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Ormond Country Club calls meeting to discuss debt problems

By **Matt Scallan, The Times-Picayune**

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Property values along the golf course could drop more than 20 percent if the 106-acre golf course isn't maintained, Ormond Country Club President Ken Turkington said.

The **Ormond Country Club** in Destrehan, burdened by debt and a declining membership, is holding a public meeting asking Ormond Estates residents for their advice.

"We want to tell our neighbors exactly what our options are," club President Ken Turkington said Wednesday.

The club is holding a community meeting at 7 p.m., Dec. 17 at the clubhouse to give residents a picture of what might happen if the club fails.

Those options almost certainly include some form of bankruptcy in January, he said.

"We just can't service our debt," Turkington said.

Turkington predicts that property values along the golf course could drop more than 20 percent if the 106-acre golf course isn't maintained.

The golf course's 17 ponds are linked together and tied into the parish's drainage system and helps drain the surrounding area, he said.

"This is a challenging course to play because of all those ponds," he



Brett Duke/The Times-Picayune

Groundskeeper Bobby Oubre rakes leaves

said. "You lose a lot of balls on this course."

Turkington said there are some 200 homes along the golf course, but few of the owners are club members.

The club owes two lenders, Chase Bank and the Small Business Administration, \$2.6 million and can't service the note.

The SBA loan was taken out to make repairs to the course and clubhouse after Hurricane Katrina, Turkington said.

"We gambled that the membership would grow again, but that didn't happen," he said. "People don't have the disposable income that they once did."

Wednesday at the Ormond Country Club clubhouse.



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Ormond Country Club had about 700 members when it opened in the 1970s, but now has a little more than 200.

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"People don't have as much discretionary income since Katrina," he said.

The club needs a membership of about 400, tilted heavily toward the more pricier golf memberships, to survive, he said.

Turkington said there has been some discussion about forming a group of current members to buy the club out of bankruptcy.

Across the Mississippi River, Willowdale Country Club in Luling also is facing lean times, but board member Carroll Thibodeaux said the club is getting by.

"We're able to manage our debt and we've brought our expenses in line with our revenue," he said. "We're hoping that things will get better."

Turkington said the Ormond club also has trimmed expenses to the bone, relying on a volunteer general manager and greenskeeper, and eliminating its Class A golf pro from the roster.

Parish Councilwoman Wendy Benedetto, whose district includes the Ormond Estates subdivision, said the club's survival is important to the overall community.

"I think the parish needs to do what it can to help them because it does impact property value of the community and that affects our tax revenue," she said.

Turkington suggested that the parish could consider buying the clubhouse and tennis courts for public use.

Parish President V.J. St. Pierre Jr., an Ormond resident, said he hasn't heard a formal proposal from the group, but said the parish's options are limited.

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