**NGF touts new tools, customer loyalty awards**

By Derek Rice

ORLANDO, Fla. — Seeking to help golf courses better understand both their current and potential customers, the National Golf Foundation (NGF) introduced its InfoNet service and handed out three Customer Loyalty and Satisfaction Program (CLASP) Awards at the PGA Merchandise Show held here.

The CLASP program is a method of evaluating facilities based solely on responses from their customers. By viewing the results, courses can tell what areas of their operations need improvement, which should, by extension, lead to more rounds played.

The NGF presented the new awards to facilities in three categories—premium daily-fee, a daily-fee and a municipal facility—based on consumer responses to NGF surveys.

The winner in the premium daily-fee category was Silverstone Golf Club in Las Vegas, which is operated by ChampionsGate, Fla.-based Meadowbrook Golf. The daily-fee winner was Lago Vista Golf Club in Lago Vista, Texas. The municipal award went to Painted Dunes Desert Golf Course in El Paso, Texas.

"As an organization, we really embrace the CLASP program and could not be happier with the award," said Cindi Feingold, public and media relations director for Meadowbrook Golf.

"We are really proud of our properties and their efforts."

More than 400 facilities participated in the CLASP program, which has generated more than 58,000 surveys in the system. The NGF’s InfoNet allows facilities to confidentially share and compare key financial and operations data with other local, regional and national operators.

NGF members can access the compiled information free, while non-NGF members may receive a free monthly report for participating or unlimited access for $149 a year.

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**Editorial Focus: Hiring and Training**

Taking the guesswork out of hiring

By Harris M. Plotkin

Putting forth the time and effort to hire the right person for a job costs time and money. However, not spending that initial time and effort can often cost a club much more money in employee theft and turnover costs, and in negligent hiring, sexual harassment and wrongful termination lawsuits. These lawsuits are on the rise because too many clubs are not aware of what techniques are legal and available to use in the hiring process.

If you don’t select the right person to start with, no amount of training is ever going to make that person right for the job. You can’t train a frog to be a prince. Too many managers and superintendents make hiring decisions based solely on an interview, and that hiring decision is usually made in the first 3-4 minutes of the interview. The interview, while a necessary and informative aspect of the hiring process, should not be the sole basis for candidate selection. The key to improving your hiring process is to pay careful attention to the steps to take before the interview. Pre-interview screening will not only save you time and money, it can be the difference between just hiring a candidate and hiring the right candidate.

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**Keyonix finds success with Ratcliffe Golf**

GREENVILLE, S.C. — Keyonix LLC recently celebrated the six-month anniversary of its first multi-course installation. Ratcliffe Golf Services in Charlotte, N.C., implemented Keyonix's Smart Key System of accountability for golf car use last summer. The technology has generated more than 58,000 surveys in the system. The NGF’s InfoNet allows facilities to confidentially share and compare key financial and operations data with other local, regional and national operators. NGF members can access the compiled information free, while non-NGF members may receive a free monthly report for participating or unlimited access for $149 a year.

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**Owners lose two personnel cases**

By Joe Devaney and DiAnne Summers Devaney

In two cases that demonstrate the importance of good pre-hire screening and education, the Tenth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled against golf course owners. While the issues in each case were different, the rulings should serve as lessons to other course managers about the proper conduct of hiring and training.

In the first case, Teresita J. Dumais was employed by the Paradise Hills Golf Course in Albuquerque, N.M. Eventually, American Golf Corp. (AGC) assumed ownership of the course and subsequently required all course employees, including Dumais, to execute new employment applications. The employees were required to sign two separate documents. The first, titled “We Can Work It Out,” was an agreement that required them to litigate certain claims, including harassment, discrimination and wrongful discharge, through a binding and final arbitration process instead of

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**MEADOWBROOK GOLF**

Meadowbrook Golf’s Silverstone Golf Club in Las Vegas took top honors in the premium daily-fee facility category of the NGF’s CLASP Awards.
**Hiring decisions**

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"Selection, selection, selection. Employee selection is so crucial that nothing else - not leadership, not team building, not training, not pay incentives, not total quality management - can overcome poor hiring decisions. The aim of selection (to find the best person for the job) may not have changed. But today's consequences of making a bad hire can be severe."

Key factors to help identify whether candidates will be successful at a job include: the ability or aptitude to do the work; attitude and motivation to utilize their talents to do the work; experience the job requires; education and training for the job; and most importantly, compatibility with the organization.

**RESUMES AND EMPLOYMENT APPLICATIONS**

The first thing many employers receive when a job is advertised is a resume or employment application. Resumes are time-consuming to filter through, but they can be effective first screens for candidates. Resumes should be compared against specific selection criteria to see if the candidate has the necessary education, training and experience. It is important to keep in mind, however, that 50 percent of resumes contain fabrications or exaggerations of pay, position and responsibilities.

