

What Makes a PGA Professional of the Year?

Old-fashioned as it may sound, Warren Smith believes in serving people

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Good taste, friendly atmosphere, neat displays, excellent golf merchandise are all qualities that impress the visitor to Warren Smith's pro shop at prestigious Cherry Hills CC located in suburban Denver.

Here, high standards are mundane, an expression of the man who copped the 1973 Professional Golfers' Assn. Professional of the Year Award from among 7,200 other PGA members. Unlike headline-grabbing, meteoric successes, Warren Smith didn't make his name by playing tour golf. He learned his business by trial and error, by serving and liking people. He served his profession as Colorado Section president five times and in the last 10 years has sent at least seven former assistants on to good head pro jobs.

The Michigan-born Smith is understandably proud of his staff, both present and past. Former assistants of his, who have moved up in the profession, include Bill Majure at Phoenix CC and Ed Gnam at Houston CC. He is proud, too, of his reputation among young, up-and-coming professionals and keeps on file the many inquiries he gets from young men interested in apprenticing at Cherry Hills. "When we have an opening, we have a wide choice from these and any new applicants," says Smith.

A "positive attitude" is the first thing Smith looks for in a prospective assistant. Some experience is desirable, the "where" being more important than how much. "Close to scratch" golf ability is helpful, Smith feels, because golf members "respect you more."

Smith and his most experienced holdover assistant work personally with a new assistant to teach him procedures. There is no "manual of operations." Sometimes, a new man brings with him novel and better ideas, which Smith, to his credit, will incorporate into his golf program.

The Cherry Hills pro staff includes a number one and number two full-time

assistants (Clayton Cole and Stoney Brown in 1973), a full-time female assistant (Carlyne Whitworth, sister of LPGA star Kathy Whitworth), a third shop assistant in season, a full-time bag room man and a seasonal practice range, caddie master and starter.

The top assistants draw a salary, plus a bonus for extra shop sales above goals, plus all income from their teaching. Smith encourages his assistants to do all the teaching they can, learn purchasing and bookkeeping, go to golf committee meetings and help run tournaments.

"We try to help each man learn to be a good head professional. After three or four seasons here, a man is qualified for any club job," Smith declares with pride.

If and when the number one assistant is tapped to run his own shop (as has happened in the past), the number two man in line replaces him.

Smith's duties at Cherry Hills include every facet of the golf program: shop, junior lessons, golf cars, cad-

dies, starting, tournament management. "We just try to do whatever we can to keep our members happy," Smith relates modestly. "We learn something new every year. We try to improve our job each season. Play has increased by about one-third since I came in 1963. We've expanded the staff and give more lessons."

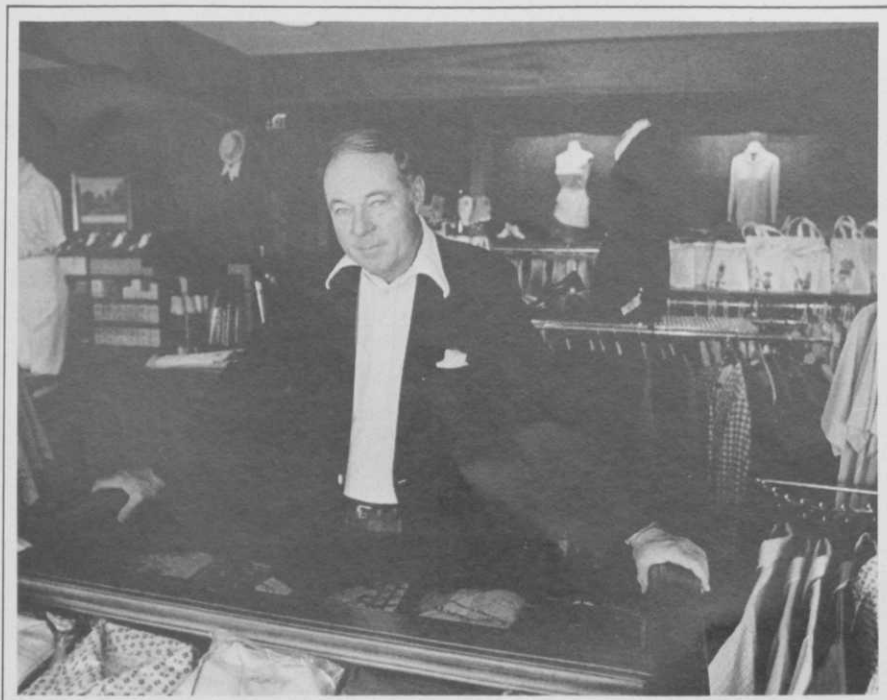
The three teaching professionals give about 1,000 lessons a year.

