

BRIEFS

PERSONNEL CORNER

# Teaching an old dog new service tricks

By VINCE ALFONSO

How many of you remember the early TV game show, "Name That Tune"? I realize I am dating myself but I remember: I loved that show. I was amazed at how those people could hear only one or two notes of a song and then — BINGO — they "Named That Tune".

And I'm sure that, as amazing as it was to me, it was no big deal to them. If asked how they did it, I'm sure they would have said, "It just comes natural to me. I hear a tune and I never forget it."

When it comes to customer service, a lot of people are like that. It just comes naturally to them. They see a customer step one foot inside the door of their shop and their instincts take over. They seem to know just what to say, how to say it and when to say it. They really know how to make a customer feel acknowledged, valued, appreciated and welcome. And, of course, that translates into a happy customer, which almost always turns into more sales.

As owners and managers of golf courses, charged with the responsibility of hiring and training our staff, we often try to hire sales people whose credentials meet all of our criteria, including having

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POLO TRACE PURCHASED

DELRAY BEACH, Fla. — Polo Trace Management, Inc., a Florida corporation comprised of five local business people, has acquired Polo Trace Country Club here for \$7 million. The transaction was financed through Stonehill Commercial Capital of East Providence, R.I., a golf course finance company. Built in 1990, the course suffered through a bankruptcy and Resolution Trust Corp. management before being purchased by a speculator in 1993. The current principals of Polo Trace Management took over management in 1994.

NGP SNAPS UP TWO MORE

SANTA MONICA, Calif. — National Golf Properties, Inc. has acquired Stonecreek Golf Course, a premium resort course located in Phoenix, from a commercial property developer for approximately \$9.3 million. NGP (NGP) also sold Kendale Lakes Golf



ACQUISITIONS

Course, a daily-fee course located in Miami, to a local investor group for approximately \$3.5 million and reinvested the

proceeds in Stonecreek. Stonecreek will be leased to American Golf Corp. NGP has also acquired San Geronimo Golf Course, an 18-hole daily-fee course in Marin County north of San Francisco. San Geronimo will be leased to Evergreen Alliance Golf Limited.

NATIONSCREDIT ADDS PAIR

LEESBURG, Fla. — ISS has been retained to oversee the grow-in of nine additional holes of play here at Pennbrooke Fairways. The Gordon Lewis-designed Pennbrooke Fairways course plans to open its 9-hole addition this month. ISS currently oversees the golf course and landscape maintenance of the course.

NEW SUPPLIERS FOR NGCOA

CHARLESTON, S.C. — With the recent addition of three new suppliers, the National Golf Course Owners Association (NGCOA) Smart Buy Program now offers savings on several new products and services. The three new suppliers are: NGCOA Food Services, administered by the Anthony Owen Co.; Hertz Technologies, Inc.; and NGCOA Travel Advantage. For more information, contact the NGCOA at 803-881-9956.



MANAGEMENT COMPANY FACILITIES LISTED

Hillcrest Golf Club in Scottsdale, Ariz., is the latest acquisition by the John Jacobs Group, one of the management firms and properties listed in the course management chart on pages 76-77.

## Casper to manage Hawaii's toughest

VIENNA, Va. — Billy Casper Golf Management, Inc. (BCGM) has been selected to manage Koolau Golf Course on the island of Oahu, Hawaii. The 18-hole course's slope rating of 164 is the highest ever recorded by the U.S. Golf Association, hence Koolau's moniker, "toughest in the nation." The course is under foreclosure and is anticipated to be sold via sealed bid in 1997, although a date has yet to be set.

BCGM will perform turnkey management services in the areas of clubhouse operations, sales and marketing, agronomy, staffing and training, accounting, food and beverage, merchandising, and financial management.

Koolau is a daily-fee golf facility, hosting more than 30,000 18-hole rounds of golf. Greens fees are \$85 for non-resi-

dents and \$45 for Hawaiian residents. The 7,310-yard, par-72 course was designed by Dick Nugent, carved out of the heavily forested Windward Side foothills of Oahu, with the Koolau Mountains rising several thousand feet above the course and waterfalls cascading from imposing peaks.

"We are fortunate to engage an experienced Billy Casper group to direct the day-to-day operations of Koolau Golf Course," said Joseph Toy, director of Hospitality Industry Consulting Services for Coopers and Lybrand (Hawaii) and the court-appointed commissioner. "The firm's role is to improve all facets of the facility and operation in preparation for marketing the property to potential buyers."

