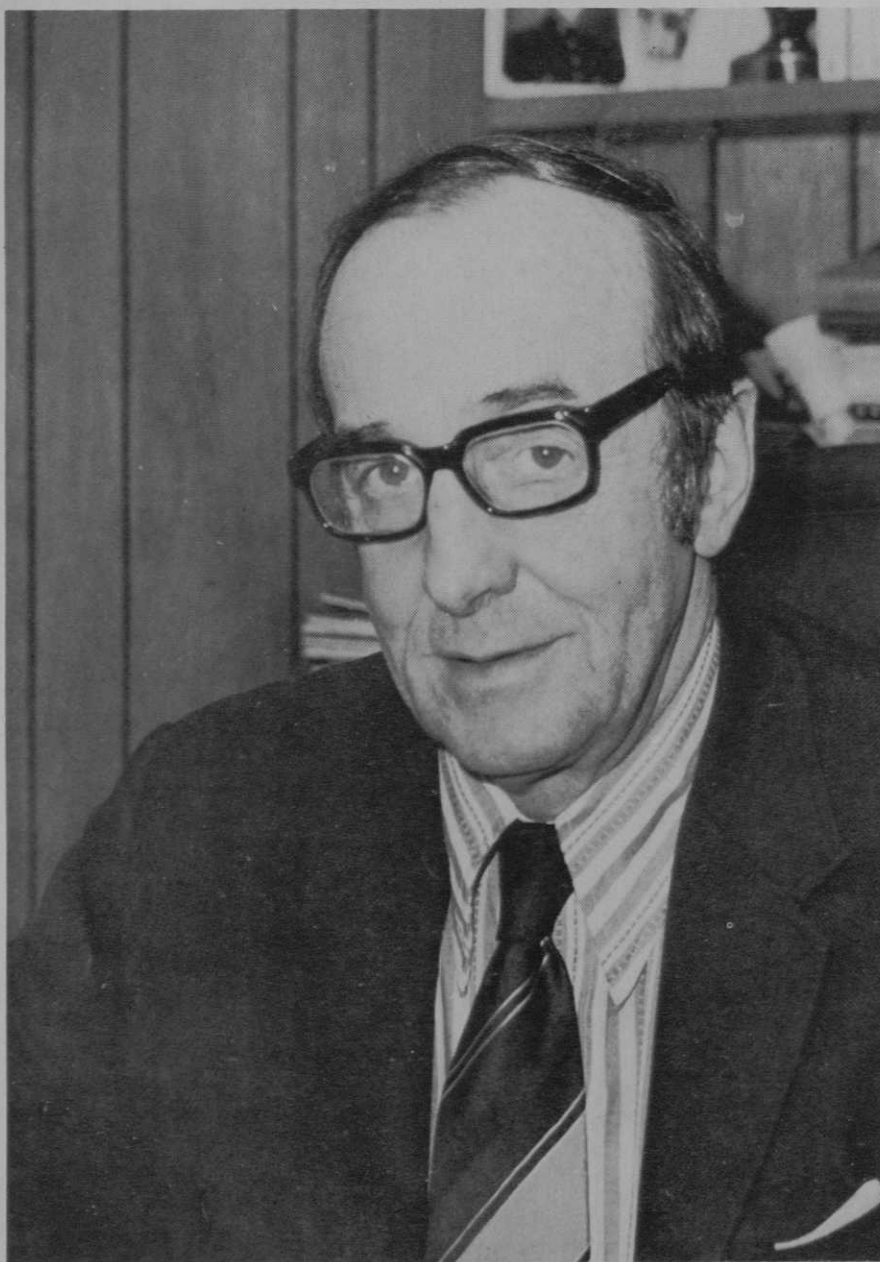


Black Ties To White Aprons



Count Basie and his band had been in last week for a big party at the club; tonight was the second of three celebrations this week for victorious state congressmen in the capital city of Harrisburg.

Charley Knisley was in his element. Hobnobbing with political bigwigs (after all, wasn't Gov. Milton Shapp an honorary member and didn't he hold his 1200-person inaugural ball at West Shore?), walking around the ballroom checking last-minute details as more of a time-killer than necessity, and basking in the atmosphere of another event running smoothly.

About the time the empty salad bowls were being removed from the tables, the word came out from the kitchen — the dishwasher had failed to show for the evening. A make-shift crew had to be assembled and guess who ended up running all the dishes from the party through the dishwasher? A shirt-sleeved Charley Knisley.

You would think 27 years as club manager at West Shore Country Club in Camp Hill outside Harrisburg, Pa. would merit Charles M. Knisley a better break than this.

Running a 750-member country club has had many moments like this for Knisley. But the same factor that enables him to wash dishes beside his kitchen help is one that has made Knisley successful over the years in the area he feels is most important in running a club.

