



club managers

WEST

Everybody in the golf business talks about increased costs, but the responsibility for doing something about them rests with club managers, even if it's nothing more profound than raising prices for food, beverages and club services.

In some cases the economic pressure is forcing managers and boards in the West to make plans and changes they might otherwise delay.

For example, one San Francisco Peninsula club manager (Arthur Frey, Burlingame CC, Burlingame) described by its manager as "very social" is in the midst of a youth movement, with several activities reminiscent of those of 25 years ago or more — junior tennis and golf, a swim team, and the real possibility of teen-age dances.

The club budget is up 15 percent over 1973, and dues have been increased 12½ percent. "We've got a younger generation coming on", the manager (Frey) said, "and it means some changes."

He said committees must work harder to find new sources of revenue, and to avoid stagnation in club programs.

In contrast to superintendents in the area, who have at least one consolation in a plentiful labor market, managers consistently complain about the lack of trained help. As one (Frey) said, "Well trained chefs are very hard to find. European-trained people just aren't around; it may mean prefabrication of meals from central sources some day".

Another manager in the San Francisco area (Al Meillon, California GC, South San Francisco) said club income at the midpoint of 1974 was ahead of 1973, but admitted the food department is a ma-

jor concern. "Recent increases in both food and beverages make it very difficult to get our money back from the members," he said.

On one hand managers must encourage their members more and more to take advantage of club facilities, while increasing the prices repeatedly.

He is experiencing a youth movement also. His membership has turned over almost 50 percent in the past three years. "Younger members tend to use the facilities more, and more often," he said.

His club is planning modernization of the clubhouse facilities later this year, and favor seems to be growing for the construction of tennis courts, which could be the result of a more youthful membership.

An East Bay club manager (Peter Pinot, Round Hill CC, Alamo) has ridden the crest of the tennis popularity wave to new highs. With 15 courts and tentative plans for three more, he has 400 tennis members as compared to 500 golfing members.

He believes many other clubs could increase use of their existing facilities and increase revenue significantly by emphasizing tennis. As for maintenance: "Super!" he said. "All you have to do is hose down the courts and replace a net now and then, a far cry from the constant worry about golf course condition".

Although he may be oversimplifying the maintenance formula for tennis facilities, he does more than worry about the golf course, because he describes its condition as the best it has been in the club's 13 years. Playing is up, reflecting member appreciation for the course's condition.

The club also is involved in a \$250,000 remodeling program to update furnishings in the dining room, bar and kitchen, with restrooms and a snack bar on the course, the plan-

ting of several trees, 100 percent cart paths and recent repaving of the parking lot.

In spite of a dues increase the signs of a vigorous membership are more evident than ever at one San Francisco club (Peninsula CC, San Mateo, Glenn Scott, manager), and 1974 seems sure to surpass 1973.

He's at a loss to explain the improved membership and transfer sales, especially in view of a less than optimistic economic outlook. And somewhat surprisingly, most of the new members are over 40. A tentative plan drawn last year to offer special memberships in the under-40 age has been shelved.

He describes his club as very stable membership traditionally. "We work hard at analyzing our members' needs, and supplying them," he said. Committees are unusually busy, involving many members in club affairs. "When management, board and house committees understand the membership it works," he said. And it appears he's right.

CENTRAL

"Business in the first two months of the season was so good that it almost scared me." Thus, in a manner as succinct as his name, did Norman Norman, manager of Flossmoor on Chicago's far southside, describe patronage through the middle part of May.

"We were getting three or four visits a week from considerable percentage of our members, something I hadn't seen before in the six years I've been at the club," said Norman. "Luncheon business was up 15 percent or more due to better ladies' day turnouts and because women mem-

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Petrie's maintenance plans are right on schedule with very little disease reported. Of course, in the Atlanta area there is no general rainfall, rain takes the form of thunder-showers, so Petrie doesn't have to share the concerns of his Northern brethren. However, there is the heat. It can be tremendous in Georgia. Petrie reports Pine Tree's Bent greens are doing well this season, in spite of the heat.

Parts are hard to get down South too and anything sent out for repair is very slow getting back, according to Petrie.

After a slow start caused by wet weather, Terry Wueschinski's program is back on schedule at the CC of York, Pa.

Running a couple of diesel tractors has helped alleviate any potential gasoline shortage problem at York. Wueschinski cleared up a strain of Dollar Spot with Daconil in the latter part of June and reports no further turf problems.

The Pennsylvania State Women's Amateur was contested at the CC of York in July and in anticipation of the event three of the ladies' tees were reconstructed this Spring.

