

THE RESORT PRO

Golf resorts have been an integral part of this business for several decades now. As vacation time or cold weather drive golfers from the north, the golf resorts of this country are ready and waiting to service this transient trade.

With more and more golfers looking for beautiful and warm places to play, the resort industry has expanded to one of the biggest potential areas in golf business.

The resort pro has one of the toughest jobs at such operations. How do you take care of your travelling trade and still make a profit in the pro shop?

Maybe one of the best examples of the pro at a resort is Peter Dwyer at Grenelefe, near Cypress Gardens, Fla. Dwyer and his staff are quite aware their shop is the focal point of the operation and everything flows from it. "No developer builds the swimming pool first," Dwyer told GOLFDOM, "The golf course and the game are No. 1."

Owned by the Radisson Hotel Corporation in Minneapolis, Grenelefe is but one of many resorts now operated by companies in the lodging field. According to Grenelefe general manager Henry Goldstein, there are three different types of customers visiting Grenelefe and making use of the golf and other facilities.

A marriage of a deluxe development offering second homes plus accommodations rented to individuals, Grenelefe also has members from the surrounding area who use its golf and tennis facilities. Dwyer's shop is located on the ground floor of the clubhouse with a commanding view of the driving range and the first tee. This location affords optimum efficiency in pro-

viding service. Grenelefe statistics show 85 percent of all visitors are members at private clubs and in turn are measuring the resort's service against their club back home.

As with most resorts, the key to shop profit lies with soft goods. According to Dwyer, 85 percent of his gross shop sales is in the golfwear area — shirts, slacks, shoes and hats. Balls and gloves make up 25 percent of sales, while golf equipment and other items is the remaining eight percent.

"We attempt to have a selling atmosphere in the shop. In fact, there is some sort of sale in the shop every day," says Dwyer. When he buys merchandise, Dwyer has the idea of sale always in mind. As soon as a line comes in, the items are placed at either a 20 or 30 percent markup. "People have to be motivated to buy. When they go to a resort, they are there to spend money and you have to help them along."

Buying something at first is the key at Grenelefe. Since the average guest stay at the resort is seven days and six nights, it's sure people will buy things on sale and even items that aren't.

Display continues to be a factor in sales for Dwyer and his assistant Lannie Carrier. By using modular units and changing these units every two weeks, Dwyer keeps merchandise moving and causes an effective traffic pattern throughout the shop. Like most pros, the Massachusetts native is interested in the coordinate sale.

"We want as many piggy-back sales as possible when we merchandise soft goods," comments the 39-year-old head pro, "When a customer comes into the shop, we try to attract them with display and

attempt to show them how certain shirts go well with complimenting slacks and accessories."

Admitting that most resort customers aren't into buying golf equipment sets at a resort, Dwyer leaves these sales to the local club members and concentrates on selling custom-made drivers, 6 and 7 woods, wedges and putters to the transient trade.

Utilizing videotape equipment and a sophisticated array of swing gauges, the Grenelefe staff can evaluate a golfer's needs on the spot and recommend the proper equipment. "We spend a lot of time with the customer, attempting to guide them to the equipment they need and then show them why they need it," Dwyer added. In fact, in wedge play, Grenelefe has even got its own practice traps to allow golfers time to work on this part of their game.

In every aspect, Dwyer tries to show quality in every piece of merchandise he buys for his shop. In his own formula of success, Dwyer sees quality and fashion x availability and price equalling service.

Shop management for Dwyer hinges on anticipatory action versus action by crisis. He attempts to solve most problems before they actually happen and the theory works. Dwyer, who also doubles as the resort's director of golf, has 13 people on his staff at the hilt of the season. Grenelefe is set up so each staff member knows the job of the next and is aware of what is going on in each department. Every employee is given an operating procedures manual that details everything from car maintenance, to the lost-and-found log, to shop book-keeping.

This system allows each

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employee the ability to help in all areas when needed, along with the flexibility of utilizing all personnel during peak periods, days off, vacations and sick days without any lost efficiency.

Proper use of personnel can even have a very positive effect on sales. For example, the Grenelefe starter was used to handle a ball survey. Every ball brand was noted each day for one month. This enabled the shop staff to order only brands most preferred by the customers. Dwyer and his staff invested in these brands to greater insure a better return.

