



# City Park Golf Master Plan New Orleans, Louisiana



Master Plan Report for

**The New  
New Orleans  
City Park Golf Course**

New Orleans, Louisiana

**February 2009**

prepared for  
New Orleans City Park  
and  
The Office of Facility Planning & Control  
State of Louisiana



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**REES JONES, INC.**

GOLF COURSE DESIGN

**2009  
THE NEW  
NEW ORLEANS CITY PARK  
GOLF COURSE IMPROVEMENTS**

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**LETTER OF TRANSMITTAL**



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February 16, 2009

Mr. Bob Becker, Director  
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1 Palm Drive  
New Orleans, LA 70124

Ms. Kittye Rouse  
Facility Planning and Control  
1201 North Third Street  
7th Floor, Suite 7-160  
Baton Rouge, LA 70802

Dear Kittye and Bob:

Please find this City Park Golf Master Plan report as our final completion of what has been a six-month comprehensive effort to understand the impacts of and to provide for a dynamic future of golf for City Park. In this effort, we have had a new, accurate planimetric aerial completed as a base map, completed geotechnical investigations, coordinated the designs of Rees Jones, Inc. for a comprehensive new golf course layout of 45 holes and a new practice facility, and completed the initial investigation on site hydraulics and stormwater management.

This master plan has gone through extensive review with members of City Park Staff, City Park Board, City Park Golf Committee, Bayou District Foundation (BDF, a potential philanthropic partner in this development), and members of Louisiana Facility Planning and Control (FP&C). We additionally received proposals for irrigation wells which would be critical to take existing water demands off of the domestic City water supply which would ensure a more cost effective future for golf operations within City Park.

Rees Jones, Inc. has designed a dramatic new golf program for City Park, taking advantage of, and expanding upon, the resources of stately live oaks, lagoons, and pastoral settings. Numerous iterations of cost estimates were completed, reviewed, and modified based on a multitude of schemes and programs.

The final result of the plan is a wonderful new golf complex for the entire New Orleans region, located in beautiful City Park. The ultimate development cost of over \$40 million is broken down into phases with the base first phase reflecting funds that are primarily available through state and FEMA dollars. The other phases are based on a yet-to-be-selected non-profit partner

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(like BDF) to add to that base of funding to create a great new complex. The master plan phasing diagrams reflect those levels of funding and implementation schedules.

We are pleased with the product and what was accomplished through this iterative process. This development will be of critical importance to the economic and recreational future of City Park and the entire New Orleans region.

Thank you for allowing us to have been part of this great effort. We look forward to working with you to bring this dream to fruition.

Cordially,

L. Azeo Torre, FASLA, AIA, FAAR, IIDA, USGBC, LEED® AP  
President



# INTRODUCTION

*Golf Tournament at  
City Park during the  
1930's*



## INTRODUCTION

Golf has been an important element within its recreational activities within City Park since the early 1900's. Like other elements within the Park, golf has had numerous locations and designs, leading up to the final layout that was in place prior to Hurricane Katrina. The grand days of golf in City Park included numerous famous players that participated in the New Orleans Open, and the most famous of the courses was the east course or Bayou Oaks.

The following is a history of golf in City Park through 1962 by Charles Sparks Rees; copyrighted in 2002: *(Since this history was written prior to the impact of Hurricane Katrina, recent information on Golf has changed.)*

### **The History of Golf at City Park**

According to Cotton [*A History of Golf*, published by Lippincott in 1975] in 1896 there were 46 golf courses in England, 61 in Scotland, and 80 in the

USA. John Tobin introduced golf to Audubon Park in 1898, but he lived on Esplanade Avenue. Because of the 6 or 7 mile distance between these two places, in 1902 he founded the New Orleans Golf Club, which laid out a 9 hole golf course at City Park. David Bell, the first golf instructor, was injured during his first year. He was replaced in 1903 by Alexander Baxter.