## Carefree's Miller credits fellow superintendents for successful career

By PETER BLAIS

CAREFREE, Ariz. — Ed Miller likens his job to the director of player personnel for an NFL football team, an apt analogy in light of the just-completed Super Bowl.

"I look for the best talent when

recruiting superintendents and then give them the authority to do their job," said the director of golf operations for Carefree Resorts, operators of The Boulders in Carefree, Ariz., The Lodge at Ventana Canyon in Tucson, Ariz., and Carmel (Calif.) Valley Ranch.

"One of the greatest challenges in this industry is recruiting the right person for that position. The superintendent's job is demanding, challenging, but not very well understood."

Miller knows whereof he speaks, having spent many years as a course superintendent before becoming the man responsible for Carefree's multi-million-dollar golf operations.

Miller was a junior at the University of Wisconsin when he began his golf career at nine-hole Walnut Grove Golf Course in Cochrane, Wis. He did a little bit of everything, working on the construction crew, serving as equipment manager, acting as grow-in superintendent and occasionally tending bar. He spent two years at Walnut Grove while earning his bachelor's degree in business administration.

"It was fascinating and stimulating work," he recalled. "But I knew if I wanted a career in this business, I had to accelerate the process. That's a choice I had to make."



Ed Miller (right) and The Boulders superintendent Scott Nair.

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great customer-service instincts. However, there are many, many more potential employees who have otherwise great credentials for our sales jobs but lack customer-service instincts and have never learned the skill.

But since we need good people with all these other skills — like inventory control, merchandis-

ing, scheduling, accounting — and good people who are neat, honest, on time, caring, respectful and hardworking, we hire them whether or not they have good customer-service instincts or skills. And I believe we should. So what if a well-qualified new employee doesn't know how to interact with our customers in a way that makes them feel acknowledged, valued, appreciated

and welcome.

"They'll learn," we say.

My question for you is this: From whom or from what? Do we expose these employees to *people* who have the instincts and skills we so covet as owners and managers, or do we send them to a *school* or encourage them to read "how to" books? Just what is the best way to train employees in this extremely important

area of customer service? Which is it? A "whom" or a "what"?

I think it should be a "whom". No, I know it should be a "whom"! And here's why.

I knew Tom Tomacello as the Pro-Shu salesman who called on my Dad, Vince Sr., while he was head professional at Bella Vista Country Club in Memphis, Tenn. When I became head professional at Holiday Golf Club in

Olive Branch, Miss., I naturally carried the Pro-Shu line.

One morning during my first year at Holiday, Tom showed up at my door with the new Pro-Shu line and his guitar (Tom was one of the last traveling troubadours).

After the customary greetings, plans were made for him to have dinner and spend the night at our house. Tom stayed around the shop all day observing my operation.

That night, after dinner and out of the blue, Tom said, "Can I work for you tomorrow, Vince?"

"Why?" I asked.

"I really think there are some things you have forgotten — things your Dad taught you about how to deal with customers. I think you need a refresher course."

I wasn't about to say no to Tom. I knew he was a great salesman.

"Sure," I said. "It will be fun watching a master salesman in action."

Well, the next day, watch is exactly what I did — when I wasn't ringing up all the merchandise Tom was selling, that is. Shirts, clubs, shoes, gloves, balls, you name it — Tom sold it. It was a sight to behold.

I cannot place a value on what I learned from Tom that day. Not to mention how watching Tom did, indeed, refresh my memory of all the things I had learned from my Dad, both during his years as owner of his grocery store, Weona #88, and his years as head professional at Bella Vista. It was truly a breakthrough day for me as a salesman. There are no books or schools that could teach me what I learned that day.

It took a "whom" not a "what" to teach me how to acknowledge, value, appreciate and welcome customers in a way that makes them want to buy the merchandise I have for sale.

History is replete with stories of people studying at the feet of the master, whatever the craft or trade. My life experience verifies it.

I cannot stress this enough. Find the Tom Tomacello in your organization or go out and hire a qualified Customer Service Trainer. Have them work side by side with your staff, hands-on, in your shop. I believe with all my heart, your employees will learn more from hands-on, real-life training experiences than they could ever learn from books or schools.

We may not be able to teach a person to name a tune after hearing just two notes, but we can teach a good employee how to improve their customer-service skills by allowing them to work side by side with a master salesman.



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