

Cleveland Pro Shop Emphasizes Service, Personal Contact and Experience

"Our Sales Edge—Follow Through"

Mike Limback, PGA professional who runs the pro shop at Tanglewood Country Club, just outside Cleveland, works a three-tier Alpine Chalet that is both picturesque and functional. And at a time when competition is getting tougher, Limback and his assistant, Dennis Toler, are putting both to work in order to come up with a strong program of merchandise mix and merchandising.

"We have a lot of competition from the downtown stores," Limback said. "Somehow or other they get hold of what is supposed to be only available to us, and then they sell this merchandise at ridiculously low prices. We've got to do something different to keep the traffic here."

Limback and Toler follow through on what might be called tender-loving-care merchandising. "Few people realize," Toler adds, "what follow through really means. For example, when they buy a set from a discount house and the head comes off or something else goes wrong, that's it. No customer can go back and say he doesn't like this set."

"We're different. If a person is going to buy a set of clubs, we let him play a round of 18 holes to get the feel. We play with him to see what he's doing and how he handles that new set. Part of the purchase price is the experience that goes into selling the set."

This personalizing of the sale is what is helping to build up a sense of loyalty among club members.

"Look at it this way," Limback said, "each customer, each member has to believe that we're interested in helping him into a perfect game. And part of that perfect game is having

the right equipment."

Therefore, if a customer is indecisive about the set, Limback will let the man or woman take out four or five irons from the different sets, and go up to practice with them. And this is not a one-shot deal. He can try them out several times before making the final choice. And, in the meantime, Limback will be there to give him pointers about the game. It takes extra time, but it is part of the merchandizing Limback is talking about.

Offering him further support is the three-tier chalet that functionally divides the area into specific sections. The pro shop itself is only one section of the chalet. As the member enters, he can go downstairs which is devoted to storage and the cart repair area. Toler said the area can store 480 bags easily.

If the member walks up a flight of six stairs, he comes into the 20' x 30' pro shop on the right hand side. On the left, flowing from the shop, is a 20' x 30' canteen area with tables and chairs, a fountain and counter section. This structure is different from many other clubs in that the formal dining area and bar is kept separate from the golf course and the pro shop. The canteen, however, allows for a rest and refreshment on an informal basis.

Storage, inventory and equipment is kept on the third tier that is under the A-frame of the building.

Limback believes in a full-shelf approach to merchandising and wide mix as well. Using women's clothing as an example, he begins with women's skirts. Tanglewood goes mostly with Haymaker which has been their big seller over the years. In addition, the shop carries Quantum

and Harburt. Price range for skirts runs from \$20 to \$28, while tops go from \$9.50 to \$18.00. Menswear leads off with Munsingwear in the \$8 to \$12 shirt and Izod in the \$15 to \$17.50 range. In addition, Tanglewood has the Kimberton cotton lisle shirt which carries the club's crest on it.

When it comes to clubs, Limback tries to get one set of everything at the beginning of the season "... so that the members can get a good look at what's new on the market". Limback likes the idea of displaying a complete range in clubs. Both Toler and he are Spaulding representatives.

Display and inventory are an important factor in the merchandising. The "up front" philosophy is strongly adhered to.

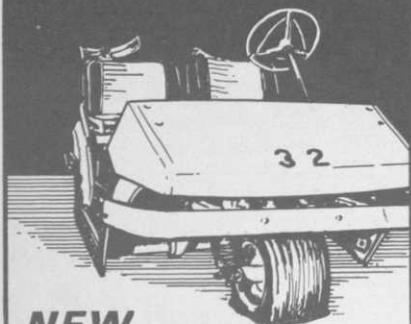
"For instance," Limback says, "we put the most expensive shirts up front. Eyecatchers like the flashy Izods. The idea is that this is the first thing the members see when they come in. Munsingwear is a staple that will sell all the time, especially because of its price range. Therefore, you want to put it where the members can see what you have."

Inventory in shorts runs medium, large and extra-large. Ordering in dozen lots for each style, Tanglewood carries three each of the medium and extralarge, and six of the large. In their approach, Limback and Toler keep everything out front with little backup stock. This has the great advantage of offering a well-stocked front from which members can choose.

The idea behind this is to give the customer the feeling there is both variety and depth in the shop, and

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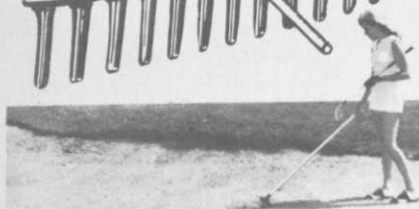
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there is no need to shop elsewhere. The season opens in March, and by April, Limback has his shelves filled with both the variety of styles, and their backup.

