





**PGA President Bill Clarke has been named executive director at his home club — a new concept in club management.**

# THE MAIN MAN

A decision was made earlier this year at Hillendale Country Club in the rolling hills north of Baltimore that may have an effect on the way golf courses are organized and run in the future.

The club appointed R. William Clarke, 51-year-old PGA president who will be stepping down from that post next month, to the position of executive director. The appointment has put Clarke in charge of all operations of the club, a move that he and others feel is necessary to keep up with changing business climates.

In a recent interview with *GOLFDOM*, Clarke explained some of the policies of Hillendale, what led up to his appointment, the responsibilities of his position, and why he feels this is a move many clubs should make.

"I have had the position of executive director since July, and I have mostly spent my time this summer observing the workings of the club from this new standpoint," Clarke said. "I was a little apprehensive about taking over during the busiest time of the year, but it has been a good experience seeing everything at full operation."

Another reason Clarke decided to take the job this summer is that Hillendale is in the middle of an \$800,000 expansion and improvement program that is to be completed next spring, and he felt it was important for somebody in his new position to be around to oversee the program.

*\*please turn page*

The expansion is the first major program since Clarke joined the club as head pro in 1954 when it moved from downtown Baltimore to its new site on 234 acres in suburban Phoenix. Clarke supervises an 18-hole, 6,800-yard-plus layout on acreage bought for \$62,000 in the early '50s. The adjacent land now sells for close to \$5,000 an acre.

Expansion is underway on the pro shop and clubhouse complex that sits on a hill surveying the course. Also included in the program is the addition of tennis courts number seven and eight, a new olympic-size swimming pool to go along with an existing smaller one, and an automatic watering system that is already in operation.

Club member Larry Best is also coordinating the improvement program, and is in charge of negotiating all contracts, a task he is well-suited for because he is in the construction business.

"Larry and I are under our budget so far," Clarke said, "and we expect to get even more than we originally planned in the beginning. In this respect, I was glad to have been in the position of executive director this summer because of the improvement program."

When asked what his duties and responsibilities are as executive director, he said, "I guess I am still trying to explain it to myself. I am still the head pro but I have a club manager and a superintendent to take care of those areas — my function is to tie the whole operation together."

Clarke said many clubs are run by inexperienced club officers who do not have the time to devote to running a club properly. He said one of the things Hillendale is trying to do is give a business-like approach to running the club.

"I am the buying coordinator," he said. "I don't tell the bartender or the superintendent or the others what to buy, but somebody has to be in charge. I set up the budgets with them. If they can prove to me that a special program is the right thing to do, I take it to the board and see how they feel about it if it is a major change."

He said the only problem he has had so far with the job is it takes so much time. He still runs the pro shop with the help of his assistant Don

Keefer, his wife Marian, and his secretary Ginny Brooks. He has not really had time as of yet to get deeply into the working of his superintendent, Mike Larson, club manager, Betty Selby, and controller Betty Schoemaker.

"I will be getting into these other departments from here on in," he said. "We have a good staff here, and I think that is one thing that is necessary for an executive director to be named. I work mostly with budgeting, planning, scheduling and ironing out conflicts between departments — but I let them do pretty much what they feel is necessary to run their departments."

The operation Clarke oversees at Hillendale is a relatively big one. The club has about 525 members in various types of memberships from full to just swimming, tennis or social. The club has 25 full-time employees and 50 part-time for the heavy nine-month season, and the slower time from December through February.

As Hillendale officers led up to

the decision to hire Clarke, they discussed the position with him twice before he actually accepted. At both times, the club manager had just left, but Clarke said he had no interest in taking over the club — he was happy with the setup he already had in his own element in the pro shop. So why did he decide to take the job?

"I guess it was the challenge more than anything else," he said. "It was something new and different, I thought I could do more for the club, and I do strongly feel this type of position is needed, if the club can afford it."

He said for the big, affluent clubs that have the money to hire the type of man necessary for the post, it could cost between \$30,000 and \$40,000. The question then is whether or not the man can save the club at least that much money with coordination.

"I think in the long run an executive director will be able to," Clarke said, "but the economics have to dictate for each and every situation."



Clarke's wife, Marian, is not a golf widow by any means. She assists in running Hillendale's pro shop operation, handles the books, and recently has begun doing the buying of women's apparel for the shop. In addition to improving her game on the club's driving range every afternoon.



Since his appointment as executive director of Hillendale this summer, much of Clarke's time has been spent overseeing the club's \$800,000 expansion and improvement which is to be completed early next year. Club member Larry Best, a member who is in the construction business, has also been in on the program from the start.

He said the position of executive director, at Hillendale at least, differs from that of the more traditional general manager in that Hillendale wanted the powers of the post to be as broad as possible.

Most general managers have started as club managers, but Clarke feels that in his position with a pro-background he can deal with the superintendents because he can understand his problems in more detail.

Also, he feels the main thing about this type of position is the person chosen has to have a rapport with the members, and this can only come with experience in dealing with the members.

He said many of the new superintendents are strictly turf-oriented, and although some club managers deal strongly with the members, he feels that in most cases only the club pro is the one who has dealt with the members extensively enough to build up the kind of rapport and respect needed to run the club from top to bottom. But he stressed either a superintendent or manager who knows the individual club well and possesses strong organizational capabilities could probably fill the post of executive director.

Other clubs are watching Clarke's appointment at Hillendale with great interest. Some have said Hillendale is smartly cashing in on

his solid experience both with the club itself and also with the PGA. He has traveled around the country, and seen some of the best operations.

And they say this makes him a perfect choice to direct the club and take the day-to-day duties off the shoulders of elected members who might not have the time necessary to run the club as it should be run.

Others have said it is time for specialists in golf business management to take over; persons like Bill Clarke who have the experience and business judgment to coordinate all phases of club operation — and save money too. □