Membership directors talk the talk

ALENA, Ohio — Superintendents are not the only staff members being called on to know the intricacies of the course in order to excel in their position.

Directors of membership marketing for new courses under construction are carefully studying architects’ design specs, inquiring about different types of grasses and studying irrigation and drainage plans to be able to paint a clear picture for prospective new members of private clubs.

Bauer Voss Consulting, Inc. of Galena, a club marketing consulting firm, helps new private clubs hire membership marketing directors and has integrated “Golf Course Construction and Maintenance” into the company’s 90-plus-page training manual. Membership directors are required to know about courseyardage,grass types,irrigation systems, design and maintenance philosophy.

Heidi Voss, president of Bauer Voss Consulting, said: “It is just like selling any other type of product. You have to know it inside and out and you have to believe in it and be committed to it.”

Voss often places directors in clubs six months to a year prior to the course breaking ground. The Ledges of Huntsville Mountain in Alabama enrolled 325 memberships prior to breaking ground. The Ledges of Huntsville Mountain in Alabama enrolled 325 memberships prior to breaking ground. The Ledges of Huntsville Mountain in Alabama enrolled 325 memberships prior to breaking ground. Natalie Rushing, the membership director, can’t turn to the superintendent or course pro to explain the course since they are not on board yet.

“The director,” Voss said, “must be able to paint a picture of the course for the prospective member and create a high level of enthusiasm that will encourage new members to sponsor friends.”

Beth Gillillin, director of membership for The Reserve Club in Pawleys Island, S.C., had a background selling golf packages to tourists for a local resort.

Stepping into membership was an easy move for her. Gillillin networks with her members and encourages them to extend invitations to prospects to come out for a tour of the Greg Norman course scheduled to open this fall.

“If I can get them in for a tour, they will join,” Gillillin predicted. “Once people see this course and realize how different we are from others in the area, they are hooked.”

Early on, Gillillin used her own 4X Tahoe to get prospective members out on the site. With the cart paths in, she uses a cart or walks with prospects. “People are always astonished,” she added, “when I can tell them about the different types of grasses that were used for this project.”

Gillillin made sure that she was close by to observe Norman when he visited. She also visits extensively with project manager Rick Ryan.

Another director who has succeeded in enrolling new members by touring them through the course under construction is Erin Walling of Fieldstone Golf Club in Greenville, Del. Walling brings prospects on a rough-and-tumble ride through 18 rolling acres that will soon accommodate a Hurdzan/Fry Golf Design course. The course broke ground March 31 and officially hosted its first Member/Guest and Maintenance Tournament on May 16.

“Five holes were shaped out and playable and the members and their friends just had a blast,” Walling said. Because the construction is not visible from the club offices, Walling said it is very difficult for prospective members to understand that if they go on the tour they are going to be able to visualize the course. One couple who had an appointment pulled in and sat in the car for about 10 minutes, then came in and just asked for a brochure.

Walling convinced them to go for a short ride. An hour later she had to pull them away from the rock walls that have been improved and, in turn, so did my sales. It was more than just talking golf, it was a genuine desire to learn more about my product and to be able to put it in simple terms that the prospective member could understand.”

Voss attends Golf Course Superintendents Association of America conferences with her husband and participates in the lecture series. “I hope it makes the member director under their wing and teaches them about maintenance practices,” Voss said. “I don’t think they necessarily have to propose marriage.”

Membership consultant Heidi Voss.

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