"One of us is available almost any time. We never tell anyone we're too busy," says the 58 year-old Smith. "The methods may vary according to the player, but building his confidence comes first in helping him hit the ball better."

Smith and his assistants are available to play golf with members; one on Tuesday, one on Wednesday, and one on Thursday. Whoever signs up first may play. One professional plays golf with three ladies on Tuesday mornings.

This kind of availability has the ob-

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vious approval of members. Play in 1973 topped 31,000 rounds.

Other services that Smith and his staff routinely perform include:

- Arranging games between new and old members or calling out-of-town clubs to introduce a member who will be traveling;
- Taking trade-ins on merchandise won at out-of-town tournaments;
- Picking up and returning to the rack room, bags left at the club's entrance (there are 750 bags stored in the rack room) after a trip or at the practice range;
- Always speaking first and calling a member by his or her name when he or she enters the shop;
- Managing strong junior golf and caddie programs.

Cherry Hills is one of the rare clubs where caddies get as much work as they did 10 years ago. The balance of use between caddies and golf cars has hardly changed, says Smith. There are 65 electric cars for rent, but 45 caddies worked full-time last year.

"Many golfers would still rather walk, if a good caddie is available," says Smith. "We try to get and keep good boys. We want quality boys, those we can train and keep until they are 18 or 19. In winter we stay in touch by sending them Christmas cards with a letter asking them to come back next season."

Despite a busy course, junior play is encouraged. Smith and his staff oversee a popular lesson program for beginners, twice-weekly competition on the par three nine, two teams in the

metropolitan clubs' junior league, an annual three-day team invitational hosting 20 clubs and the annual season-ending father-son or -daughter tournament. Casual junior play is allowed Monday through Friday mornings or after 3:30 p.m. Youngsters with a 12 or less handicap may play anytime except Saturday mornings.

MERCHANDISING PROGRAM

Smith's pro shop operation is managed in an intelligent, business-like manner. The goal is to offer Cherry Hills members the best and to make a profit—no discount store methods or gift shop gimmicks, just good service, in the Smith manner.

What changes has he seen in merchandising in recent years? New styles, more and better choices, of course. But sales records indicate that buying habits have changed at Cherry Hills. The chart below shows three-year interval comparisons in the ratio of major category sales:

	1966	1969	1972
Golf equipment	63%	54%	46%
Men's soft goods	29%	37%	43%
Women's soft goods	8%	9%	11%

All categories have increased in volume, with men's wear showing the largest. Part of the reason for the increase in all categories, besides a change in buying habits, is that shop space was expanded in 1969, which gave him the opportunity to buy and display more merchandise.

"We're probably not getting as much ladies' business as we should or

as some shops do," admits Smith. "We've just done a better job of buying and sell men's wear. We have to, to serve 550 male golfers."

Here are some other Smith answers to key merchandising problems:

Buying: We depend a lot on salesmen and company recommendations, plus our experience. Our biggest problem is getting deliveries on time, so we stick with companies that give us the best service."

Number of lines: "Except in clubs, we stock only a few lines in depth. In shoes and slacks, for example, we carry one line heavy, then show a few in one or two others."

Non-golfing items: "This is supposed to be a golf shop. We don't want to make it a gift shop or compete with discount stores. We only stock a little golf jewelry, like tie tacs."

Displays: "During the main season, we change key displays once a week. We also move the mannequins and tables around to achieve a 'new look.'"

Sales: "We always have something on sale, featuring one item at a time. This encourages members to stop in and look more often."

Promotion: "Our best advertising is the sale ads we run in the club newsletter. An assistant also has a column of golf instruction. For Christmas, we send a letter and return order card to the members promoting personalized golf balls as gifts."

Keeping records: "Unlike many clubs, we don't keep detailed sales records on each member. Building and updating a file on everyone is difficult. Sizes and needs change. If someone from a family asks for a gift recommendation, we just check the bag in the rack room or look in the locker."

Doesn't running a busy, demanding golf program and attending to a busy pro shop at a large club such as Cherry Hills have its headaches?

"Keeping up is probably our main worry," admits Smith. "There is bookwork, mail, phone calls, scheduling—these use up tremendous amounts of time. If you get behind, it's hard to catch up."

The visitor to his office overlooking No. 9 green immediately notices, however, that Smith never seems hurried and keeps an immaculate desk.

"Having a good staff makes the job much easier," he smiles. "Like any successful football coach will tell you, you can't win without a good staff." □