"My people call me 'mister' but we are still able to work together," Knisley said. "I give them respect, and they give it back to me and we get along well. Club pro Ed Tabor has more to say on this subject about the man he has worked with for 27 years. "He makes them work. I mean it isn't a case of him being a good guy that makes them like him. He gives the orders and gets the work out and there is no resentment involved."

Knisley must be doing something right in the way he handles his people, because he has had the same bartender for 26 years, and four others who have worked for him over 20 years. West Shore has a staff of about 50 regular persons working at the club. During peak times of the year, there are about 30 extras involved.

continued

Black Ties To White Aprons continued

"It is getting more and more difficult to get help that really cares about the customers and members," Knisley said. "The new generation is not that accustomed to club conditions, and not enough attention is paid to getting the younger generation started in the club management business.

"I come from the old school, where the club is open six days a week, and it is a second home to the members," Knisley said. "This is what I try to impress the help with, that a member spends a lot of time here and that 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."

Knisley also faces the same problem many club managers have to contend with, that being it is sometimes difficult to find people that are interested in a long-term relationship with a club. He said the unemployment rate is only about three percent in his area, and that people move from job to job quickly. This is one reason why it is so amazing that he has people who have been with him for over 20 years.

West Shore opened July 14, 1928 with 128 members. It has 69 acres and the original stone house built by a Samuel Bowman in 1821. Dues were \$35 a year. Today the club is four times larger in acreage, and in

a year. Within five years, the state of Pennsylvania legislated against slot machines, and the club had to raise dues to stay in business.

When Knisley took charge, the place was so poor he had his desk in the dining room and personally typed out the menus. Knisley inquired if there was a walk-in refrigerator, and one of the members asked what that was. He took a look at purchasing and found the usual order was for six steaks and 10 heads of lettuce. "Frankly, I expected to stay about two years," he says now. He, his wife and son and daughter lived upstairs for two years. He remembers the apartment fondly. It had a bathtub with legs and the only television in the club, so friendly members were always dropping in.

Knisley believes promotion is the best way to get the members interested in what is going on at the club and to get them out. He publishes a monthly newsletter called "What's Cooking." This newsletter plus daily promotions keep the members informed and give them a chance to plan for the events. Some regular parties he has that are popular are Seafood Night, New Orleans Night, Roman Holiday, Octoberfest, summer poolside barbecues, luaus, Riverboat Night, and formal dances at Christmas and other times of the year.

Many of the members live very

involved a member wanting a very special affair for his daughter's wedding. Knisley set up two large circus tents, one for the wedding ceremony and one for the reception of 350 persons. There was an elevated stage for the orchestra and a portable dance floor. There were also four buffet lines with 20 items.

"It was tough, and we worked on it for a long time," Knisley said. "I didn't get much sleep the week we held it. The logistics alone of organizing it, then preparing the food, then transporting it and keeping it hot, and keeping it hot while we served it was quite a task. But it came off perfect."

Food and its preparation is the main thing in the way Knisley looks at his job and keeping his members happy. He does a lot of research, has a roomful of cookbooks and is always open to suggestion from members and attends Club Managers of America meetings to keep up-to-date.

"I have a good chef," he says, "I write menus, and we both work together and plan out our own recipes. Our Country Club Salad is big with the members, and my bible is the gourmet cookbooks I have. Gourmet cooking in itself is not big around here, but there are many ideas in the books that have gone over well at West Shore. "I try to keep close tabs on food," he says, "it is always my number one interest. When I go to big cities, I try to go to the finest restaurants to see what is new. I used to have a bachelor friend living in New York, and every time I would go there we would hit all of the finest spots to keep up on trends."

West Shore has a daily flyer menu along with the usual ala carte, with thousands of different entrees served in a year. For special parties, Knisley is big on different kinds of hors d'oeuvres. Some of the more popular ones include scampi in a pernod sauce, and scallops prepared in the same manner. At some parties he has over 50 different varieties of cheeses and a variety of different kinds of meatballs. Another popular item is pieces of filet in a bearnaise sauce, and for one retirement party the appetizer was corned beef and cabbage.

Rising food prices have hit West Shore as they have for club man-

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Knisley's time has increased its income, as well as its tax payments, by 10 times. It now costs \$600 to begin a full membership at the club, plus \$500 a year dues.

When Knisley arrived at West Shore in 1948, the club had 452 members, and its books were balanced by rows of slot machines in the cellar. The good, old West Shore residents were pulling the one-armed bandits to the tune of \$35,000

near the club along its fairways. The members have cocktail parties that Knisley and his crew cater. His secret here is to be very flexible, and serve exactly what the members want. Some members want their own recipes, and if it means Knisley has to get into his station wagon and driving to New York for special sausage, or dusting off a Scandinavian cookbook, so be it. One of Knisley's toughest parties of this nature

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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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. □

SETTING UP

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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.