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Tayman Park's upgrade on course

Renovations ongoing, but 9-hole golf facility in Healdsburg, around since 1923, is no longer desert of divots

By **BRUCE MEADOWS**

THE PRESS DEMOCRAT

HEALDSBURG

Tayman Park, the aging granddaddy of Sonoma County golf courses, is getting a new lease on life.

The old municipal course was pretty much on the ropes until Frank Johnson and Jimmy Stewart came up with a 1-2 punch. Johnson took over as director of golf in early 1998, and Stewart took over the lease with the city in December, 1999.

FOR THE BETTER

Tayman Park Golf Course
927 South Fitch Mountain Road,
Healdsburg

Phone: 433-4275

9 holes, par 33 for men,
35 for women

Green fees: weekdays \$11 for 9 holes, \$17 for 18; weekends \$13 for 9 holes, \$19 for 18; twilight, senior, junior rates available.

Since that time, Tayman Park, the oldest course in the county (1923) slowly but steadily has been moving toward the pair's goal of making it one of the best nine-hole courses in the area.

"When I got here, I heard mem-



JEFF KAN LEE / The Press Democrat

John Azevedo and Mike Lucia play the new first hole at Healdsburg's Tayman Park.

bers say it had always been in bad shape," said Johnson, 37. "They kind of accepted it, but I didn't."

Kay Steinbach has been playing at Tayman Park since she was 14 and has seen the course at its worst.

"The city charged too much for water, so they really didn't water the course much," said Steinbach, now 67. "These guys are trying to take care of the course, and it shows."

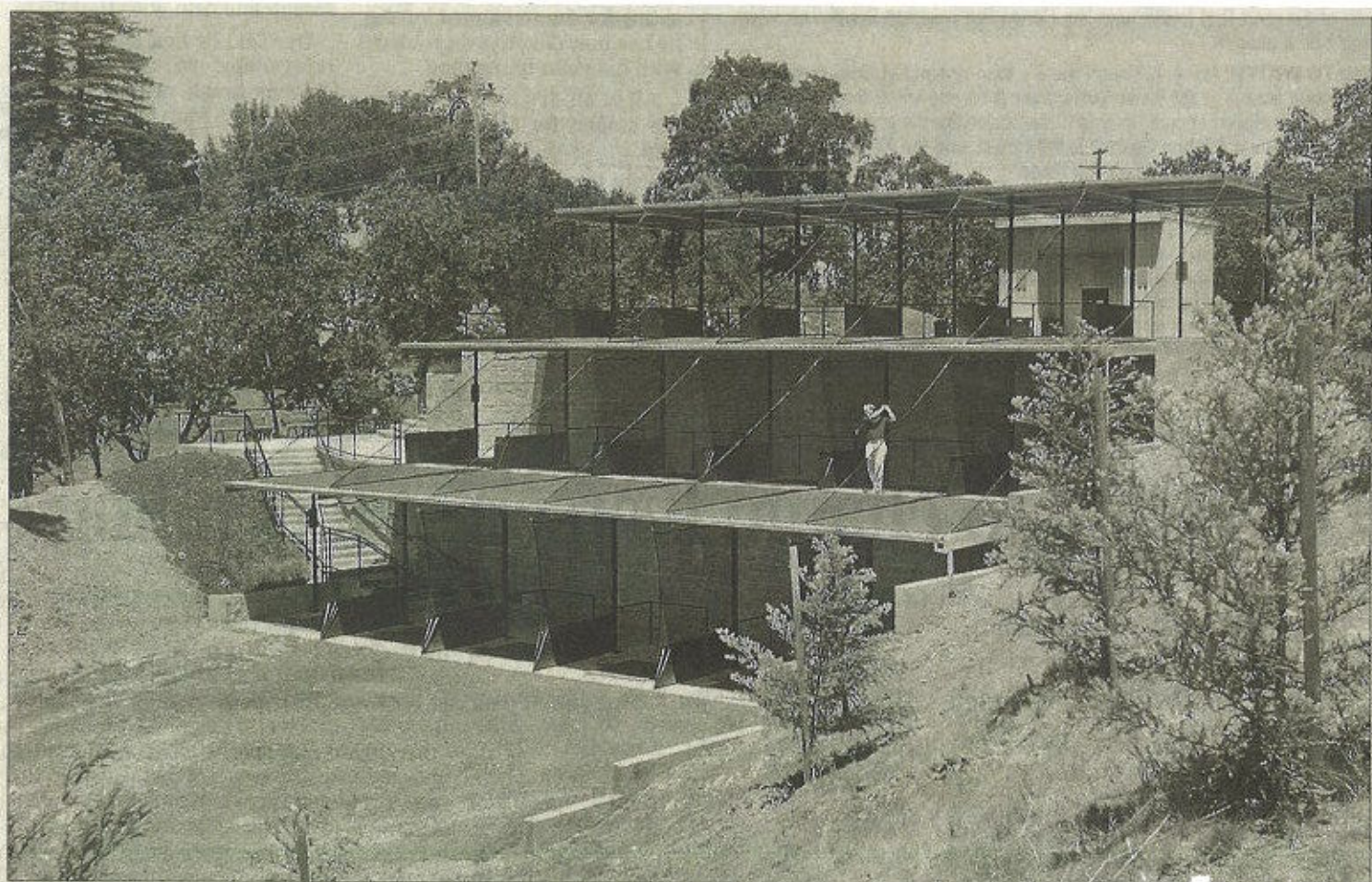
The first step in the resurrection of Tayman Park came when it ob-

