

A little diplomacy goes a long way

By VINCE ALFONSO

My Dad used to say, "Buddy [he called me Buddy], always remember you catch more flies with honey than you do with vinegar."

This old cliché ranks right up there with 'You can bring a horse to water, but you can't make him drink,' and 'You can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear (Miss

Piggy's favorite).'

Little did I know way back then that someday my Dad's old saying would save my neck and increase my business.

It all happened on a soggy, very soggy, Tuesday morning at The Rail (my former golf course). It was the day of a big outing and it had rained several inches overnight. The

course was soaking wet. With no golf car paths, days like this could be my worst nightmare.

After a long talk and inspection of the course with my superintendent, we decided to let the event go on as scheduled. But, and this was a big but, we would have to route the golf cars around all the super trouble areas and avoid the fairways at all costs.

I made a passionate appeal

over the public address system for all players to follow our directions carefully so we would minimize damage to the course, and then, turned them loose.

My golf guides (rangers) were always reminded, before an outing, that they did not have to take abuse from any customer, ever. I told them, in no uncertain terms, to avoid confrontations with customers, and to report

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any belligerent customers to me.

Not 15 minutes after the shotgun start, Colonel Bishop, one of my guides, found me at the clubhouse and proceeded to tell me about an irate customer on No. 10 green. Bishop told me exactly what the man had said about me and my blankety-blank rules, and then he gave me a message from my customer. Basically, the message, somewhat ungracefully, related where he wanted me to put my blankety-blank rules.

Well, my Italian temper began to boil and I said, "Take me to this guy."

We got to the No. 11 tee box right before they hit their shots. As they pulled up to the tee box, I approached the man the Colonel had pointed out to me as the irate customer.

"Excuse me sir," I started. "The Colonel said you had something you wanted to tell me."

This guy calmly got out of his car, looked down at me (he was at least 6'4" and I'm 5'10") and said exactly what the Colonel had said he said.

As I looked past his shirt placket and up into his eyes, I said, "That's exactly what the Colonel said you said."

Although I knew the guy could break me in half, for a few nanoseconds I contemplated the obvious. And then my father's words rang in my brain, "honey, use honey."

So I very politely explained that I was sorry he felt the way he did. I further explained that I could see on the faces of the other members of the foursome that they were also very unhappy with the golf car policy for the day. I encouraged them to come back to the clubhouse where I could refund their money and try to secure them a tee time at another area course with either golf car paths or one that didn't get the rain that we had gotten.

After some discussion (that revealed a long-standing dispute one of the gentlemen had with my predecessor), they elected to keep playing. I reiterated that my offer stood if they changed their minds.

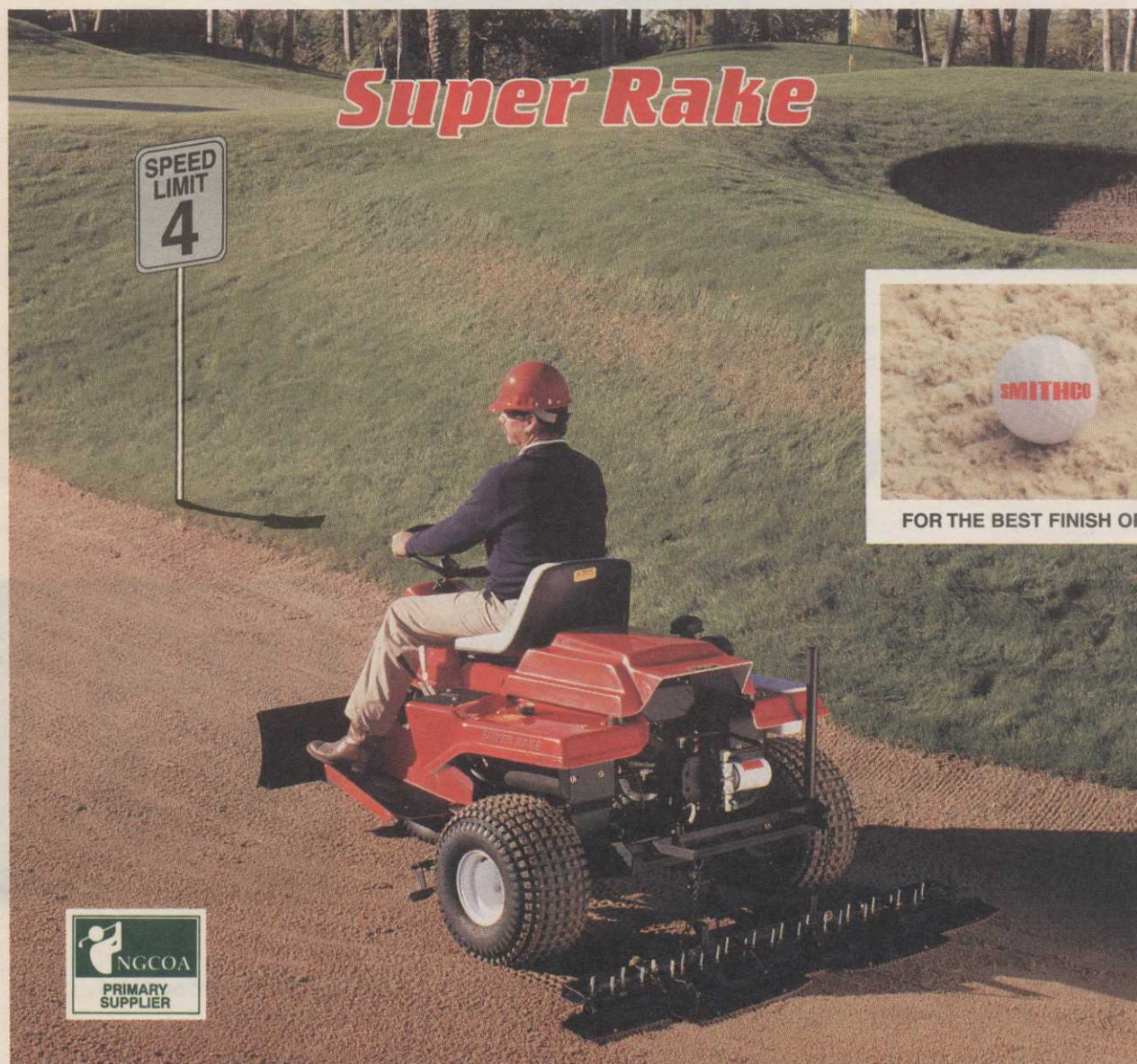
As the Colonel and I drove away, I instructed him to tell all guides to be especially courteous to that foursome, and to trust my judgment on this.

By the end of the day, the gentleman apologized for his behavior and, over time, became one of my best customers.

Tell your staff, and tell them often, Mr. Vince Alfonso Sr. says, "You catch more flies with honey than you do with vinegar." It might just sweeten your bottom line.

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