

**BUILDING UP MEMBERSHIPS**



## Youth Programs:

# INSURANCE FOR THE FUTURE



by STEPHEN W. BYERS

GOLFDOM looks at youth programs and young adult incentives at country clubs across the nation as a way to ensure clubs an involved future membership and as a way to perpetuate the success of the golf industry as a whole

A major concern in the golf industry in recent years has been how to perpetuate a continuing interest in golf and golf club life among juniors and young adults, the absence of which would amount to a death warrant for the future of the industry as we know it today.

The 1967 survey reported by the Wall Street Journal showing a 514,000 increase over 1960 in the number of youths under 18 who play regular golf, has not allayed the fears expressed by golf club officials, feeling the empty spaces on their membership rolls.

The celebrated chasm separating the values of youth of the 60s and 70s from those of their inevitably more conservative parents, involves myriad ramifications bearing on virtually every aspect of life for both generations.

It should not be the purpose of this article to proclaim the virtues of one generation over another. These points of contention have been, are being and will surely continue to be fully aired by spokesmen for each side.

Suffice to say there are fire-works in the chasm, and if clubs are to survive the reverberations they must find some sturdy bridges to gulf these ideological differences.

#### MOTIVATING YOUNG ADULTS

Just as necessary to the future of golf as juniors and more immediately convertible to full-club member status, are young adults between the ages of 21 and 35.

In the recent past, this age group served as a "hype" to outmoded club doctrine and injected pizzazz, urgency and vitality into sluggish club programs.

This continual resurgence of fresh blood or the lack of it usually determines the survival of any social institution.

The apparent lack of interest expressed by this age group in country club life has already begun to take its toll. For every club like the Scarsdale CC, N.Y., which boasts a surfeit of eager membership applicants, there are three clubs struggling for survival in the wake of higher property taxes, runaway inflation and the specter of a dangerously depleted membership

as the *coup de grace*.

Amazingly, GOLFDOM's poll on how clubs are bearing up under the above triple threat, showed that clubs, which were reticent about offering incentives to young adults in the form of dues and initiation fee breaks, were invariably the clubs in the worst financial shape, and judging from the age of their average member, future improvement appears a slim hope in the absence of policy reform.

Most of their spokesmen felt offering less than full paying memberships was a demeaning (to the club) "ploy," tantamount to door-to-door solicitation, or they were not appraised of or not convinced of the success of such "ploys" at many other clubs. Some of them seemed to be relying on the passage of time to cure their sagging membership problems.

The most successful clubs were those that offered special rates to members under 35 and presented the widest variety of membership activities.

The Lakewood CC, Denver, found it could add 50 new members a year if needed, with a "special membership plan," which provides that at 21 years of age, a young member is eligible for club membership for a fee of \$800. He is charged another \$800 at 26 and again at 31. On his 39th birthday he pays \$2,000, making the total of his four payments \$4,400, which is the amount of the bond required for normal full membership.

Normal monthly dues are \$50, but under the "special membership" this fee is graduated also, starting at \$15 when the member is 21 years old and so on until he reaches age 39.

Under this plan the benefits of full membership are afforded the "special member" at age 21 even though he pays less than a quarter of the bond and monthly fee as a full club member.

The Pinehurst CC, Denver, under the supervision of Laurice T. (Bud) Hall, offers a variety of memberships ranging from a \$16 a month social membership to the \$38.50 a month regular membership fee, with a refundable \$1,500 initiation fee.

"Pinehurst is not just a social club with athletic facilities," says Hall, "nor are we just in the food and beverage business. We are in the people business and enriching the lives of our members, employees and our community is our goal. People and pride are the important ingredients."