Baxter was in turn replaced by Harry Turpie from Chicago, who had grown up as a caddy in St. Andrews, Scotland. Harry and his brother George stayed at City Park until 1910, when Delgado Museum was built. The golf course had to be relocated, and the Golf Club wanted to expand the course from 9 to 18 holes. The membership was divided, and some of them bought land near the other end of what is now City Park Avenue, and they built what was to become the New Orleans Country Club. The course there was designed by George Turpie.

Harry Turpie stayed at City Park. The original 9 holes were redesigned, and in 1915 it became New Orleans' first public golf course. In 1920 City Park sold some land west of the Orleans Canal, and also bought

from the Fair Grounds some land which had recently been a competing horse racing track. City Park also acquired several pieces of land north of what was then the park, which along with the race track land almost doubled the size of City Park. George Turpie then returned to City park as head pro and extended the 9-hole course to 18 holes in 1921 [at a cost of less than \$4,000] and to 27 holes in 1922. This was in the area which is now the South Course, and also the track and field area north of Tad Gormley stadium. See {Reeves, page 243} for a map of part of the course layout. This map is also on display at the City Park Clubhouse. In 1925 George Turpie moved from City Park to Audubon Park. His assistant, T. Wilfred Roux, was golf pro at City Park from 1925 until his death in 1932.

Roux was succeeded by Henry Thomas. Thomas played golf early, and at the age of eight he received a set of clubs and some balls as a Christmas present from George Turpie. Thomas was a caddie at City Park, then a starter, while attending Warren Easton H. S., where he was the valedictorian. He worked at City Park, and later at Colonial Country Club, and was 20 years old when he became head pro at City Park in 1932.

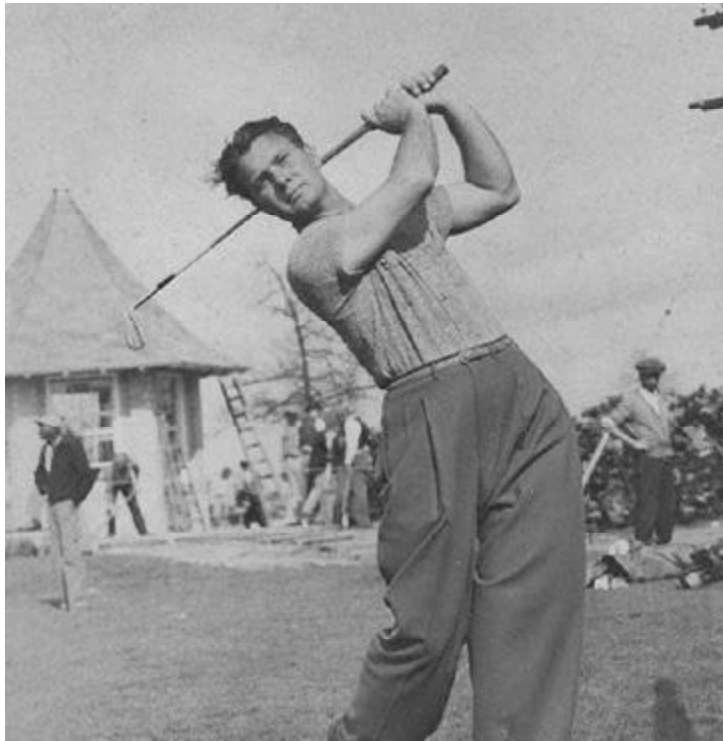
*He remained in that position for 55 years*, until 1987. Even at the age of 75, he still loved the job and was very reluctant to give up his position as head pro, but nonetheless he was eventually forced to do so. A plaque in the current clubhouse on Filmore says simply, yet eloquently, what many people have told me about Thomas:

### **Head Golf Pro; Golfer, Gentleman.**

Frank Mackel was the head pro at City Park from 1987 to 1999. When the management contract went up for renewal in 1999, he chose to go to Eastover Country Club. Mackel died from a heart attack on 9/11/01. The Kemper Sports Management Co. from Kansas City has operated the golf courses from 1999 through 2002, and recently got a 5-year extension.

