

the
Golf
card

1044

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EXPIRES

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Vacation dollars are still at a premium in our current economy, but a new firm is trying to make things easier for the golf resorts and at the same time make a few bucks for itself.

First introduced to the industry in November, the Golf Card was the brainchild of Jim Allen, a man who admits that his dream would take large scale financing, so he went out and got it.

In essence, the Golf Card is designed for the affluent golfer who plans to do a little traveling to the resort areas. The card, which has a membership fee of \$35, allows the golfer to get a couple of free rounds at the member resorts. The partnership is set up between the card company management and the resorts, to further aid the vacation traffic at these operations.

"We try to help people find quality places to play," said Allen, "that's the basic idea behind the card." The initial response to the idea has been good, according to Allen. Through the company's ad response and other media stories, over 1,500 inquires have flooded into Allen's office.

Allen: 'Card has a future.'



"The response has really been surprising. We already have members in Iran, Italy and West Germany and I'm sure that before it's over, there'll be card carriers in a lot of other foreign countries," Allen said. Allen admits, though, the card's biggest promise is through word-of-mouth endorsements by cardholders to their friends.

Presently, the card clubs are situated in the east with the majority in the Carolinas. Several are in Florida and one each is in California, Maryland and New Hampshire. The list of card courses at present is nearly 30, but Allen insists there will be a lot more.

Golf Card officials spent much of the spring on the road getting more clubs involved in promoting the cards, gearing for a massive media campaign to the public in August. Utilizing certain markets, Allen and his associates plan to test the salability of the card to the affluent golfer.

Much like its consumer counterparts, American Express® or Master Charge®, the Golf Card will handle most of the advertising display features of the other cards. Clubs utilizing the card will display signs stating the fact and when advertising in national publications, include the Golf Card in its advertising.

There may be a greater future for the Golf Card someday or a card somewhat like it. Many clubs take pro shop purchases in cash or on a member's tab, but it seems probable, a credit card could make purchases easier and

might also be used to purchase anything from balls to greens-fees, while a cardholder visits another club.

Convenience would be the key to this approach and it would be possible for the cardholder to get a variety of services. For instance, the biggest possibility for such a program might be in the clubhouse. Definitely, a help to boost food and beverage sales.

For the moment, Allen and his people are setting their sights on the resort trade, but indicate there are possibilities at daily fee operations, too. "I think there is an unlimited future to the card," Allen stated, "We think around 100,000 cardholders would be the right number of customers for us."

Telling people where they can go play golf is the simple idea behind the card. Company officials indicate that courses interested in utilizing the service are welcome to make inquiries.

As courses are added to the rolls, the membership is made aware of the additions by a newsletter, usually appearing in the fall.

Whether this approach will work or not is a question, but in a credit card oriented society, the idea might be a plus for the golf industry. □