The extras offered at Pinehurst besides the regular golf and tennis tournaments, swimming meets, dinner-dances, bridge parties and fashion shows, which stimulate the interest of young adults, include a boating academy periodically coached by marine experts, a fishing academy, scuba diving lessons, charm classes for young girls, swimming and tennis classes taught by physical education instructors, teen dances, hairstyling and wig fashion shows, travelog adventure film series, art classes, culinary classes (running double sessions because of demand), water skiing classes, a mental cybernetics lecture series, a great decisions discussion paneled by four university of Minnesota professors, and club sponsored trips to the Orient and Africa.

#### SUCCESS: AT LEAST AN INDICATOR

The manifold avenues for channeling member interest at Pinehurst are stupefying to most club managers and impossible to completely duplicate unless the club enjoys the 60,000-square feet of roofed floor space, as does Pinehurst.

But many Pinehurst programs are possible for any club, and as Hall is a former president of the Club Managers Assn. of America many managers feel his would not be a bad lead to follow.

#### MOTIVATING JUNIORS

Unanimity of understanding between juniors and their seniors is a very tall order and certainly too much to hope for, but failing that, a few people in the golf industry have dedicated themselves to communicating to young people what is good in the game of golf.

One such man is Frank Emmet, director, Junior Golfers, of Wash-

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ington, D.C. Emmet realized 46 years ago that mere coexistence with youth in the hope that the passage of time will supply the impetus for golf enthusiasm was not enough. He knew that simply building a short link course for juniors separate from the adult course and saying "go play" was not the kind of motivation needed to satiate the golf club membership rolls of the future.

### COMPETITION: A KEY TO ENTHUSIASM

Since 1927, Emmet has worked to encourage high school golf programs and the establishment of national and international golf tournaments. The Williams Cup Tournament that he worked to establish 10 years ago, in which eight teams of young American and Canadian golfers compete, is one of many successful Emmet efforts to motivate young people, through competition, to embrace golf as a life's profession and avocation.

Emmet stresses that, though much can be accomplished in high school and municipal golf programs, country clubs could provide a great service to the industry by developing and vigorously supporting junior golf programs, clinics and summer golf camps.

Emmet's efforts to promote the joys of golf and golf club life have not been singular. More recently, the names of Mike Hebron, coordinator for the Met PGA Junior Championships and head professional of the Smithtown Landing GC and Jimmy Jackson, head professional at New York's oldest municipal golf course, Van Cortlandt Park, have been added to the growing list of professionals "getting involved."

Before Hebron was approached three years ago to be junior chairman of the Met PGA, the Met was the only district that didn't sponsor a junior championship golf tournament. Now they do. Professionals donate prizes and take ads in a Junior Journal, which lists tournament winners and provides some written golf lessons. The Chemical Bank in New York City was persuaded to provide scholar-

ships to juniors suffering from financial hardships and the YMCA donates trophies along with other civic-minded municipal groups.

Hebron says, "Junior tournaments are my way of giving back to golf what it has given me. Junior golfers formerly came from the caddie ranks, but with the advent of golf cars and the movement of golf courses to the more remote suburbs, the caddie system can no longer be counted on to supply young golfers. There were formerly many municipal and private courses located in the city or on its near periphery that young caddies could get to on foot or with a short bus ride. This distance problem, combined with the advent of the golf car and the fact that suburban kids that live near courses don't need the money as badly as city kids, has cut into the caddie system. It's just a lot tougher to keep kids interested in golf without tournaments."

Hebron's golf clinics are held every Saturday at 1 p.m. for ages 6 to 14. The size of the class, he says, determines the number of instructors. He doesn't recommend private lessons for the young kids, even if they can afford them, because he feels golf is more fun for them when they are surrounded by their peers.

This is a tip that country clubs should note, because the fun in playing golf is surely the prime motivation for playing it. With older children or kids who have developed expertise at the game, private lessons are more applicable, because the motivation is more intrinsic and honing their game to a fine edge becomes a more personal experience.

Hebron gives the learning of etiquette and safety an equal priority with learning expertise in his lessons, stating that "consideration for rules on the part of juniors is the biggest factor in getting adults interested in playing golf with the young people."