**TESTS**

The most important step in developing a hiring process is to do the least expensive, most accurate step first. Most people think this is the interview, but very rarely do they take into account how much time and money is spent interviewing up to three people.

Results of a study done by Michigan State University's School of Business revealed that tests were rated four times more accurate than interviews. In designing your hiring process, you must look at the various tests that are available to you, and select those which will measure the qualities you want the applicant to have, so you can compare them to your criteria and make an accurate hiring decision.

Tests are legal and they have been for many years. There are some exceptions. For example, in Rhode Island you cannot use an honesty test as the sole reason for rejecting an applicant; there must be other considerations. In Massachusetts, you cannot use an honesty test at all, but in the remainder of the states you can.

**REFERENCES AND BACKGROUND CHECKS**

Many background checks can be conducted. However, the primary purpose of a background check is to reduce your potential liability for negligent hiring lawsuits. It is important to note that background checks will not tell you if an applicant is honest. Too often, companies have relied on credit checks to do this because of their insurance companies' wishes. All you can tell from a credit check is that somebody has been paying their bills, but you can't tell if they stole the money to do it.

Tests, background checks and reference checks must all be put into their proper contexts. They, along with the interview, are tools to give you information. While none of those tools alone will provide you with all of the information you need, collectively they provide you with a piece of the candidate selection puzzle that will help you make a more accurate and informed hiring decision.

Harris M. (Hank) Plotkin is the founder of The Plotkin Group, a management consulting and training firm located in Carlsbad, Calif.

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**VGM Club, Yamaha**

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sign other car manufacturers.

Yamaha joins a stable of close to 160 vendors who have signed on with VGM, spanning golf course operations from the clubhouse and dining room to the maintenance facility. The company has experienced a great deal of growth in recent months, Ellis said.

"In just the last six months, we've gone to another level. Our membership has grown to over 3,000, and we have 150 to 160 manufacturers," he said.

Ellis said VGM has recently added services such as agronomics consulting and financing for its members. In addition, the company could add several other maintenance-related manufacturers to its stable in the near future.

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second document, "The New Co-Worker Authorization and Acknowledgment Form," employees also agreed they would be bound by provisions of AGC's employment handbook. This was where AGC made its mistake since, although the handbook contained a reference to the binding arbitration process, it also included two conflicting passages.

In one part of the handbook, AGC stated it "reserves the right to at any time change, delete, modify or add to any of the provisions contained in this handbook at its sole discretion," with the exception of an employee's employment-at-will status. Dumais left AGC and subsequently filed a discrimination lawsuit with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, as well as a discrimination complaint in the New Mexico U.S. District Court. AGC responded by filing a motion to compel arbitration, citing the provisions in the paperwork Dumais had signed. The District Court, however, refused to grant AGC's motion and the company appealed to the Tenth Circuit.

In affirming the lower court's ruling, the Tenth Circuit applied a law of contracts under which any ambiguities in documents are construed against the party that drafted the documents. This is a key principal of law found in most (perhaps all) states. In the opinion, the Tenth Circuit wrote, "The alleged agreement between AGC and appellant to arbitrate their employment dispute is illusory" because it allowed one party the right to alter the arbitration agreement's existence or its scope.

This case suggests that golf course managers and their attorneys should carefully review all employment policies and documents to make sure there are no conflicting provisions. If there are, any conflict will be interpreted against the side that drafted the agreement. A binding arbitration agreement, such as was the subject of this lawsuit, can save employer's money, but courts will enforce such agreements only when they have been properly drafted.

In the second case, Arcenio Garcia, a 61-year-old Hispanic, was employed at the Pueblo Country Club in Pueblo, Colo., as a grounds maintenance supervisor. For more than four decades, Garcia had worked at the club in a number of different jobs. In 1998, as part of an extensive upgrade of the club, management sought a person to fill a new position, golf course superintendent. This new position, which required the employee to have knowledge of modern turf management, paid 40 percent more than what Garcia was earning. Garcia did not apply for the new position and the club offered him a reduced position as repair/maintenance manager.

After the club hired a 41-year-old white man to work as the superintendent, Garcia filed a lawsuit in the Colorado U.S. District Court, claiming both age and race discrimination. The Court entered summary judgment in favor of the club, holding that it created a new position and that Garcia could not claim discrimination since he had not applied for this new position.

Garcia appealed and the Tenth Circuit reversed the District Court, sending the case back for a jury trial. The appellate court ruled that a jury had to determine whether Garcia's position had been eliminated and whether the club had simply created the new position as a way to discriminate against Garcia.

The legal moral of this second case is that golf course managers should carefully document whenever new positions are created and which old positions are eliminated. It is important to draft clear job descriptions that spell out the exact differences and responsibilities between old and new jobs. In addition, existing employees should be warned that their position is going to be eliminated and provided a specific opportunity to apply for the new position. By so doing, management may prevent a potential discrimination lawsuit from developing.