

# Setting Up Shop

Every assistant pro has ideas for when he gets his first head pro job. But there is a lot to learn when you are on your own for the first time. Just ask Joe McDermott of Albuquerque Country Club in New Mexico.

"There's a difference, you know," McDermott told GOLFDOM. "When you have to make the final decision, it is different from doing it for someone else. Suddenly the bottom line becomes your own." As he looks forward to his third season at Albuquerque, he recalls the problems he had when he first began.

"Borrowing money to run this shop became one of my first objectives," he said. "I was able to get good financing at a reasonable rate, and with that I bought merchandise in Chicago where I had quite a few connections. Things that I needed immediately." He also said a pro starting out now has to face interest rates triple what he had to pay when he began.

McDermott said much of his success in his first season was because he was able to secure his lines of communication. And he believes any other golf pro finding himself in a similar position should tackle this problem right from the start. McDermott was hired in February, but did not arrive on the scene until November.

"I worked with my assistant," he said. "He kept a running tally of what kind of inventory position we were in, and I was able to buy the fill-ins as needed according to size, type of clothes, color, etc. We were really on the button because of that."

Working on his own first full season was a little different from the fill-ins. During a previous period when he worked at Albuquerque as an assistant, McDermott knew that the conservative club, founded in 1914, had an average age of 60 for its membership. But the club was also in the middle of a program to get younger members, and had dropped the initiation fee for those who were under 35. As a result, there were now two types of mem-

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There is a difference, says New Mexico pro Joe McDermott, when the final decision rests for the first time on the shoulders of the new pro.

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"I think this is important to recognize," he said. "In talking to other pros, I find that many appeal to one category, without realizing that the makeup of the membership might contain more than one. If you don't appeal to all groups, some of them will go elsewhere. When our members think golf, I want them to think of this shop. So I just split my styling and colors down the middle to appeal to both groups."

McDermott gives as an example his dual approach to handling skirts. He handles Haymaker which has an established name among his clientele, and appeals across-the-board. Then he began to handle the Quantum line, which appealed to his younger members. Being the first in his state to handle the line, McDermott ended up the season in a sell-out position with no carryover.

Being new on the scene, McDermott used his first spring sale to tell him about his members. He found his prime sizes were six, eights, 10 and 12. He concentrated his buying in that size range, buying one of each in the 14-16-18 range. When it came to colors, he relied upon the manufacturer's judgment as to the new ones, which he bought on a trial basis. Other than the basic whites, McDermott says of colors and styles. "I prefer to buy variety more than depth," he said. "I just don't think our members like to see themselves coming and going in the same kind of outfits."

This becomes an important merchandising ploy. For instance, if chartreuse is a major color for the season, he would buy the color, but buy variety in styling and patterns. And he would not duplicate sizes, except at the extremes. "If they had six chartreuses on the rack," he says

of his buying trip, "I'd get one of each. If I did duplicate size, I'd get a six and a 12 in the same color and pattern. But usually, there is enough showing so that you can pick out one of each and still get different sizes."

Variety, according to McDermott, is more important than depth in a style. But he makes the point that you have to keep the shelves full. "If you want a woman to come in and to look around," he said, "you have to make her feel there is an awful lot here, and that it is all different."

At any given point, McDermott carries an inventory of about \$15,000 minimum with a range between \$25,000 and \$35,000 more usual. He makes it a rule of thumb to have one "of everything we have" on display. He also makes it a point to shop the department stores on a weekly basis — and when he is out-of-town, he shops the stores as well. In this case, he is not looking for merchandise as much as he is looking for display methods.

"These people are in the business of merchandising and display," he said. "After all, that's the way they do their business. I want to know what they are doing because I can probably use some of these ideas in my shop."

To illustrate his point he suggests his use of chains in display. "The major stores use this a lot," McDermott said. He found it was a good idea for his shop because it allowed a greater flexibility than he previously had. It also helped him develop special attention-getters for merchandise he wanted to feature. Then when it was time for a change, he only has to take down the hanger and put up another piece of clothing in its place.

McDermott also uses display as a means of promoting his tournaments. "We call one of ours Cottonwood Chaos because the course is lined with cottonwood trees," he said. The tournament has a two-man team, one begins at 8 a.m. and the other at 1 p.m. Actually, it is two tournaments on two different days.

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agers elsewhere. Knisley said he does not know from day to day what food prices are going to be, and hidden costs continue to creep up on him. "We were planning our Christmas party recently, and when I went to the committee with the figures on what it was going to cost, they made me justify on paper why it was so high," he said. "We did not have the

a profit on the food and liquor side for his million-dollar-plus operation at West Shore. And the club has not had any year-end assessments on members to pay for deficits in the time he has been there.