He emphasizes the advantage of a club having a short nine-hole course on which the very young and beginners can make mistakes without curtailing the play and enjoyment of adults on the main course. But he does not feel that making a special place for youth to

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RHODE ISLAND TURFGRASS FIELD DAYS, University of Rhode Island, Kingston, R.I., August 22-23.

TURF AND LANDSCAPE DAY, Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center, Wooster, Ohio, September 11.

MICHIGAN TURFGRASS FIELD DAY, Michigan State University, East Lansing, Mich., September 13.

TURFGRASS FIELD DAY, Ornamental Horticulture Research Center, Urbana, Ill., September 18.

PROFESSIONAL GROUNDS MANAGEMENT SOCIETY ANNUAL MEETING, Wilson Lodge, Ogelbay Park, Wheeling, W.Va., September 19-22.

MIDWEST TURF FIELD DAY, Agronomy Farm and Campus, Purdue University, West Lafayette, Ind., September 24.

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play golf should be regarded as the sole motivation for youth golf enthusiasm.

Hebron has had a large measure of success with his golf camps at Smithville Landing. "Kids meet here one day a week for eight weeks. We don't want to saturate their interest with too rigid a program. Our classes run from 12:30 to 5 p.m., and they have plenty of time to fish or do other things.

"Being natural hams, they particularly like to view the periodic films we take of their progress. We try to keep the fee for our summer camp to the minimum we can function with (\$50)."

Hebron regards his youth program efforts as an investment in the future of golf as well as a bid to motivate juniors to participate in a worthwhile sport. "They benefit and golf benefits. The player and the sport are the same," he says.

Hebron urges the establishment of more inexpensive clinics, the financing of which could come from private sponsors. "The main thing is recruiting interested people to get these sponsors and follow the programs through. People will often give money but not their time. We need both."

Jimmy Jackson is another man who has not been selfish with his time. This fall he is again scheduled to teach golf to underprivileged youngsters through a series of clinics at six junior high schools in New York's South Bronx, one of the most depressed areas in the city. (See article appearing on p. 34.)

The National Golf Foundation published this year a booklet, authored by Gary Wiren, educational director of the Professional Golfers' Assn., wherein he stated the NGF feeling about youth and the future of golf: "Junior golf means working with young people, and working with young people means an opportunity to shape the future of golf.

"Qualities such as courage, perseverance and self control," Wiren continues, "which are elemental parts of achieving playing success, are values which can be strengthened in the youngster's character under competitive golf situations."

Wiren also stresses that the teaching of golf skills makes juniors enjoy the game more.

## GUIDELINES

It may prove beneficial to country clubs in evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of their junior programs to ask themselves the following questions:

- 1) Does our golf course have a regular junior day or morning that is scheduled each week during summer months?
- 2) Do our juniors have an organization with a statement of purpose?
- 3) Is there a schedule of events or seasonal program for the juniors that is posted or printed?
- 4) Are lessons or clinics offered on regularly junior players?
- 5) Is there a substantial weekly junior turnout at our club?
- 6) Is there an area, a room or a bulletin board set aside specifically for juniors?
- 7) Is there an active junior golf committee at our course, which is representative of the adults, the directors or owners, the golf course staff and the junior players?
- 8) Are our juniors required or given an opportunity to take tests in skills and on rules and etiquette to achieve certain privileges at the course?
- 9) Does our junior program produce players who participate on high school golf teams or who distinguish themselves in district or state competition?
- 10) Does our golf course hold an annual junior championship for its own players?

It should be remembered that the single most important component in a successful youth program is the dedication of the adult club coordinators.

It would be unfair not to report that there are those in the industry who have expressed doubt that junior membership drives and special rate stimulants for young adults will be productive as a device to fill the member rolls of the future.

The future of the golf industry and country club life is hard to predict, but one thing seems certain: Little can be hurt by taking a hard look at successful clubs and implementing what appears to work. □