



Weekly Management Report

January 8, 2021

- 1. Memo** Summary of DeBell Golf Course Annual
Report for Fiscal Year 2019-2020
Parks and Recreation

MEMORANDUM



PARKS AND RECREATION



DATE: December 29, 2020

TO: Justin Hess, City Manager

FROM: Marisa Garcia, Park, Recreation and Community Services Director
BY: Gwen Indermill, Recreation Services Manager *Marisa Garcia*

SUBJECT: Summary of DeBell Golf Course Annual Report for Fiscal Year 2019-2020

The following is a summary of the Fiscal Year (FY) 2019-20 DeBell Golf Course Annual Report that was presented to the Parks and Recreation Board on November 12, 2020. A verbal presentation on this item is being scheduled for an upcoming City Council meeting. At that time, we will also be inviting Mark Luthman, President of Touchstone, to discuss their activities and future plans at DeBell.

On December 11, 2018, the City Council approved a five-year Golf Course Management Agreement (Agreement) between the City of Burbank and Touchstone Golf LLC (Touchstone). Under the terms of the Agreement, Touchstone is responsible for DeBell Golf Club (DeBell) golf operations, golf maintenance; food and beverage (F&B) operations; private events; and tournament programming. The City budgets general fund dollars to operate the facility and receives all revenue from the operations to help offset operation costs. Touchstone officially assumed operation of the golf course on December 13, 2018, and operation of the restaurant on January 1, 2019.

Since assuming the operation in December 2018, Touchstone has made many equipment, staffing, operational, capital and aesthetic improvements that have led to an increase in the number of visitors to the golf course and restaurant. The carefully planned and well-thought-out improvements continued in FY 2019-20. These proved to be very successful for the overall operation of DeBell, ensuring the highest quality of golf programs for the community.

Touchstone began FY 2019-20 with immediate and noteworthy improvements at DeBell. Among one of the most impactful improvements was the replacement of the golf carts. Touchstone leased a fleet of new low maintenance and lithium ion battery powered golf carts that feature a USB charger for cellular telephones and modern dashboard. The new energy efficient golf carts have the horsepower to manage the steep terrain on the golf

course and improve the pace of play at DeBell. Additionally, golf course staff received customer service training to ensure efficient and friendly service delivery.

During the fall of 2019, Touchstone made some simple yet effective enhancements to the driving range, which included: replacing damaged golf mats; purchasing new golf balls; installing range targets; planting grass seed; and installing a new ball dispensing machine which accepts credit cards. The new ball dispensing machine makes it convenient for golfers to purchase balls directly at the driving range instead of walking to the clubhouse. As a result, the new machine accounted for 75% of the driving range revenue during FY 2019-20.

Touchstone also worked tirelessly to repair the existing and outdated irrigation system on the 18-hole and par 3 golf courses. Despite an outdated irrigation system, the tee box, fairway, and greenway aesthetics have dramatically improved. The Department's Forestry Division supported Touchstone with the removal of dead and fallen trees throughout the golf course. Moreover, during FY 2019-20 while the facility was temporarily closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Touchstone continued to complete routine daily maintenance, chemical and fertilizer applications, aerification and other repairs on the golf course.

Over the course of the last fiscal year several capital improvements were completed at DeBell including bunker renovations, clubhouse updates, and miscellaneous repairs. Bunkers are an integral feature for golf courses and in fall 2019, a sand bunker renovation project was completed. Golf course holes #1 and #18 are the most visible to visitors from the clubhouse, consequently these two sand bunkers were the first to be renovated. As signature holes on the course, the bunkers provide the golf course character that separates it from other courses. Thereafter, in winter 2019, improvements were made to the clubhouse including new tile and carpet throughout the second floor, portions of the interior and exterior of the building were repainted, and new patio furniture was purchased. Lastly, in spring 2020 Touchstone completed irrigation repairs, made upgrades to the 18-hole golf course; and replaced golf course netting on hole #1 and the driving range. Additionally, as part of the City's Capital Improvement Program, City staff is currently working to replace the outdated irrigation system at DeBell. The new state of the art irrigation system will dramatically improve irrigation head coverage and efficiency, as well as reduce water and labor costs.

Under Touchstone's leadership, improvements were also made to enhance the operations of the Hilltop Restaurant and Bar. These improvements included overall décor, an updated menu, and expanded hours of operation. Touchstone F&B staff received additional training to improve the quality of service. The year-round expanded restaurant hours address previous input from golfers to provide convenient F&B service and private events throughout the entire day. Additional "grab and go" food and beverage items are also available for purchase at the pro shop including breakfast items, snacks, coffee and an assortment of other beverages.

The Touchstone team also coordinated a multitude of events and tournaments at DeBell. Events included a Valentine's Day Dinner, Easter Brunch, Music on the Patios, DeBell 60th Anniversary Golf Tournament, DeBell Open House, CIF High School Cross Country

Meet, Veterans Day Golf Tournament, Thanksgiving Shotgun Golf Tournament, Brunch with Santa, and a number of private events such as weddings and parties. These private events and tournaments are an opportunity to welcome new visitors and increase revenues at DeBell.

