
Lorain County Metro Parks converting golf course into a nature preserve



The former Royal Oaks Golf Club in the village of Grafton joins the Lorain Metro Parks' Indian Hollow Reservation. The plan is to let it revert to a natural state. (Western Reserve Land Conservancy)



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GRAFTON, Ohio -- The **Lorain County Metro Parks** [\[http://www.metroparks.cc/\]](http://www.metroparks.cc/) system has acquired the former Royal Oaks Golf Club and will run it as a nature preserve.

Jennifer Bracken, the park system's assistant director, said the agency did not consider operating the Grafton property as a golf course.

The club had been closed for several years and was being farmed. The park system purchased the land with help from the **Western Reserve Land Conservancy**. [\[http://www.wrlandconservancy.org/\]](http://www.wrlandconservancy.org/)

Joe Leslie, the land conservancy's director of acquisitions, said the 97-acre parcel sold for \$865,000 with 74 percent of that -- \$647,870 -- coming from the Clean Ohio Conservation Fund. The park system picked up the rest.

The former golf club becomes part of the Lorain County Metro Parks' Indian Hills Reservation, joining two separate parcels of the reservation and expanding it to 726 acres.

The park system said the acquisition protects 2,100 linear feet of the East Branch of the Black River, along with wetlands, meadows and forest.

Bracken said the acquisition comes with a club house and "we will utilize it, but we are not sure how yet."

Trails eventually will be built on the new property. The parks envision the land as a place for snow shoeing and cross-country skiing, Bracken said.

This is the second golf course that the land conservancy has helped turn back to nature.

The **Geauga Park District** [<http://www.geaugaparkdistrict.org/>] partnered with the organization in 2007 to buy the former Orchard Hills course for about \$3 million. The property is now called Orchard Hills Park and abuts the Patterson Fruit Farm. The Pattersons ran it as a golf course for nearly half a century.

When the Cleveland Metroparks acquired the former Acacia country club in late 2012, the Geauga project was considered **a pioneering effort** [http://www.cleveland.com/metro/index.ssf/2012/10/post_58.html].

Anonymous benefactors that assisted the Virginia-based conservation fund in buying Acacia insisted that the land never again be used as a golf course.

"The purpose of conveying it to the (Cleveland) Metroparks was to turn it back into a preserve and a park," said Matt Sexton, a senior vice president of the fund.

The Cleveland Metroparks is close to unveiling **details of the best ways to aid Acacia's return to nature** [http://www.cleveland.com/metro/index.ssf/2014/04/acacia_master_plan.html].

"We looked at Acacia with an eye toward best practices and are developing a master plan for Royal Oaks," said Bracken, of Lorain County Metro Parks. "We still have to assess all the natural resources there."

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