.

Focusing and investing in our communities is not only replicable...it is required!

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