Drive by BREC's Webb Park any day of the week and you'll see golfers playing the 18-hole course. There are always cars parked in front of the old clubhouse, now home to a new BREC fitness center.

Webb Park is a popular BREC facility, older than BREC itself. It began in 1924 as the Westdale Golf and Country Club. Originally the club's 50-acre tract was in the botanic area several miles outside Baton Rouge. Now that property, where Broussard Street ends at Country Club Drive, is in the heart of the city.

Hermann Moyse Jr. and his sister, Betty Moyse Simmons, remember the Westdale Golf and Country Club well. Their grandfather, Joe Gottlieb, a prominent Baton Rouge banker, was one of the organizers of the club.

Articles in the State-Times in early 1925 describe plans for the Mediterranean-style clubhouse designed by architects Jones, Roessle and Olsnmer of New Orleans. The plans included a nine-hole golf course, tennis courts and a swimming pool.

"The beauty of the finished clubhouse and its well laid out grounds can be imagined. With the colors of the building, the course, the blue sky of the southland, a scene of loveliness will be formed which can hardly be matched," the news article concluded in the flowery language of the day.

"The pool was very popular with kids in the summer time," said Joan Benjamin Goldberger. "That's where we went swimming until the club closed during the Depression." She recalled that ladies used the clubhouse to play cards.

As a young child, Simmons often swam there. She remembered the area as being very secluded, "Westdale Drive was gravel. When we saw the cars stirring up gravel, we knew our parents were coming to pick us up."

Simmons celebrated her 12th birthday in 1933 with a party at the pool. The party ended with much excitement when a cut on Moyse's foot began to bleed, and he had to be rushed to his uncle, Dr. Eddie Hirsch, for immediate medical attention.

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BREC clubhouse. Fanny Herzberg, club hostess who went on to become hostess for four governors, served the "best food in Baton Rouge," Simmons said. "She served it so beautifully."

Regular meals were not offered at the club, but Herzberg oversaw special functions. She was in charge of the elaborate buffets served on Sunday afternoon teas and banquets at Westdale. Herzberg had been urged to take on the position as hostess by the late Benjamin, Goldberger's son, and the late Lewis Gottlieb, uncle of Simmons and Moyse. Moyse said several regulars on the golf course included Dr. Lester Sanders, insurance executive D.H. Yearrough, owner of the Louisiana Hotel, businessman D.H. and Roy Heidelberg, insurance executive. Moyse said the club was a sand trap and then there was Huey Long, "a red-headed old man, Joe Gottlieb," said Moyse. "He said he never did, but he got over the green in three shots."

The Westdale Club did not last very long. Sometime in the early 1930s, it was dissolved. It, like many other private clubs, did not survive the Great Depression.

In 1936, on the advice of LSU athletic director T.P. Heard and J. Perry Cole, faculty supervisor of golf activities, LSU purchased Westdale for $25,000. The money came from the university's athletic endowment.

They say Skipper (T.P.) Heard used to dictate where the fairways were, Moyse said with a laugh. "He tailored the fairways to his game. Wherever he hit the ball, that was the fairway."

Moyse, who entered LSU in 1938, often drove his blue Dodge to the course for a round of golf. "I think students could play out there for 10 cents," he said.

During World War II, LSU shut down the course, Moyse said. "There were no golf balls. There was no gas to drive out there; he said."

After the war, the facility again reopened. However, the old buildings had fallen into disrepair. LSU decided to build a golf course adjacent to the university and to limit its use to faculty, staff and students.

In December 1956, the Recreation and Park Commission, which later became BREC, voted to accept a city council proposal to finance the purchase of the Westdale Country Club and golf course from LSU for $700,000. "We needed another golf course in the city limits, and LSU wanted to get rid of it," said Eugene Young, BREC superintendent. "Golf was picking up at that time. We had an opportunity to get it."

Much of the facility was in bad shape. Some of the old buildings had to be torn down. In 1957, the park was renamed the Jesse L. Webb Jr. Memorial Park in memory of Webb, the city 32-year-old mayor who was killed in a single-engine plane crash in April 1956.

In 1958, BREC renovated the old swimming pool and built a playground. In the early 1960s, BREC opened the clubhouse after a major renovation. The building contained a golf shop, meeting rooms for center activities and dressing rooms for swimmers. It was also used as a public verting place.

The clubhouse was dedicated Nov. 4, 1962, at ceremonies featuring guests. Moyse said. Jack Christian and W.E. Robinson, chairman of BREC. A photo-painting of Jesse Webb Jr. decorated by his friends was unveiled during the ceremony.

Following the dedication, Webb Park pro Al Michael staged a hole-in-one contest at the first tee.

In May 1964, all public swimming pools in Baton Rouge were closed reportedly because of a lack of operating funds. Days later, a federal court ordered the pools integrated. In 1966, the Webb Park pool, previously designated an all-white facility, was opened on an integrated basis. That same year, explosives were thrown from Country Club Drive across a parking lot toward the pool's filter tanks, which were unpublished on the west end of the pool. The explosives apparently blew up while they were still in the air. The pool itself was not damaged.

The pool facility survived the turbulent '60s and '70s to become one of BREC's most popular facilities," Young said. It is used by people of all ages and all races.

In recent years, the pool has been completely renovated. "It was in bad shape," Young said. "With all the old pipes, we couldn't stop the leaking." Maintenance crews dug completely around the pool and installed all new piping and a new circulating system. All of the electrical equipment was redone. The pool is used throughout the summer for BREC's popular day camps.

The main bathroom of the clubhouse has been completely redone to create a state-of-the-art fitness center offering memberships at $23 a month.

BREC has even more plans for Webb Park. "We're getting ready to renovate the old golf shop. We're going to raise the roof and turn it into a senior citizens area," Young said.

Seniors are some of BREC's best customers. They enjoy activities at senior citizens' facilities: They are regulars on the six BREC golf courses. Some play golf every day of the week.

Young said they're always after him to fix things or make improvements at BREC facilities. "One of them told me, 'This is our home. We just go to our other home to eat,'" he said.

BREC plans to raise the roof on the old golf shop and renovate it as a facility for senior citizens.

The Webb Park swimming pool is used all summer for BREC's popular day camps.

The terrace at the back of the clubhouse overlooks the 18-hole golf course.

Advocate photo by Randy Bergeron.