When it comes to display methods, Limback has the problem that all pro shops suffer from: lack of space. Therefore, in order to give the feel of difference to a customer who comes in more than once a week, he does a great deal of switching around of displays. Menswear and ladies wear are kept separate, and they are changed every two or three weeks. Limback avoids the display rule of getting the customer familiar with a "slacks section," etc. Rather, he wants the member to feel there is a sense of excitement.

In terms of fixturing, he offers two suggestions to others who are concerned with similar problems. Because of the Alpine A-frame structure, the shop receives a great deal of daytime light. Even so, there is a necessity of indoor follow through. Therefore, he has his traditional downlight established with a fixture. But then, in order to highlight merchandise that falls within the range of the downlight, he has a spot or double spot right next to the downlight fixture. This enables the spot to pick up anywhere within that lighting sphere in order to emphasize specific displays.

A second method he uses which is



Double lighting effect is an important ploy in highlighting. Spotlights and downlighting fixtures are used to achieve this effect.

working well is to avoid many floor stands that are traditional for middle-of-the-shop areas. Instead, he has chain links hanging from the sloping ceiling sections with a bar spread between them. The links fit into the Alpine motif, and can be shortened or lengthened depending upon the merchandise on display as to shirts and trousers, or it can be narrowed or widened depending upon the need for more or less display bars. In effect, this gives the floor area much more mobility, and much less of a cluttered feeling.

As to promotions, Limback smiles because there "seems to be something going all the time." At the beginning of the year, Tanglewood has a mandatory sports fund fee of \$15. This money all goes into the pot, and then the winners of the weekly Saturday and Sunday morning tournaments receive gift certificates that are redeemable at the pro shop. Part of the money is also used for the bigger tournaments such as the member-guest tournaments, stag day, derby day, etc. There are at least five or six major tournaments held on the course every year, in addition to the smaller "fun" week-end ones.

As with other clubs, Tanglewood's repair shop does not do major repairs, limiting their work to re-shafting or refinishing a club at maximum. Tanglewood does have a policy, however, of loaning clubs to anyone who has one in for repair. Most of these clubs are ones which were taken in for trade-in. Limback keeps several sets in the repair shop for these purposes as well as for just in case someone needs a set on an emergency basis.

Limback also runs the usual end-of-season sales. Because of Cleveland's weather, he also has a Christmas promotion during this off-season. The shop sends out a leaflet which is four pages. It gives a listing of Christmas-gift ideas for men, women, and children.

The folder contains not only the listings but several photos of merchandise as well. This is mailed right after Thanksgiving when the shop is decorated with Christmas trimmings.

Tanglewood is also anxious to "grow a set of golf-playing youngsters" and Limback runs a junior clinic which is eight weeks of lessons. The age limits are eight to 16, and

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Empty golf bags are hung from the window, for example, in order to make use of an otherwise "empty" space. In order to display caps and hats, Wansa puts one on top of a headless mannequin that is displaying a shirt. In cases where wall shelves do not come down to the floor, golf clubs, golf carts, and other floor merchandise are placed under the shelves to utilize that space as well.

Wansa does a big trade with caps and hats, and he believes that other pro shops could work this category into a solid add-on sale.

"We have them all over," he said.

"All different styles. The idea is that everyone should have a cap or hat, and that everyone can have something different."

As a result, he has one entire section of valuable wall space given over to caps. He reasons that a woman or man might not come in and want a golf outfit of slacks and shirt or blouse, but that everyone will pick up a hat.

"That's what we mean when we say we have an impulse customer," he said. "But then again — and I think this is important — every customer in every pro shop is really an impulse customer."

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last year, there were 72 youngsters enrolled. The series of lessons are given every Tuesday for an hour, and this is followed up on Friday when the youngsters are teamed up according to ability and then age. The younger ones usually play one or two holes, but some of the older ones will go nine or 18.

Their scores become important as an indication of their ability, obviously, but Limback and Toler do not beat them with it. At the end of the year, however, they run a junior tournament according to ability, and there are trophies and prizes in addition to door prizes for everyone. Another important aspect in the junior tournament is the annual banquet which is held at the club, and is keyed to a younger level, although formal in its appearance.

Tanglewood is a busy course, and the shop is kept busy with the in-and-out traffic. During the summer, there will be seven or eight employees including the pro and assistant pro. Hours usually are from 8 a.m. to 7:30 p.m., six days a week, closed on Monday. Canteen help is separate, but there is a strong walk-through traffic which Limback naturally encourages. In fact, the merchandise in the pro shop can be seen from the canteen so that individuals sitting at the tables can peruse the merchandise, and then afterwards go up to the racks.

How does Limback view it all?

"I think it's a matter of getting to know your people," he said. "It's difficult to set down hard and fast rules. But I think it's important that your customers feel that the pro shop is a friendly place first of all, and then, of course, that you have the merchandise. You can't keep showing the same thing in the same place. Don't forget that we're competing against downtown and shopping center stores that thrive on merchandising techniques. We've got to show the members that we can go one better."

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