"The way to make it is to keep the volume up and the costs reasonable," he says. "The two go hand-in-hand. That is, if you keep the costs

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**"... a member spends a lot of time here and he should be catered to. If a member has a particular cigar or whiskey that he prefers, I try to have it on hand for him, and I want my help to feel the same way."**

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party last year, and they just could not believe that food prices had risen 50 percent for the items for the Christmas party in two years and that beverage prices were up 20 percent.

"All prices are up, including linen and paper," he said. "You order from suppliers, sometimes you don't get what you ordered on time, sometimes you get substitutes that you do not want. I buy from a number of markets — local, Philadelphia, Washington, New York — and I have a pretty good idea of what the best price is on most items, but everything is up. It is an entirely different ball game."

When Knisley started out, he did not believe in a minimum charge at the clubhouse for members. Now he says it is the best thing that ever happened to him since a minimum was instituted at West Shore recently. "I go back to the days when the thought was that the club should sell itself on its own merits without having a minimum to induce members to come to the club," he said. "I had to be sold the hard way, but it has really paid off. The \$20 minimum in itself is nothing to the members, but I have found that it gets the members into the club and spending money.

"The minimum has helped a great deal. It has stirred new interest in the club, and been quite a profitable deal for us. People just flock to our mixed grill. It seats 60 people, and we sometimes turn it over a few times on a good night."

Some clubs operate on the basis of yearly dues to pay for operating costs, new member fees to pay for improvements, and realize that they are going to take a beating on food and liquor service. Knisley does not operate that way, and in fact shows

reasonable, the volume will go up."

In his 27 years at West Shore, Knisley says there has been a lot of change, and admits that there probably should have been a lot more. "It used to be that we would try to keep the golf apart from the social section of the club. You could have one or the other, but not both.

"There is definitely a generation gap now in more ways than one, and because I want to be clued in, I try to read as much as I can and attend as many conferences as I can. There are things that are being done different now than in the past. For example, maybe more clubs should have a steak and brew room to cater to the younger members who are less formal than their parents were. There has to be a way to reach a happy medium and satisfy both the young and old members."

This is the area Knisley thinks more club managers should be looking at these days — how to cater to the younger generation. The true country club now has tennis and swimming integrated into the entire program, he said. He also said West Shore is projecting construction of a health club addition to its facilities, although this is admittedly in the future. This might also be a way to pick up more members on a part-time basis in the future, he adds.

All in all, Knisley feels the greatest asset a good club manager can have is being able to get along with all kinds of people. The manager is the one in-between employes and members. There is a very diversified mix of people the manager has to get along with. That includes dining with members and their wives, and also working alongside the kitchen crew, and in his 27 years at West Shore, Knisley has done it all. □

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The first day is best ball, and the second day it is a low net twosome. Each winner receives a set of irons for a prize, a set of woods as second prize. Then a golf bag for third, Johnston-Murphy shoes for fourth, a cashmere sweater for fifth, a Pickering shirt for sixth, and golf balls for seventh.

All of the prizes are then placed onto his "wall of prizes" which is at one side near the entrance of his 20 x 30 shop. They go up about a month ahead of time, and serve two purposes: (1) to lure the members into the tournament; and (2) to remind the members about the tournament. The prizes are chosen by the tournament committee.

McDermott makes a point about merchandise and displays that might be useful to other pros setting up shop. "I like to have something that nobody else is offering. Here in Albuquerque, we are somewhere in between California and Florida styles and a little New York as well. I feel that if I can get something on an exclusive basis, I've got an added attraction. I can't compete with the department stores, but I certainly can with other proshops. The Quantum line is a good example. It brought in a great deal of traffic. This doesn't mean to pass up the brand names we all know such as Haymaker. But I think you have to be willing to experiment."

McDermott credits the PGA Merchandising Show just held in Disney World in Orlando, Fla., as an important factor in helping him make his buying decisions. He feels that one "can get an idea of the overall picture once you get there. You can see what's happening nationally and then you can fit in."

McDermott has started out successfully at Albuquerque, and he believes sound planning has been a major reason. He lists the following factors: (1) make contact with your assistant and keep a running tally on what is selling until you get on the scene; (2) know your membership and cater to specific categories rather than having one overall presentation; (3) try for exclusives in merchandise; (4) shop around for ideas to keep your displays up-to-date and fresh; and (5) buy a wide variety and keep it on display.