Preoccupation with price as a competitive force leads many professionals to forget areas in which they can have a distinct advantage over the "downtown" competition. "Service above all" is the motto at Columbine’s pro shop, and sales volume proves the wisdom of these words

by JERRY CLAUSSEN

“I don’t ever want to put up a sign saying, ‘Closed, We Undersold Everybody.’”

Tony Novitsky was smiling, but completely serious about serving the members as professional at Columbine CC, in Littleton, a suburb just outside Denver.

“We are always available for the members’ convenience,” he continues. “We rely on and expect their support. We want the best for a member. We want him to buy only what fits him and what he can enjoy.”

Novitsky is emphatic about dealing with the “problem” of competition from discount stores, closeouts and other “deals” available today to golfers.

“This isn’t a new problem. We don’t try to compete; we don’t intend to try,” the section’s 1967 Pro of the Year answers. “Low price is always easy to sell. But no one else can compete with us in giving service.”

Novitsky also feels this question touches on the long-range future of golf and country club operations.

“A country club is not so different from any other organization. If members don’t support the club, it will be hurt and maybe die,” he points out.

A veteran of 14 seasons at Columbine, the astute head professional puts service first in all phases of his pro shop business and personal planning. He works at:

• Keeping a flexible schedule to stay available to give a lesson, play a few holes with members, advise on buying clubs, attend club committee meetings and answer questions from his staff and golfers;
• Buying merchandise only from reliable sources that can guarantee latest styles and in quantities he needs when his members need them;
• Having a Feature of the Week promotion, not one or two major closeouts a year, so that members may save on needed items throughout the season. Example: A lucky size shoe discount. “This says, ‘Thank you for your support’ all year,” says Novitsky;
• Accepting returns of merchandise with no questions asked;
• Meeting often with the club manager and course superintendent to coordinate activity schedules and solve mutual problems;
• Leading groups of members on annual vacation-tournament junkets to golf retreats in Scotland, Bermuda, Hawaii and Acapulco;
• Keeping a complete file of every purchase by every member, noting all sizes or specifications, on unique record cards he designed;

On the latter, Novitsky is a strong believer in simple, useful records.

“There is no end to forms, but our simple file serves well,” he reports.

“The size, color and so on of each sale are put on the cash register sales slip, then transferred to the file card. We even mark down slack inseam lengths when a man has a pair altered. As the golf season comes and goes, you would be surprised how some sizes change. We want current records always.”

These same cards, plus shipment invoices and memos on trial merchandise, serve as the inventory record.

“We used to keep a perpetual inventory,” he

The pro shop is open “from 7 a.m. 'til dark and later.”

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"Change revives members' interest," says Novitsky, above. This interior, right, is remodeled every couple of years and displays and merchandise positions are changed weekly.
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Columbine CC is a golfers' club, but also a modern suburban family facility. Founded in 1957, it is encircled by a luxurious residential community, Columbine Valley, along the South Platte River. Columbine and Novitsky were hosts to the 1967 PGA Championship won by Don January.

The club currently lists about 425 men golfers and 250 women players and at least 120 active juniors. The narrow bag storage room is packed to the ceiling with 325 bags.

The pro shop is open 7 a.m. until dark or later, six days a week. Novitsky says he personally tries to close up at night when he can "spend 20 to 30 minutes looking around the shop to ask: 'What can we do better?'"

He has a young, talented and conscientious staff. First assistant John Clark, a strong teacher and merchandiser, came to Columbine CC from Minnesota four years ago. Assistant Alan Resinger and salesgirl Bunny Dengler, plus another girl hired for the summer, complete the shop staff. Novitsky oversees a caddie master, starter-ranger and the three boys in club storage.

"We look for something in each assistant beyond the usual," says Novitsky. He cites John's display know-how and Alan's sign-making as helpful extras.

What about the future? Novitsky is optimistic about the country club business.

"Our profession is more challenging and moving ahead in many ways," he replies. "The manufacturers are coming out with better equipment faster than ever. The PGA is doing great things for us with their business schools.

"I just have to keep looking ahead six months to a year or more to find new methods and keep improving our service," says the professional who never forgets that his members come first.