Fore Star's style works well in U.S. Southwest

By Peter Blais

LUBBOCK, Texas — Visit 36-hole Meadowbrook Golf Course here and you're likely to see Fore Star Golf President Steve Yonke parking golf cars, busing tables, serving drinks or working behind the pro shop cash register.

"This is a people business," said Yonke, who doubles as Meadowbrook's general manager and head of the six-course management firm that stresses a hands-on management style. "I'm always talking to our customers. Some of their suggestions may be off the wall, but people generally give you good ideas about your operation.

"When we first took over here, we asked the customers what we could do to improve. They wanted us to do a better job handling the golf carts, put starters at both courses, and start a marshaling program. We did those things and the course runs much more smoothly than it did."

Yonke gained this insight into the need to quiz customers while working at the course level. He joined Jim Colbert Golf in 1984 and managed several different operations before becoming Colbert's quality manager. Prior to founding Fore Star in 1992, Yonke received the National Golf Foundation Public Golf Award for his efforts to promote and enhance the game. Brothers Jeff and Gary Miller soon joined

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"Most courses in our area are well above the minimum," said Lee McLemore, head superintendent at Birmingham (Ala.) Country Club. "Our wages have gone up significantly the past few years to compete in a small labor pool where unemployment is running around 3.5 percent. We're competing with other businesses, like McDonald's, for workers and they're already above $5 per hour."

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Personnel
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container without hesitation. He picked up several large pieces of debris by the tent and returned to his post. I was quite puzzled by his behavior, so I walked down the steps from the deck and said, "Bobby, you didn't do what I asked you to do." He answered, "Yes, I did." "Bobby," I said, "you didn't pick up the trash in the range container and you didn't pick up the small debris by the tent."

He said, "Oh, that. That trash in the range container — that's the grounds crew's trash. They'll pick that up tomorrow morning. And as for the bottle caps and toothpicks and stuff by the tent, nobody will ever see that stuff."

"Bobby," I said, "that's the problem around here. I asked you to perform a simple task and you just didn't do it. Now please go back out there and do as I asked you to do. I don't want our range customers or our golf course grounds crew dealing with an overflowing trash container and I don't want that trash left by the tent."

Bobby bristled up and shot back, "I'll tell you what the problem is around here. It's you. You see trash that nobody sees."

Surely, you can understand that a lengthy discussion followed Bobby's remarks. I quickly pointed out that trash is trash. It's not grounds crew trash, or golf guide trash, or customer trash, or golf cart crew trash, or snack bar trash or outing trash; it's just trash. I explained that our customers will never take pride in our course if we don't first show them that we take pride in our course. I went on to explain that eradicating trash, any trash, was one sure way of expressing our pride in our golf course. Needless to say, Bobby returned to the range and tent and removed all the trash in question.

As much as I wanted to place blame somewhere else, I could not. You see, I had to face the fact that it was I who was to blame for this predicament. It was I who had not thoroughly explained and trained my staff about trash and how its timely removal is directly tied to the color of the ink on our bottom line.

So I called an emergency staff meeting to discuss, that's right, trash. Our meeting featured a keynote address by yours truly entitled "Just Whose Trash Is It Anyway?" and subtitled "Why Trash Has To Away." Other items discussed included the results of a survey done by the National Golf Foundation some years before that gave us all some sobering data. Golfers stated their No. 1 reason for returning to a facility was the cleanliness and beauty of the entry, parking lot and general environs around the clubhouse. First impressions are so important. The survey confirmed that when your establishment exudes pride of ownership and management through cleanliness, customers get the message. Just ask the Disney people. They can go on for hours about the benefits of cleanliness as a way of achieving a black ink bottom line.

Do you have a problem with trash in your place? Do you pick it up? Do you tell others to pick it up? Do you ignore it? What do you do about it? You do something. If you are doing nothing, you are doing something — nothing. Think.

If you believe what the surveys say. If you believe what Disney research says. If you believe as I do, then you had better explain and train. If it's trash, it's got to go and it's everybody's job on the staff to get it done.

Masters Adds Two
Orlando, Fla. — Masters Golf Corp. has reached agreements with two new Florida projects. Orange tree at Ventura in Naples is a daily-fee track and The Monarch at Royal Highlands is in a Leesburg retirement community. Both are scheduled to open in 1997.

Let's not mince words — your job's challenging.

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