

TOYTOWN DUMP

Continued From Page 1

Representatives of the annual Tampa Bay Classic golf tournament, who visited Toytown last year, submitted a proposal last summer to operate a championship golf course at public-course rates, Talley said. The proposal is pending, and Talley said the county likely would seek competitive bids before deciding whether to accept it.

Many Golf Courses On Landfills

Converting landfills into golf courses is not a novel idea. Mangrove Bay Golf Course in St. Petersburg and Tampa's Rogers Park Golf Course were built on old dumps. About 70 of the nation's nearly 16,000 golf courses occupy former landfills or other kinds of waste sites.

Toytown, named for the defunct residential community it replaced, is owned by the county but lies within the St. Petersburg city limits.

The landfill opened in the early 1960s and was operated until 1983 by St. Petersburg, which dumped mostly household garbage there, as did Clearwater.

Toytown was known as a "sanitary" landfill, meaning millions of tons of garbage was compacted and buried each day in trenches to fend off vermin and disease.

At its highest point, the garbage rises to about 46 feet in some sections.

'It Was A Stinker'

"It was a stinker," said Warren Smith, the county's solid waste director, who remembers Toytown while growing up in the Bay area. "You could smell it along the interstate when you went by."

While touring the now-odorless property one recent day, Smith imagined its possibilities.

"There's obviously some constraints with building a golf course on a piece of land like this," he said. "You couldn't put water hazards in. You're not going to have a lot of vegetation."

"On the other hand, it presents some interesting differences, too. Because you don't get this type of topography in Florida, typically."

For instance, the gently sloping terrain could lend itself to a "prairie" or Scottish links-style course, with few if any trees and holes separated by larger distances than typically found at most golf courses.



Tribune photo by MARK GUSS

Warren Smith, left, county solid waste director, and Deborah Bush, operations manager, study a map of the Toytown landfill.

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Early next year, the county plans to spend more than \$5 million adding about 1 million cubic yards of dirt to the landfill, elevating its surface about 2 feet.

The additional dirt is required for any use of the property, not just a golf course, Talley said.

The county spends about \$300,000 annually to maintain the landfill, which officials say has posed no environmental problems.

The landfill is covered with loads of dirt and a clay cap. A bathtublike clay lining prevents seepage from its bottom or sides.

Most of the settling from decomposing garbage that occurs with closed landfills happens within the first eight to 10 years, experts say, so Toytown is well past that point.

The settling has caused no problems other than buckling a small paved runway used by people who fly remote-controlled model planes on part of the landfill.

"That landfill's getting quite old now," Smith said. "So it's reaching the latter stages of life in terms of the degradation that's going on there."

Reporter Carlos Moncada can be reached at (727) 823-3412.

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