tained use of its own well and with it an adequate supply of irrigation water. It went from a dry, dusty desert of divots to a green golf course.

"It wasn't that it was an embarrassment as much as you had to wonder how it ever got that bad," said Johnson.

When he arrived, Johnson had a five-year plan, and when Stewart assumed the lease, things started to

TURN TO TAYMAN, PAGE C4



JEFF KAN LEE / The Press Democrat

Healdsburg's Tayman Park Golf Course now has the only three-tiered driving range in Sonoma County.

TAYMAN: Local ownership creating golfing niche in area

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fall in place.

A three-tiered driving range opened in April, a new first hole opened last year and a renovated clubhouse with a new deck affords one of the best views from any local course.

"It's a great view, and it was being wasted," said Stewart.

The pro shop and restaurant have been flip-flopped, with more space for golf equipment. The old clubhouse next to the pro shop/restaurant still has the classic mahogany bar installed in the 1920s, and an upgraded kitchen area.

Another significant change was the re-routing of the entry road. In the old days, it dissected the first hole. Most golfers resisted trying to hit a moving target, but not all of them.

"I can recall some cars being hit," said Johnson.

The new road uses the same entrance, but winds its way past the new first hole, a downhill par-3 to the right as you drive in, through a grove of sig-

nificantly thinned-out trees and past the pro shop.

The putting green is now behind the driving range and the cart barn is also relocated behind the parking lot.

"Calling what we had a range is a stretch," said Stewart, a four-year player at University of Houston who competed on the Asian Tour and worked for noted course architects Ron Fream and Robert Trent Jones. "Golfers hit back at the first tee and they had to use irons."

The new all-weather range, the only one of its kind in the area, has three levels of six stalls each. At the far end of the range is a lesson tee.

"We're getting a lot of people back who had stopped coming here ... a lot more families and kids," said Johnson. "This is a family place, and people realize we are going to be here for a long time."

Joel Wright, 64, has played Tayman Park since he was a teen-ager.

"Word has gotten out and

people who decided it wasn't worth playing here are coming back," said Wright, who lives within a half mile of the course. "This means a lot to the city."

With the first phase of renovation nearly complete, Stewart is looking to what he calls a 10-year plan.

"We want to take a hole a year and rebuild the green so it looks more like our first hole," he said. "We're also looking at lengthening some holes."

The greens, said Stewart, are in good shape, "but we want them to be uniform."

Tayman is starting to draw attention from tournaments, too.

"We are getting more, but we don't want to book so many it comes at the expense of our regular customers," said Stewart.

In 1935, it cost 25 cents for a round of golf at Tayman; for 50 cents you could play all day. A month of unlimited play was \$5, an annual membership \$12.

"I can remember that \$5 rate," said Steinbach. "I used to play 36 holes a day."

Things have changed, but Johnson and Stewart still try to keep the lid on green fees.

On weekdays it costs \$11 for nine holes, \$17 for 18; on weekends it's \$13 and \$19. Junior rates are \$6.50 and \$10.50, and seniors pay \$8 and \$13.

Twilight rates (noon) are \$12 weekday, \$14 weekend; super twilight rates are \$8 and \$10.

"We think we have a niche in the area," said Stewart. "We want to keep it affordable ... I mean, how can a family afford to play at most courses?"

Johnson said having local ownership is the key. The previous lease was held by Club-Corp, a Dallas group.

"Jimmy and I are golf people, not business people," said Johnson. "The future of this place is unlimited."

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