



Ed Roufa gets ready to tee off on the 13th fairway at Piñon Hills Golf Course. Roufa is from Telluride Colo., and says he comes to Farmington about twice a year to golf at Piñon Hills. Photos by Lindsay Pierce/The Daily Times

Mayor: Course looks good

Councilman's comments criticized in meeting

— By Steve Lynn —
The Daily Times

FARMINGTON —The mayor strongly rejected claims by a city councilman that Piñon Hills Golf Course has maintenance problems.

Mayor Bill Standley criticized Councilman Jason Sandel's comments and the Daily Times for publishing them at a City Council meeting Tuesday. Sandel's comments last week led Standley to visit the course Monday to inspect conditions and talk to golfers.

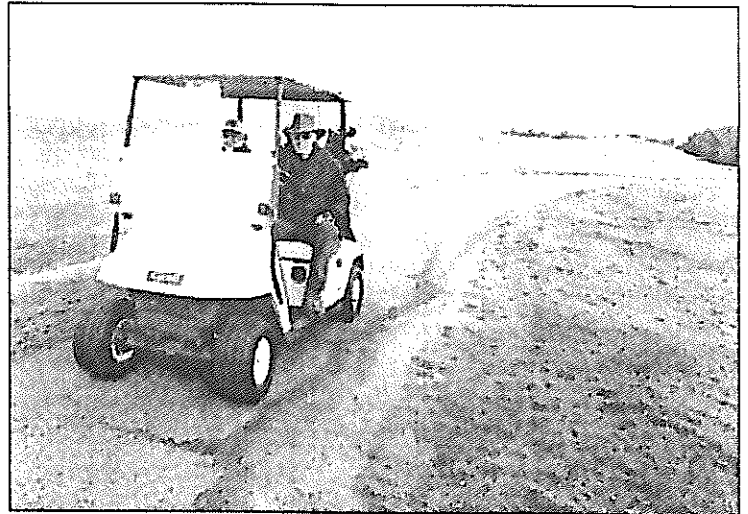
No one complained to Standley about course conditions even when he asked them to do so, he said.

"They say that the golf course is in better condition than they've ever seen it," he said.

The dispute comes as the golf course faces a funding crunch brought on by fewer people paying a daily rate in favor of annual passes that give golfers discounts when they play often.

The approximately \$150,000 shortfall means less money for small improvements or a potential disaster such as an irrigation system failure, said Jeff Bowman, director of the city's Parks, Recreation and Cultural Affairs department.

Even though the course faces less funding, Golfweek recently



Richard Cornellier, left, and Dean Chirigos play a round of golf at Piñon Hills Golf Course last week.

ranked Piñon Hills No. 4 in its "Best Municipal Courses." The magazine rated acclaimed course Torrey Pines in San Diego, Calif., No. 5.

"If you're ahead of Torrey Pines is that an 'unkempt' golf course?" Standley said.

Councilwoman Mary Fischer called Sandel's comments "irresponsible."

Sandel said his comments about crumbling cart paths, deteriorating restaurant furniture and the need for improvements such as an awning for shade on

a patio were based on complaints from golfers and his own observations while playing the course.

Sandel, who did not attend Tuesday's meeting because he was in Houston on business, called the criticism "unfortunate" considering he was not there to defend himself.

"My intent is to be focused on issues and improving our community ... rather than partaking in petty bickering," he said.

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Pinon Hills

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Pinon Hills is in "great shape," but the golf course has "room for improvements," he said.

Bryan Heath, president of Pinon Hills Men's Golf Association, agreed.

The course looks great this time of year compared to how it normally looks in late fall and the "new greenskeeper has done a heck of a job."

But the pro shop and restaurant could use some work, he said.

"The whole pro shop, dining room facility are not up to par with the course," he said. "It's not that they're bad, but I think in the future it's something they should look at."

Standley said the city probably will help the restaurant's operator fund an awning.

He did not see any problems with cart paths during his visit to the course besides natural erosion. The restaurant's furniture also is fine.

"I didn't sit in chairs that

have duct tape on them," he said.

Sandel also said money the city spent on Civitan Golf Course's pro shop should have been spent on Pinon Hills.

Fischer called Civitan "a wonderful facility" for children and beginning golfers.

"Civitan is there for our community," Councilman George Sharpe said.

Standley said "bad publicity" from undue criticism would "negatively affect" Pinon Hills, a major tourist attraction.

"If we're doing some-

thing wrong then we should be criticized," Standley said. "But that's not the case."

Sandel said he was elected to address concerns of constituents, who want Pinon Hills to advance.

"If we just stay where we're at today, we're going to lose our stature," he said.

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