



October 10, 2006

Disc golf

By Shirley S. Shin

It's considered one of the world's fastest growing pastimes, and in recent years, a professional sport, attracting tens of thousands of players worldwide. Disc golf has become an increasingly popular way to be active while at the same time enjoying nature's offerings. Shirley Shin has the story.

On any given day, rain or shine, people of all ages trek to Pasadena's Hahamongna Watershed Park to enjoy a game of disc golf. Disc golf is played much like traditional golf, but instead of a ball and a club, players use a flying disc, a smaller and heavier version of the Frisbee. Players throw their discs from a designated place, or a tee area, toward a target. And like traditional golf, the object of the game is to get the disc into the hole in the fewest number of throws possible.

Disc golf, in some form, was played at the turn of the twentieth century. Mark Horn, one of the sport's earliest enthusiasts and the 1977 World Disc Golf Champion, believes that the game of disc golf started with competitive banter between Frisbee players. "We're standing here and I'd say, I bet you I can get to that tree in less throws than you."

Many players come specifically to Hahamongna Watershed Park where they can find the first official course for disc golf. Then Oak Grove County Park, the course was set up in 1975 by the Father of Disc Golf, "Steady" Ed Headrick. It was the first course to employ standardized targets, or poles holes, a metal basket with hanging chains to catch the disc.

But Pasadena's historic course may not remain the same, as city and county officials are drawing up plans to move part of the original course. Arroyo Seco Park Supervisor Rosa Laveaga said the proposed plan would change the original layout of the course by moving the back nine holes. The current course lies in the middle of a long stand of Coast live oak trees, which some consider to have an even greater historic value than the course. "We don't want to get rid of the course. It is a historic course," said Laveaga. "But what's happened is that the trees are getting severely damaged. You can see that there are wounds and scars and literally gouges in the trees."

This proposal has upset many disc golfers who say the course is a historic landmark and should not be altered. "If you're going to change a hole here and a hole there, that's one thing. But if you're going to remove a whole nine, a whole half of a golf course, then I'm not in favor of that," said Ralph Hammond, who's been disc golfing for the past 16 years. "I'd petition against it and I'd gather my buddies together to do the same."

The proposal is only in its beginning stages, and Laveaga said it will take several more years for the plan to be approved.

Hahamongna is just one of 1,824 permanent disc golf courses throughout the United States, according to the Professional Disc Golf Association (PDGA) located in Augusta, Ga. The sport's popularity translates outside of the country, as well, with courses in Scotland, Sweden, Germany, Japan and even Antarctica.

Disc golf started as an easygoing pastime, but has grown into a competitive sport. The PDGA estimates that there are 2,421 men and 176 women professional disc golf competitors throughout the world.

“It’s an easy, inexpensive sport that can take a lot of time, and it keeps you relatively healthy,” said Horn. “It’s just so much fun! It’s a great way to get outside and enjoy what god gave us.”