Quality product, customer service alive and well

Providing a quality product and first-rate customer service. That could be the credo of just about every golf course management firm in the world. Hardly a press release passes through this office without the words quality and customer service appearing somewhere in the text. Management firms do a great job providing these two essential ingredients. And they have the public relations/marketing firms to remind us that they do. But as editors, who sift through piles of press releases and answer numerous phone calls from marketing/PR firms, we sometimes forget there are many family-owned operations out there that daily strive to "exceed their customers' expectations." Unfortunately, they don't have the PR firms to remind us.

Take Franklin Greens Golf & Country Club in Franklin, N.H., which I had the pleasure of playing over the 4th of July weekend. Those who have played the nine-hole, John Van Kleek/Wayne Stiles-designed layout may know the course by another name, Mojakali Country Club. Gil and Lori Lambert, who purchased the property 18 months ago, changed the name to signify the new ownership.

The course plays along a ridge near the headwaters of the Merrimack River in the Granite State's Lakes Region. Opened in 1920, it still boasts the deceptive bunkering and subtle green contours Van Kleek and Stiles designed. But like any 80-year-old, Mojakali/Franklin Greens was beginning to show signs of age.

"It had been sadly neglected for a long time," Gil Lambert said. The Lamberts - who operated a motorcycle business on the New Hampshire/Massachusetts border for 17 years prior to entering the golf industry - paid $800,000 for the property. They invested another $400,000 in clubhouse/course upgrades and $500,000 on the nine-hole, George Sargent-designed addition that will open this fall.

"You always see someone out here working on a project," noted one golfer I played with. "The playing conditions just keep getting better," remarked another.

A quality product. There was no attendant to take my golf bag out of the trunk or valet to park my car at Franklin Greens, things I might expect at a $100 green fee course, but plan to forego for the $25 at a Franklin Greens.

So, while customer service may not "begin when you drive through the entrance," it certainly did surface when I walked into the pro shop. The woman behind the register thanked me for coming to play; the mower operators stopped their machines while I struck my shots; the grill cook came by to ask how my fries tasted; and the woman behind the register offered a direction that shaved five miles off my return trip home.

"They are just naturally friendly," Lambert said when asked if he stressed customer service with his employees. "We treat our employees well and they treat our customers well."

Customer service.

Management firms are to be commended for raising golfers' awareness and expectations for a quality product and customer service. They, and the many family-owned courses that still operate throughout the United States and Canada, are to be commended for following through.