In 1933 federal money from the ERA [Emergency Relief Admin.], a precursor of the WPA, which was formed to help fight the Depression, was used to design a golf course between Harrison Avenue and the railroad tracks. This was called the Number 1 course, and it was designed by William Wiedorn, a landscape

*At right, Jimmy Demaret, winner of the 1939 New Orleans Open. At far right, golfers play on the WPA-built course with the New Orleans Museum of Art (then Isaac Delgado Museum) in the background. Lower left, the original Golf Clubhouse in the 1930's. Lower right, City Park golf 1930's*





# INTRODUCTION

architect and city planner for the park. The New Orleans Item of Monday 14 January 1935 also gives credit to Joe Bartholomew for designing the new course. The course was built in 1934, and it formally opened on January 13, 1935. The length of the course was given as 6445 yards, a distance that would be increased in the future.

Note that the bridge on Harrison Avenue itself, next to the current East #14, says on both ends that it was built in 1939 by the WPA. The ERA furnished the labor to build the course, and in return they “asked” that the use of caddies be made mandatory in order to give more people work and eliminate that many people from the relief rolls. They pointed out that when caddies are used, play is faster, divots from the fairway are replaced, the condition of the greens is maintained, and more golfers can play in a day, thus making more money for the course and City Park. It was further pointed out that is City Park did not agree to mandatory use of caddies, City Park would in the future lose the savings gained by the use of ERA maintenance labor. A letter from Walter Mangan, president of the St John Golf Club, said the club was opposed to the mandatory use of caddies and the concurrent fees. At this same meeting, there was a discussion of extending Carrollton Avenue into City Park, possibly into the current South Course; this was later decided in the negative.

The daily greens fees for the Number One Course was set at \$1.10 in 1935, which included the mandatory use of a caddy at 75 for 18 holes. Monthly tickets were sold for \$3.00, again requiring using a caddy. Although a caddy was required on the Number One Course [East Course], the Number Two Course [South Course] did not require the use of a caddy, and the fee was only 35 cents for all day.

The St. John Golf Club had used the second floor of the Casino building as its headquarters, but in 1938 a second Golf Clubhouse building was built near Zachary Taylor Drive and Bayou St. John. The first one had been near Esplanade and Wisner. The second one was greatly expanded in 1940, and was a magnificent building in an L shape. It was formally dedicated on Sunday 13 October 1940. The St. John Golf Club has the distinction of being the oldest private club playing on a public course in the county, and it was the first golf club at City Park. Organized in 1920 and incorporated in 1923, the first few presidents were Joseph Lallande, Joseph Cousins, W. W. Carter Jr., William Leftwich Sr., and Harry Fletcher. It is now 82 years old and was deeply involved in each of the 13 New Orleans Open tournaments held at the Number One Course at City Park .

The first “New Orleans Open” was actually called the Crescent City Golf Tournament, and it was held at the Number One Course in 1938, with a total prize of \$5,000. This money was authorized by Mayor Maestri and the City of New Orleans. There was no daily fee for attending the tournament. The 1939 and 1940 tournaments had a \$10,000 prize, again sponsored by Mayor Maestri and the City of New Orleans. It was said in the paper that Mayor Maestri put up the \$10,000 himself, but this is Louisiana and he may have had some help from friends or the City treasury. Note also from the 1942 OFFICIAL PROGRAM: “In 1941, due to the unfavorable financial status, our City Fathers deemed it advisable that someone else assume the sponsorship, at which time Dr. Herbert Meyer underwrote the Tournament.” This seems to indicate some city involvement financially. In any case Mayor Maestri helped the New Orleans Open a lot in its formative years. The name was changed in 1940 to the new Orleans Open

Golf Tournament, and it was held at City Park for 13 of the years from 1938-1962, and also at Metairie Country Club in 1948. If we include the first and last years, this covers a period of 25 years.