Wueschinski reported minor problems with not being able to get replacement parts but said it wasn't too bad.

It would appear that superintendents in 1974 may not have to face a major crisis such as that growing out of the pending fuel shortage that might have proven disastrous if it had come to pass.

Perhaps even the weatherman may balance his early season outpourings over the Northeast with more gentle showers during the rest of the season. It is hoped that he too may have forgotten 1973!

Disease and blight, not apparent to any great degree at mid-season, may well be a sometime thing this year.

The parts replacement problem, with no ready solution in sight, will probably continue to plague superintendents.

Most East Coast superintendents, looking forward to a good season in their own inimitable style, will no doubt willingly exchange the minor annoyances currently being expressed for the relative peace of a season without major strain.

club managers

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bers are entertaining more. Dinner business was 10 percent over last year, which was as good as any we ever had. On the top of this, the club, which caters only members' parties and weddings, is booked solidly until Labor Day."

A dozen other club managers who were queried weren't, with the exception of Biltmore's Bill Blackwood, quite as enthusiastic as Norman Norman in describing their clubs' business in the early weeks. Most estimated they were doing better than last year, but because the weather in April and early May kept going from rain to cold and back to rain almost continuously, the consensus was that things hadn't really opened up. Still, there was general agreement that food and drink volume so far in 1974 was possibly 10 percent better than it had been a year ago.

For reasons not fully explained except that it has a young and hardy membership, Biltmore got rather exceptional play from mid-April on. Courses at other clubs, except for Easter Sunday, which was relatively clement, were largely deserted in the early weeks, but even Biltmore is located in the northern section of the Chicago District, it was getting at least an average quota of play from April 1 on. This, coupled with expensive renovation of two grills and the addition of a dining room, completed last fall, was responsible for keeping members pouring in. Blackwood's early statistics were just about as glowing as those reported for Flossmoor.

The general increase in club patronage was, of course, attributed to gas rationing. It was being referred to in mid-May as the "late crisis," because by then gas hadn't been in short supply for six or eight weeks. But many people were wary that the crisis might re-surface during the July vacation crush, and even more were disgruntled by the huge increase in the price of gas. Consequently, the mood was to greatly curtail vacation-taking this year and choose recreation and entertainment close to home. Country clubs started profiting from this attitude

immediately upon reopening this spring. What was Florida's loss was their gain, judging from the spring report.

One club manager, while acknowledging that the oil companies had driven people to the haven of club-houses and other near-at-hand entertainment, suggested that there is a new attitude abroad regarding spending. He wasn't sure if it was fatalistic or because people have unbounded confidence in the economy. "They've been more relaxed about money this year than they have been in a long time," this man said. "I wonder if it is because people are figuring you might as well spend while you have it, or because the threatened 1974 recession isn't turning out to be as severe as expected. Anyway, there is optimism in the air, but it could be false."

It is dimmed, of course, when people start thinking about prices. Menu prices at practically all clubs in the Chicago District have been increased around 10 percent, although in a few cases the increases are selective. Most managers say they have held the line on meat, but for the most part, it stops there. Norman Norman, who can quote the Cost of Living index without reference to props or to notes, along with a few other managers thinks that club-house prices should be up a minimum of 15 percent. However, the non-profit nature of the dining room operation doesn't make it imperative that cost increases be immediately recovered in their entirety. If a deficit is incurred at the end of the year, it can be easily adjusted by that great equalizer, the assessment. Anyway, most members feel better paying lower prices, even if they know there is to be an accounting later on.

In a way, it is kind of a miracle that country clubs have restricted dining increases to no more than 10 percent. Norman points out that in the last year there have been eight increases in dairy products, amounting

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CONVENIENT SHOPPING

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to at least 50 percent. Coffee and bakery goods have gone up five different times; potato prices have doubled; some clubs are avoiding garnishing sandwiches and fruit plates with lettuce. As for the salad dieters, they are benefiting doubly — from the non-caloric content of the lettuce and the fact that portions have been reduced.

On top of these no-so-healthy food price increases, the clubs have the added burden of paying higher wages to waitresses, bus boys and other help, as the result of the recent increase in the minimum wage.

