



COURTESY CITY OF HENDERSON PARKS AND RECREATION DEPARTMENT

NUMEROUS PARKS and recreation facilities, such as Paseo Verde Park, have helped to sell homes in Green Valley Ranch.



ETHAN MILLER / LAS VEGAS SUN

STEVE COATS goes down the water slide at the Black Mountain Recreation Center pool, passing the shadows of those lined up for their turn.

Parks aplenty

Henderson top dog in providing recreation facilities

By Andy Holtmann

LAS VEGAS SUN

HENDERSON — Southern Nevada's rapid growth has left some communities hurting for parks and recreation facilities. But Henderson, the fastest growing of the bunch, has managed to keep pace — and then some.

Some highlights:

■ The Las Vegas Valley's first zero-depth swimming pool is located at the city's Black Mountain Recreation Center. The pool begins on one end with a depth of zero feet and gradually extends to four feet.

"Parents can bring their younger kids and let them play in one or two inches of water," says Dan Shaw, chairman of the Henderson Parks and Recreation Citizens Advisory Committee. "You can't do that with other pools."

Black Mountain's pool can at times have up to 500 people using it at once, says Recreation Supervisor Gene Trombetti. A 2½ story spiraling water slide is one of the most popular attractions.

■ The Arroyo Grande Sports Complex is another example of how Henderson outshines other cities' facilities. The 80-acre baseball and softball complex has fields that Shaw calls "the best in the state of Nevada."

The 10-field complex is kept constantly green through a fertilization injection system that supplies a constant flow of fertilizer to keep the grass, shrubs and trees thriving.

Special dirt that is not affected by sun, heat or water was shipped in for the infields. The dirt is similar to that used in major league ballparks and is designed to always stay soft.

SEE PARKS, 5E

■ Parks

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Arroyo Grande has electronic scoreboards on the outfield fences on four of the fields. There are also concession stands, an announcing and score-keeping tower, large dugouts and playgrounds.

■ Henderson has three recreation "super-centers" that serve a variety of community needs in one location. These centers are similar to YMCA centers, without the memberships.

In addition to the pool, Black Mountain has a large fitness room with all the current equipment but for a lower cost than most private gyms (\$2 per day or \$10 per month). It also has racquetball courts, a game room, classrooms for summer programs, a gymnasium with a special no-echo ceiling, dance room, vending area, full kitchens, meeting rooms, and outdoor areas for ceremonies or parties.

Built in 1996, Black Mountain is the city's newest facility. The other two super-centers, Silver Springs and Lorna J. Kesterson Valley View, have the same features of Black Mountain, but are set up a little differently.

Recreation Coordinator John Sefton says the reason Henderson excels at parks and recreation is the people. Sefton moved to Henderson from Arizona and says the distinction between other cities and this city is that people actively get involved.

"The programs for the people come from the people," he said. "Our voters, our users, have said 'yes' to parks and recreation."

Officials hope a planned fourth recreation center, in the Whitney Ranch area, will be completed within 18

months.

Many of the parks in Henderson are termed "turnkey" facilities. Developers build the parks in the neighborhoods they construct as part of an agreement with the city. Once completed, the maintenance of the park is turned over to the Parks and Recreation Department.

Paseo Verde and Discovery parks in the Green Valley area and River Mountain Park on the east side of town are examples of turnkey facilities. The developers can choose how the park should look and what features each should have, as long as the parks meet city standards.

Although many of the parks have the same features, such as play areas and basketball courts, no two parks look alike.

While River Mountain has a lot of open space, Foxridge Park has a lot of pine trees and a forest setting.

The way that Henderson's Parks and Recreation Department is run has earned it many awards and recognition.

Director Dundee Jones won the National Recreation and Parks Association Pacific Southwest Regional Professional Award. Trombetti won the Pacific Southwest Regional Council Young Professional Award.

Henderson has also been a finalist twice for the Gold Medal Awards for parks and recreation departments in its population group and pulled in the first-ever Las Vegas Chamber of Commerce Beautification Award for the Black Mountain Aquatic Complex.

Jones credits the success to hard work, research and creativity.

"Our staff travels all over the country and comes back with ideas that have been used in other places," he



BRAD TALBUTT / LAS VEGAS SUN
FOXBRIDGE PARK was one of the first "turnkey" parks in Green Valley.

said. "We combine these ideas or modify them to create our parks and recreation centers."

Jones, who has been with the department since 1973, is considered by his employees as a father figure instrumental in Henderson's success. Recreation Coordinator Elaine Howser told of Jones' early visions.

"When Dundee first took over, he had a plan to create one recreation center for every 25,000 people and one park for every 5,000 people," Howser said. "We thought he was crazy, that it couldn't be done. Today, though, we

have accomplished just that. I have to attribute what Henderson has today to his vision."

Shaw's work, meanwhile, has earned him this year's Nevada Recreation and Parks Society Outstanding Service Award. His efforts in the community and as a member of the citizens committee were recognized.

"It was a big surprise to me because there are many other people involved who work just as hard or harder than I do," Shaw said. "It is a tremendous honor to be recognized, though."

Henderson has more than 280 acres of parks — rapidly approaching the 325 acres of park space in Las Vegas, a city with three times the population.

With Henderson voters' passage in May of a \$55 million bond issue, the city plans to add several new parks, sports facilities and a senior center. Officials also plan to upgrade a number of older facilities.

Vicki Taylor, assistant to the city manager, says Henderson's success comes from a combination of the developers' contributions and the residents who vote for funding for the parks.

"This is something that the community has told us they wanted," Taylor said. "The developers pay for the costs of their own roads and parks. When people move here they are paying for the cost of their own growth."

Like its counterparts across Southern Nevada, Henderson has had to deal with rapid growth. In the last six years, the population has doubled in size to 130,000. Within two years, Henderson is expected to surpass Reno and become Nevada's second largest city.

Due to its World War II-era factories, Henderson long was known as an

industrial town.

In recent years, though, Henderson has established itself as a suburban enclave in which master-planned communities dominate, and recreation thrives.

Henderson provides more parks and recreation centers per capita than any community in the state. According to Shaw and Taylor, Henderson has become a model for other cities around the country.

"They come to see the tremendous job that we have accomplished in establishing our parklands and recreation centers," Shaw said. "Our advancements have provided other communities with an outline for the future."

Henderson officials are also proud to say they have done their best at making sure the natural landscape is protected. The city has an ordinance that prohibits the development of homes or communities on the mountainsides.

The city of Henderson also is busy with several other large-scale projects.

There are tentative plans for a spring training baseball complex near Russell Road and U.S. 95. The deal is contingent on Major League Baseball teams reaching agreement to move their spring training sites from Arizona or Florida.

There are also plans for a redevelopment project for the downtown area. The project would restore a lot of the older buildings within the district.

"From the very beginning, we had a vision for Henderson," Taylor said. "It has not been easy, but we want to make sure that when people move to Henderson, they get what they want. From who I have talked to and from what I've heard on the street, this is what the people want."