The 1942 OFFICIAL PROGRAM for the New Orleans Open has a section titled “A Brief History of City Park and the Golf Course”. It says that the original golf course at City Park had only 9 holes. Furthermore a second nine was opened on July 4, 1921, and a third nine was completed in August 1922. This made 27 holes, all south of the railroad tracks and the current I-610. Some of these 27 holes were condensed into “an auxiliary 18-hole golf course (which) was completed and opened for play in 1939.” This became known as the Number Two Course because the Number One Course, north of the railroad tracks, had been officially opened four years earlier in 1935. The Number Two Course was later known as the South Course, and is now officially called the Little Course. A more appropriate name for it would be the Original Course, or perhaps the Centennial Course since the original course at City Park first opened in 1902, exactly 100 years ago now. Since the Turpies both came from St. Andrews, a historical name that the Scots would be likely to use seems very proper.

The Number One Course, with some modifications, became the east Course, and is now officially called the Wisner Course simply because of its proximity to Wisner Blvd. For more information on this course, please see chapter 4. This course could well be named Grand Slam Course [please see the Forward for my reasons].

The West Course was opened in 1957 [see Reeves, page 239]. However an LPGA Tournament was

held at City Park in 1952 and 1953. Its 1953 OFFICIAL PROGRAM [in the archives room at City Park] shows a map of the Number One Course, where the LPGA event was played, but the map also includes all or part of several holes on the north side of Harrison Avenue. On this map these holes are labeled:

13 and 14 [west of the lagoon up there],  
2, 7, and 8 and two unnamed holes [east of the lagoon],  
and 12, whose tee is east and green is west of the lagoon.  
Thus there clearly were some holes north of Harrison in 1953.

For a short while, parts of the East and West courses [and other holes which no longer exist] were combined into the Number 3 Course. This course, however, was never used for the New Orleans Open at City Park. The Number 3 Course was created because of anticipated plans for I-610, and also due to the requests from some local players who wanted a tougher course. It turned out to be tougher than expected. An editorial in the sports page by Harry Martinez [Times-Picayune, Fe. 4, 1960] refers to progress on the Number 3 golf course. He said then that they may have 9 holes of it ready by October of 1960. This would clearly have been impossible to have played the New Orleans Open on the Number 3 Course before October 1960.

The clubhouse on Filmore Avenue was opened in 1967. The North Course was opened in 1968. Both of these were in large part paid for by the federal government as a result of the Interstate Highway system. The I-610 bypass would eventually cut across City Park, and at various times it was planned to take up part of the South Course or part of the Number 1 Course. Both sides of the railroad tracks [which already ran through City

*At right, Unknown golfer at the 1939  
New Orleans Open.  
At far right, Henry Picard receives his  
prize at the New Orleans Open.  
Lower left, the Bayou Oaks  
Clubhouse columns show rings  
marking Katrina floodwaters in 2005.  
Lower right, A greens marker on the  
flood-ravaged golf course.*



Park] were at various times used as bargaining ploys [threats] by the state. There were lengthy negotiations between City Park and the State Highway Department, which concluded with a check of \$1,240,000 being presented to City Park in February of 1966. In the end, no holes of the Number One Course were actually used for the I-610, although part of the clubhouse was in fact lost. There is a possibility that the negotiations between these two *state* agencies was “coordinated” in order to maximize the money received from the *federal* interstate highway program. The federal program paid 90% of the cost, the state paid only 10%, and the State Highway Department had a lot to say about where the federal highway money was spent.

With the new clubhouse on Filmore in 1967 serving the East, West, and North courses, some changes were necessary to the East Course [Number 1 Course]. The East, which was south of Harrison, was joined to the clubhouse on Filmore by 6 new holes, 3 going from the clubhouse to Harrison and another 3 returning from Harrison to the clubhouse. Some of the old Number One Course holes were completely or partially eliminated.