Grenelefe has two separate and distinct seasons, basically going along its fiscal year. From mid-April to mid-December, greens fee play from members not owning homes or renting accommodations are permitted, but only those owning or renting property at Grenelefe are permitted to play the course from December to April. With that mix, Grenelefe recorded over 40,000 rounds in its latest fiscal year and according to Dwyer things are looking up for the immediate future. Besides playing golf, the customer at Grenelefe is also serviced by Goldstein and his staff in the beverage and food area. "We are trying to present the guest with the best possible service, excellent food, reasonable prices and a relaxing atmosphere which is appropriate for a resort setting," Goldstein told GOLFDOM.

An internationally respected hotel management executive, Goldstein has been manager at Grenelefe since Radisson got into the management phase in 1975. Goldstein's resume reads like a travel folder with positions in Istanbul, Turkey; Puerto Rico, Montreal, New York City, St. Thomas, Virgin Islands; Tobago, West Indies; and several locations in Switzerland.

Although, not as travelled as his colleague, Dwyer has gained much experience in his relatively short career as a golf professional. Dwyer started his apprenticeship in the trade back in Massachusetts at one of the nation's oldest clubs, the

Essex Country Club at Manchester-by-the-Sea. After that stint, he went on to the Oak Hill Country Club in Fitchburg, Mass., staying for three seasons. He has been at Grenelefe since October, 1974.

When Goldstein examines the needs of the owners of property at Grenelefe as it applies to the operation, he realizes that since there are already kitchen facilities in these townhouses, there is little profit potential from this area. The owners like to take advantage of the kitchens and do not use the restaurant as much as the transient visitor. The owners often invite guests to Grenelefe to enjoy a meal and cocktails within their own second homes.

Visiting vacationers are probably the best area for restaurant trade. Immediately upon check-in, guests are issued a temporary club membership card valid for the duration of their stay. Guests are told about the restaurant and encouraged to try out the facilities which are operated in the clubhouse.

Since, Grenelefe has a relatively remote location to other restaurants in the central Florida area, Goldstein has little competition for his guests' food and beverage dollar.

Chances are also good that even if a visitor has kitchen facilities available in a rental, they won't use them, since they don't want to bother with the chores of buying and cooking food. Without doubt, these in-house guests are the biggest source of revenue for Grenelefe and it's all tied in with the utilization of the golf course.

The third classification of visitor at Grenelefe are the golf and tennis club members and they are provided a variety of restaurant promotions and social activities for their membership.

For example, every first and third Sunday of each month, Grenelefe sponsors a golf or tennis tournament for these members. In conjunction with the tournaments, all participants and their families are invited to a cookout. This event is held around the swimming pool.

These tournaments and cookouts have been very successful in providing a social setting where visitors can meet owners and local club members. Many friendships

have developed from these gatherings.

In the area of general promotion, Grenelefe is somewhat restricted by local ordinances which prohibit the resort advertising its restaurant and cocktail lounge facilities. Grenelefe is operating under a "club license" and therefore is not allowed to advertise its services to the general public.

However, full advantage of in-house promotions is taken (posters in the clubhouse, etc.) and mailings to membership. Using this vehicle, the resort has achieved considerable success with special promotions in the clubhouse, restaurant and cocktail lounge.

For example, three nights each week entertainment is provided in the form of an orchestra for dancing in the restaurant. Every Thursday night is Chef's Special Surprise, on Fridays, the feature is the international buffet and Saturday has become noted for a famous Rib of Beef special.

Also successfully initiated has been a Happy Hour every Wednesday between 5 and 7 p.m. when all drinks are half price and accompanied by hot and cold hors d'oeuvres.

As Grenelefe grows it will be required to add new restaurant facilities and services since the project will eventually contain 750 rental units and three different golf courses. In conjunction with this growth Grenelefe will operate a conference center with modern audio visual equipment and meeting facilities to accommodate groups up to 1,500.

Of course, the natural incentive for any resort is customers and packages that can entice golfers down to the warmer climates. Working hand-in-hand with Dwyer and Goldstein on a number of projects is the director of hotel sales Larry Sena, who attempts to set up annual meetings and different gatherings for companies interested in utilizing Grenelefe.

In all, the business of the golf resort is hectic. The pro must address himself to the transient trade. As vacation time continues to grow in this country, the golf resort will become more and more a factor in this industry. A positive one at that. □