To try to play to scratch with ballooning costs, most clubs are making no bones about cutting back on service. It has brought about some grumbling on the part of the partons, but most managers say that when members grasp what the management is trying to do, they accept it. At one club the waitress staff reduces by one, and each waitress was assigned one more table than normally. This resulted in more than a slight delay between courses, at which no diner took umbrage. At Flossmoor CC, all noon meals are being served buffet style and more evening dinners are being served the same way. The latter is not the most popular innovation the club ever has introduced, but it is not being challenged by boycott. Another nicety that clubs are being forced to give up or reduce are gourmet dinners. Most managers really don't like to see this. It does away with an elegance that sets a club apart. As one manager says, "I always enjoyed getting ready for and serving a gourmet dinner. We didn't make much money on it, but the whole staff liked the idea of doing something different."

The economies that came in last fall — switching off lights and cutting back on heat — were still in effect this spring largely because they had become habit forming. A few clubs postponed buying new furnishings this year and some deferred renovation programs, but three of the 12 managers who were interviewed revealed that their clubhouses were extensively remodeled. One of these was Biltmore. Butter-

field made some improvements to its clubhouse and built a new pool and tennis courts as part of a continuing program that has gone on for five or six years. Glen Oak spent nearly \$200,000 in re-doing a lounge and dining room, overhauled its landscaping and, in addition, put \$220,000 into an automatic watering system, something that would have cost \$175,000 if it had been done two or three years ago. Some managers say there is no point in delaying improvements. Where costs of remodeling and additions, such as irrigation systems, used to go up 4 or 5 percent a year, they are now skyrocketing by thrice that. Along with Butterfield, three clubs added from two to four courts to their tennis facilities, and one built a new pro shop for the tennis pro.

There has been no widespread increase in dues this year. Of the two clubs that reported doing so, one upped its fee by \$10 a month and the other added a \$200 a year extra charge. According to one manager, the new idea seems to be wait until the end of the year and make the necessary assessments to wipe out any deficits that are incurred. If the club's cash flow is large enough to take care of current bills, wages and so on, and money doesn't have to be borrowed at present high interest rates, this policy makes it easy on everyone. But if a fairly large amount of money has to be borrowed, the interest paid on it may cause the member to pay a surcharge on an assessment. One manager suggested that putting assessments on a semiannual rather than annual basis might ease the financial strain at many clubs and, at the same time, make it easier on the member. Regardless of the status of dues and assessments, club memberships at Chicago area clubs are at quota strength and most have waiting lists.

About two out of three managers agreed that they had less trouble in finding clubhouse employees this spring than at any time in the past. One reason for this is that a large nucleus of most club staffs is being given 10 or 11 months employment a year. More and more, managers are attempting to recruit within families in the vicinity of their clubs. If a mother is working as a waitress, she is encouraged to try to persuade her daughter to come to work at the

club. A few clubs are paying their employees referral bonuses as an incentive to help out in the recruiting program. Practically all are providing one-way or two-way transportation for women who work in dining rooms or kitchens.

And there isn't any doubt that the inside or clubhouse labor situation was eased this spring when the minimum hourly wage was increased from \$1.60 to \$2. Women who were reluctant to work at the old rate gave the matter a second thought when the minimum scale was raised 25 percent. The additional cushion plus the prospect of earning good tips proved to be the needed incentive in quite a few cases.

If there were doubts about 1974 business before the season began, they were quickly dispelled as soon as the clubhouse doors were reopened this spring. It rained on 13 of the first 20 days in May, almost completely knocking out golf, but still the members came out. That caused the club managers to wonder where they were going to put them as soon as the weather got straightened out.

EAST

"Better this year than it has been for the past few years," Turf Valley CC, Ellicott City, Maryland.

"Business wise we're doing real well. Membership, we're holding our own," Cypress Lake CC, Ft. Myers, Florida.

"We've got about a 20% increase this year. A fantastic April, May and June," Whitmarsh Valley CC, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

In these and other typical commentaries the Management third along the East Coast has added its voice to the anticipations for an excellent season.

Variances in membership numbers, occasionally dropping below previous totals, have been offset by more active members. More people seem to be playing golf, according to Dick Welch at the Turf Valley CC. He said recently, "We've set a goal of 400 A members, 450 B members and 250 Social members. Every year our A memberships stay within 20 of the 400, the B's always fill up but this year we find our social memberships have dropped off."

Vanderpohl at Whitmarsh

Valley, in spite of a raise in dues on the first of the year to \$1,000 and an initiation fee of \$5,000 that resulted in a loss of 75 members, has already picked up 40 new members.

Tom Raber, club president and management spokesman at Cypress Lake CC in Ft. Myers, reports a minimum waiting list with membership virtually up to capacity. This season stock was raised but the 350 membership capacity has not been affected.

As Joe Makara indicates in the spread on the pros, more active members have replaced those less active at the Manchester CC in New Hampshire, too.