Part of that land has been used as

- i) a softball quadruplex [the old #3 green, #4 tee, #5 green, #6 tee, #17 green]
- ii) a soccer field [old hole #2, and the #3 tee]
- iii) a 9-hole junior course occasionally [the old holes #1 and #18]

The North Course was planned by committee including William Wiedorn and Joseph Bartholemew, an African American with longtime ties to Metairie Country Club and Audubon Golf Club. Bartholemew reportedly was sent to France by Metairie CC and others to study golf course design. An article about Bartholemew reportedly appeared in the Times-Picayune about two years ago, but I have not seen it. The North Course area required extensive filling since it was so low.

During the 1990s the names of the four courses were officially changed, and the whole City Park golf complex was called Bayou Oaks. The various names of the four courses over the years are given below.

- i) The public golf course at City Park, the Number Two Course, the South Course, the Little Course
- ii) The Number One Course, the East Course, The Wisner Course
- iii) The West Course, the Championship Course
- iv) The North Course, the Lakeside Course

Longtime local patrons, however still use the familiar South, East, West and North names because these names were used for a long time, and also because these names readily identify the four courses and are extremely easy to remember.

The old driving range had been just south of the southeast corner of Harrison and Marconi. In the 1970s, it was replaced by a new double-decked one on the north side of Filmore. This is one of the finest ranges in the South.

The clubhouse has been in three locations. Initially it was near the statue of PGT Beauregard on Wisner, then it was west of Wisner on Zachary Taylor, and it is now on Filmore Avenue.

For general interest, note that there have been two miniature golf courses at City Park. The first was the Tom Thumb course near Esplanade and Bayou St. John in the 1920s. The second one operated in the 1940s and 1950s near City Park Avenue, but it was replaced by a swimming pool.



*Upper left, The old 1930's Clubhouse  
after Hurricane Katrina.  
Lower left, the old Clubhouse restored  
by volunteers.*



## **Original Mission Statement for Renovation**

New Orleans City Park's new golf program shall be redesigned to create a superior golf experience consistent with the highest level of comparable public sector facilities. The new course design shall provide a thorough test for all levels of players and have the credentials to host national professional or amateur tournaments.

## **Golf Course Character**

The old Number One (East) Course at City Park is rich in history having hosted the New Orleans Open 13 times from 1938 to 1962. Many of golf's best players have been tested by the course including Sarazen, Hogan, Player, and Nicklaus. Re-establishing the reputation of the course is essential to the Project. Researching the history and incorporating original strengths and design characteristics shall be explored.

The 18 hole course shall be designed to take maximum advantage of the existing vegetation with a focus on traditional character with excellent drainage. Environmental sensitivity and practical maintenance shall be achieved within the course redesign.

## **Improvements and Design Considerations**

1. Course length to accommodate current technology.
2. Adequate tee and green size.
3. Fairway and green bunkers.
4. Tee Construction – construct tees with underdrains and amended topmix in locations to accommodate all skill level players.
5. Green Construction – construct greens in accordance with USGA recommendations.
6. Develop comprehensive drainage infrastructure.
7. Continuous cart path system.
8. Develop irrigation water source plan.
9. Develop construction schedule to minimize time needed for improvements.
10. The course shall follow ADA guidelines.
11. Environmental design considerations shall include sustainability, compatibility with surrounds and be consistent in concept to achieve a selected post-construction Audubon International Designation.

## **Specific Infrastructure Improvements Requirements**

### ***Existing Trees:***

The course redesign shall endeavor to protect all trees of exceptional value. Extensive tree pruning shall be incorporated throughout the course to improve the health and quality of trees to remain. Shade of all play areas shall be a major consideration within this work. Some under-story landscape enhancement shall be included to feature and highlight certain areas of the course.

### ***Tees:***

Tees of adequate size shall be constructed with laser-leveled amended tee tops to accommodate 50,000 rounds per year.

### ***Bunkers:***

Fairway and green bunkers shall be constructed with thorough interior drainage systems including discharge lines to a positive outfall location. The bunker designs shall minimize outside runoff from entering the sand area

and take into consideration the local rainfall intensity. Well-draining USGA approved sand shall be installed in the bunkers.