Moreover, community input is important to Touchstone. Consequently, to obtain input from golfers, user groups, and the community, the Touchstone management team meets quarterly with the DeBell Golf Advisory Committee and City staff to discuss operations, maintenance, and upcoming events. Staff has received numerous compliments regarding the golf and F&B operations, customer service, and golf course maintenance.

While DeBell was having an exceptional year, the COVID-19 pandemic had a crippling effect on DeBell. As a result of the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health (County) Safer at Home Order (Order) in response to the global Coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic (COVID-19), on March 20, 2020 the municipal golf course, par 3 and disc golf course, driving range, and restaurant closed its doors to the public for 49 consecutive days. Operations were further interrupted or closed early due to Los Angeles County instituted curfews and scheduled peaceful protests in Burbank and adjacent communities.

Regrettably, the unanticipated facility closure led to furloughing of Touchstone personnel. The General Manager and three employees were retained to work at the golf course to sustain minimal operations, complete repairs and maintenance projects. During the 49 day facility closure, Touchstone proactively worked with the Parks and Recreation Department (Department) to develop and implement health and safety protocols to adapt operational procedures for reopening. The new precautions to prevent the spread of COVID-19 to employees and guests included but were not limited to: requiring facial coverings, maintaining six-foot social distancing; requiring golf play reservations (18-hole, par 3 and disc golf course) in advance; restricting entry into the clubhouse; 9/18-hole tee time intervals were expanded and scheduled ten-minutes apart; single player golf cart rentals—unless from the same household; the quantity of driving range mats was reduced by 50%, and increased sanitizing and disinfecting of high touch areas. The protocols also called for the installation of safety screens, hand sanitizer stations, and removal of high touch equipment (i.e., ball washers, sand bunker rakes, and benches). Additionally, the F&B service offered a limited menu for take-away or curbside pick-up only.

On the evening of May 6, 2020, the County lifted certain restrictions and allowed for the reopening of golf in Los Angeles County, provided a health protocol plan was in place. Following the announcement, Touchstone rehired furloughed staff and reopened golf operations on May 8. Since reopening, the 9/18-hole golf course, par 3, and disc golf courses have maintained a steady increase of golfers. As part of the Order, the County briefly permitted restaurants to reopen for dine-in service from May 29 through June 30. However, the Order was later revised to only allow outdoor/patio seating and take-out service. In compliance with the Order, F&B staff added umbrellas and canopies over all patio tables and expanded the service area to include the patio adjacent to the Community Room. The menu was also revised to offer limited breakfast, lunch, and dinner entrees. Most recently, the County revised the Order, and effective November 26, F&B operations is limited to take-out service only.

The COVID-19 pandemic's limit on social gatherings also affected tournaments and private events at DeBell. Consequently, staff proactively worked with existing clients to reschedule or cancel previously scheduled tournaments and private events. A total of 51 private events and tournaments scheduled for 2020 were rescheduled, 37 were canceled and 14 were rescheduled for 2021. Unfortunately, the inability to complete these events in 2020 contributed to an estimated \$122,442 loss in revenue. However, Touchstone has been very successful launching a new marketing campaign and booked several new events and tournaments in 2021.

It is fair to say that COVID-19 presented a myriad of challenges at DeBell impacting golf, the driving range, and F&B operations. And although the March 20 through May 17 closure negatively affected the height of the spring golf season, there was still a slight increase in total rounds of play in FY 2019-20 when compared to FY 2018-19 as seen in Table 1.

**Table 1
Comparing Total Rounds of Play FY 2018-2019 and FY 2019-2020**

Rounds	FY 18-19	FY 19-20	Variance	Pct. Change
18/9 Hole	46,050	46,617	567	1.23%
Par 3	3,289	3,949	660	20.07%
Disc Golf	4,425	3,597	(828)	-18.71%
Total	53,764	54,163	399	0.74%

Moreover, DeBell also saw an increase in revenue in FY 2019-20 over FY 2018-19. The aforementioned enhancements, improved customer service, and increased marketing efforts are the reason why DeBell generated an additional \$487,396.82 from the prior year, as listed in Table 2.

**Table 2
DeBell Revenue FY 2018-2019 and FY 2019-2020**

Revenue	FY2018-19	FY 2019-20*	Variance	PCT Change
Total	\$2,004,483.88	\$2,491,880.70	\$487,396.82	24.32%

*Golf Course closed for 49 days due to COVID-19

The City has been extremely pleased with Touchstone's partnership. The operator has successfully transitioned golf, maintenance, food & beverage, private events and tournament management at DeBell. Touchstone has proven to be an expert operator and has improved operations, efficiencies and customer service. Although FY 2019-20 brought many challenges, Touchstone safely provided quality golf programming and dining experiences while increasing revenue and completing maintenance and capital improvement projects.