Dining room and bar revenues are 20% higher than last year at Cypress Lake, according to Raber, and Vanderpohl at Whitmarsh Valley reports, "I've had the best dining room and bar operation that the club has ever had."

At Whitmarsh Valley in particular it is felt a continuation of the gasoline shortage would probably have helped business. The club has many affluent members who go off on trips who might have stayed closer to home if the embargo had not been lifted. Conversely, the gasoline shortage affected banquet business for Dick Welch at Turf Valley. Several large functions were cancelled in February and March and splintered into smaller, local area gatherings. Regardless, Welch still maintains he'll do his best year in the seven he's seen at Turf Valley.

At Turf Valley an extensive pool renovation costing \$48,000 was undertaken this spring. The state's largest pool at 50 meters is 14 years old and seam separation due to settlement threatened its usage. Relining and crack repairs cost \$22,000, \$18,000 was spent for concrete and another \$8,000 for plumbing and electricity.

The mood is decidedly up among those we were able to talk with. The only "trend" apparent in mid-season might be the recruiting of active members to replace those less active. If the trend proves to be true and if it continues management may have every right to expect a near record year.

Active golfers usually make active customers. The trick will be to spot the trend and be prepared to handle the increased business.

professionals

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looks very much like the area's golf shop proprietors are going to play to a standoff. Not bad, considering that as late as the first week of June everyone was wondering if the rain ever was going to stop and if anyone ever was going to get the chance to play golf again.

There were 22 days of rain in May. The weather continued perverse through the first ten days of June. Over this 40-day span, from five to eight playing days were completely lost, and as many as half of them kept all except the most determined golfers off the courses. Clubs in the northern section of the Chicago district suffered a little more than Westside and Southside clubs, losing two or three more full days on the average than the latter, and probably not enjoying as many days in which there was at least partial play.

The pattern of sales pluses and minuses in comparing 1974 with '73 is fairly definitely defined where the weather was poorest. Shops in the Waukegan, Arlington Heights, Barrington Hills sector apparently didn't fare as well as those in the Oak Park-Riverside and farther South section. Yet, a blanket statement can't be made that business wasn't as good at all clubs in the north as in the west and south due to the drainage situation at different clubs and also because of varying golf car policies. At several locations, restrictions on the use of golf cars when turf is suited for not much more than foot traffic, have been loosened in the last two or three years.

At clubs where volume was off, practically all of the loss was attributed to irretrievable glove and ball sales. To give an idea of how weather curtailed play, only 1,850 caddy rounds were recorded at Glen Oak through May 25th when normally 3,000 would be expected. And, Glen Oak probably wasn't as hard hit as clubs farther north. At Skokie, a Northside club, there were only five days in May suitable for lesson giving. Still, the distress flags weren't flying over more than one-third or one-fourth of the shops. The reason was that capital equipment — clubs,

bags, shoes, sportswear, etc. — was selling about as well as it ever did.

What saved the pros on the heavy goods was the enormous amount of traffic in the clubhouse during the spring, heavier this year than ever before. Due, of course, to the fact that so many club members aren't planning on travelling this summer as much as they did in the past. The windfall due to the cutback rebounded to the club restaurants and bars and to a lesser extent to the pro shops. A lot of people bought playing equipment in anticipation of the rain and cold weather eventually abating.

The situation from the standpoint of weather, and that is about all that preoccupied the pros until the early part of June, is well summed up by Bill Heald of the Riverside Club. "I'm about as confused by my business this year as I have ever been," he says. "On the basis of weather we should be having an awfully lean season. But since the latter part of April people have been milling around the club. Sooner or later they strayed into the shop and started buying. As a result, our business this year is as good or a little better than it was in 1973." Another thing that has made the current season profitable for Heald is that none of his big events has been rained out.

Paul Lemke of Oak Park estimates that his volume is close to 15 percent higher than it was last year. Possibly half of the increase is due to inflated prices. Sales at Oak Park were only fair until the end of May but they picked up noticeably at Memorial Day and continued strong through June. The ball and glove business he lost due to rained-out rounds was more than compensated for by other items. One thing that has helped the Oak Park pro is that his club's policy on golf cars is not as stringent as elsewhere. Club officials have decided that damage done to turf by the cars is easily repairable and there is no point in being over fastidious as to their use. Of course, it takes cooperation from members in making this policy valid. They have to use good judgment in deciding where they can drive on rainy or soggy days.

Possibly the only club that is outdoing Lemke in volume increase is Medinah. Business has never been better than it is at this location, which has a 'supermarket' pro shop.