### ***Green Construction:***

New greens shall be designed to maximize the pin placement area on the putting surfaces maintaining the majority of slope of the green between 1% and 2½ %. The greens shall be varied in size and orientation to play, averaging 6,000 square feet in size.

Greens shall be constructed strictly to USGA recommendations, with only highest quality approved materials to be used. A nursery green of a minimum of 10,000 square feet and USGA construction shall be included. Turf selection shall be made based upon putting quality balanced with long-term maintenance commitment.

### ***Drainage:***

A comprehensive drainage plan shall be prepared including surface, subsurface, and lagoon systems consistent with the New Orleans elevation and climatic



*Left: The WPA-built Golf Course in the 1930's.*

*Right: Contemporary City Park Golf Course with downtown New Orleans skyline in the background.*

***Drainage:*** (cont. from previous page)

conditions. The revised course design shall provide for all play areas to positively drain in a timely manner minimizing course closing due to wet conditions.

Drainage appurtenances shall be designed to golf course standards and easily accommodate future expansion of the drainage system, i.e., tie-in of small drain lines, perforated drains, bunker drains, green drains, etc. Additional drop inlets shall be added to the pipelines to shorten above ground drainage runs wherever practical.

***Cart Paths:***

Eight-foot concrete paths shall be carefully located to balance aesthetics with function. Whenever possible, the paths should not be visible to the player on the shot they are playing and certainly should not detract from the same.

***Irrigation System:***

The irrigation system design shall specifically address water resources and be master planned in consideration with the potential improvement and expansion of the other courses at City Park. A computerized fully automated system shall provide full coverage of the course play areas and other selected landscape areas.

**Design:**

The new course design process shall provide appropriate milestones for committee review and approvals. It is also anticipated public workshop and/or meetings will take place during the process to fully define and determine the final plan.

The Planning process shall include a Program statement; Preliminary Plan with estimated cost to construct; Design Development including value engineering options; Construction Documents with final estimate of cost; Bidding including bidder qualifications and bid evaluation and Construction Administration.

City Park shall provide scale accurate topography and aerial photography in digital format.

**Construction Scheduling:**

The construction schedule shall be carefully planned to minimize the time needed for improvements. The New Orleans weather patterns, growing temperatures and turf establishment time shall all be taken into consideration.

**Approximate Timeframe:**

It is estimated the Project shall take eighteen to twenty-four months from start of design through opening of the course.

*(Special note: The previous section describes the original scope of work prior to Hurricane Katrina.)*

**City Park Master Plan**

After extensive study, the Board of City Park adopted a new Park Master Plan in 2005 which called for the closure of the South Course and its reuse as outdoor recreation. The Park closed the course over the July 4th weekend in 2005.

**Hurricane Katrina**

After completion of the Schematic Design, the redesign of the East Course project was halted by the devastation of Hurricane Katrina and subsequent six to ten feet of flooding to the site.

In late 2007 the Bayou District Foundation presented a golf concept plan to City Park for the entire golf complex. After considerable debate the requested footprint for golf was reduced to the approximate area of the existing three-course complex and the Park and State agreed to undertake a more comprehensive golf master plan study with funding from the State.

In 2008, TDCL was asked to complete a comprehensive master plan for an entirely new golf layout and design, this time utilizing the design skills of golf course designer Rees Jones, Inc. of New Jersey. This master plan would utilize the more than 400 acres dedicated to golf north of I-610 and was open to the latest thinking in design and operation of a high quality golf courses.

Additionally, the Bayou District Foundation sought to become a partner with City Park to help fund a bigger and more comprehensive facility through their philanthropic efforts to golf and City Park. Although not formally selected to be a partner to date, BDF played an important role and was part of the overall master planning team efforts, and subsequently the final design and layout. This master plan is realized upon the foundation and commitment to all parties that took part in this 6-month effort, including City Park Staff and Commissioners, City Park Golf Committee, Facility Planning and Control, and other interested parties.