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Asheville waives \$12K fee for Skyview at money-losing Munie

By Keith Jarrett

A city-owned golf course that lost more \$75,000 in the just completed fiscal year allowed a local tournament to play for free for three days, waiving a \$12,000 fee.

Asheville Municipal Golf Course hosted the 50th Skyview Pro-Am/Junior Tournament Tuesday through Thursday, Buncombe County's largest stroke-play event that had a field of 170 adults and 57 junior players.

Last year the city charged the Skyview Golf Association \$66 per player in exchange for shutting down the course for three days, a move that costs the city an average of around \$4,000 a day in the peak summer days.

That loss was offset by the approximately \$12,000 the Skyview paid the city, but that fee was waived this year after the association lost a \$7,000 sponsor.

A Parks and Recreation board agreed to waive the fee after the association made the request to play for free.

"The loss of \$12,000 will impact us but it's not the deciding factor on our annual budget," said Asheville Parks and Recreation superintendent Danny Hopkins.

"We felt like this was the right thing to do. It's the 50th year of a tournament that does a lot for the community, and their organization provides lot of volunteer work for the golf course."

According to an annual budget provided by Hopkins, the golf course had \$75,701 more in expenses than revenues in the 2008-09 fiscal year that ended June 30.

Asheville mayor Terry Bellamy, who issued a proclamation honoring the Skyview's 50th tournament, said she wasn't involved in the decision to waive the fee.

"They've paid fees to the city for (a lot of years), and I think it's important that we keep this tournament going," she said.

"This tournament started at a time when golf courses were still segregated, and we should do all we can to maintain historical events like the Skyview."

Billy Gardenhight, the tournament director since 1972, said the city gets many benefits from his event.

"I don't think the city or the golf course loses any money on this," he said. "For 50 years we've brought a lot of people to the city who stay in motels and eat in restaurants. On Sunday and Monday before the tournament, golfers come to this course and pay green fees to play their practice rounds."

Gardenhight, 74, said the association annually gives about \$4,000 to the community for a scholarship fund and to charitable organizations.

"This was a one-year deal, and we will negotiate with the Skyview about what fee to charge in later years," said Hopkins.

"We think we can build a partnership with the city," said Gardenhight. "We could have put on the tournament without the waiver, but there wouldn't have been any money left to give to our causes."

Entry fees for this year's tourney, which ranged from \$225 for pro players, \$140 for amateurs and \$75 for juniors, brought in about \$20,000.

The total purse paid out to the pro and senior pro divisions was \$9,800 and \$9,000 more was spent on prizes for amateur winners, according to Skyview officials.
