



Want to boost business without increasing costs?

What if someone offered to send golfers — avid, affluent golfers — to your course to rent your golf cars, to buy from your pro shop, to eat in your restaurant, to drink in your bar, to bring friends along to play, and all you had to do was let each golfer play twice in one year without green fees. Would you accept the offer?

Seven hundred golf courses have accepted such an offer from The Golf Card, linking them to 30,000 golfers who each pay \$49 a year for their black-and-gold plastic membership cards like the one above.

For their money, the golfers get to play twice a year for free at any or all of the 700+ member courses. For their participation, the member courses get to increase their income with no cash outlay.

An idea whose time has come

It seems amazing that no one had organized such a club for golfers before, at least not on such a large scale. But according to Ben Lampert, vice president and national sales director for the Golf Card, "The real success of The Golf Card began with a comprehensive promotional campaign by the present management in late 1975 and early 1976. The results of

this effort have been to expand a mostly regional organization with less than 100 participating courses and under 1,000 members to its present world-wide level of over 700 affiliated clubs and more than 30,000 cardholders.

"The future goals of The Golf Card are to provide over 1,000 participating facilities for less than 1 percent of the golfers in North America (about 100,000 to 150,000 members)."

In addition to their two complimentary 18-hole rounds at participating golf courses, cardholders receive discounts on merchandise and services at pro shops as well as a free subscription to *The Golf Traveler*, a bimonthly magazine which covers member golf courses and other golf subjects. Each issue of the magazine also includes an updated directory of facilities that honor The Golf Card. GCI Travel, a division of The Golf Card, offers vacation packages to resort courses all around the world.

Probably the greatest selling point to a golfer, though, is that he or she can recover the initial membership fee merely by playing six or eight times at member courses during the year.

Participating courses must agree to "treat holders of The Golf Card with the same courtesy and privileges afforded all guests," and in return cardholders are asked to call the course they want to play at least 24 hours in advance to arrange tee-times. Courses can, however, provide tee-times without prior notice if they are available.

Cardholders are generally affluent golfers. Half of them are retired, and 55 percent are couples. In other words, they are people who have a lot of time to play golf and play often.

There are member courses now in

47 states, Mexico, Canada, the Bahamas, the Caribbean, and the South Pacific. They range from resorts like Callaway Gardens and Pineisle Stouffer's Resort Hotel in Georgia to semi-private, daily fee courses such as Urban Hills Country Club near Chicago. A recent "first" for The Golf Card was the signing of the Kentucky State Parks system's 17 state-operated golf courses. The course membership rolls also include some municipal operations such as the Colorado City Golf Club and the City of King (Calif.) public golf course.

Advantages to courses

As representatives of The Golf Card would be quick to point out, a prime advantage of their program is that it "will increase your volume without increasing your fixed overhead." The golf course puts up no money; all it has to provide are tee-times, most of which probably would not otherwise be filled.

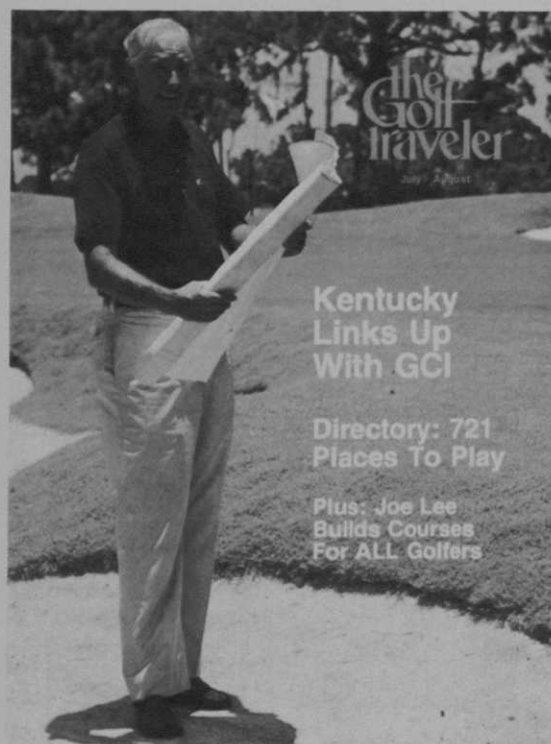
A course can derive income from honoring The Golf Card because cardholders often play with people who are not cardholders and, therefore, pay regular green fees. All of these people are also likely prospects to rent golf cars; to purchase balls, equipment, or apparel from your pro shop; to eat and drink in your clubhouse. If your course is affiliated with a hotel, these golfers may stay overnight there. If your course is affiliated with a residential development, these golfers are excellent prospects to rent or buy a house or condominium.

In fact, *The Missing Link* newsletter, which is sent to participating golf courses, often contains letters such as this recent one from a cardholder couple:

"So far, we have played 16 courses. If it is some distance away, we stay at their motel and play a second round the next day.

"On our anniversary, we drove to South Seas Plantation on Captiva Island. We had never heard of it until we read the article in *The Golf Traveler*. While there, we bought an

The *Golf Traveler* contains a directory and writeups of member courses such as Seascapes Golf & Racquet Club, Destin, Fla., featured in the issue shown.



Nitrogen fertilization of bentgrass greens

by Charles H. Darrah

Few turf surfaces today receive the care and attention of a golf course putting green. The overall performance of the green is highly dependent on its nutritional status, mowing, irrigation and syringing programs, and topdressing and aerification schemes. In addition verticutting, slicing, and spiking practices, as well as pesticide applications are important in maintaining the proper surface for the game of golf. However, none of these practices is more talked about than nitrogen fertility.

Nitrogen fertilization practices may be the key to the successful management of putting greens or the ax of their destruction. It is rare to find two superintendents who follow the same nitrogen program, and rightly so. Nitrogen fertilization must be tailored to the climatic conditions of the course, the bentgrass variety in use, and the soil used in the green. These conditions will vary from course to course and quite often from green to green on the same course. In addition the availability of other plant nutrients, mowing, watering, cultivation, and other management practices will influence the nitrogen needs of a putting green.

With all of these factors influencing the nitrogen requirement and interacting with the amount of nitrogen used, nitrogen fertilization of bentgrass putting greens becomes more of an art than a science. Still there are scientific principles to be kept in mind, and research data on which to base the design of a nitrogen program.

Creeping bentgrass has a nitrogen fertility requirement which varies from 0.8 to 1.4 pounds per 1,000 square feet per growing month on greens and 0.5 to 1.0 pound on higher cut turfs. (J.M. Duich and H.B. Musser, 1960) If we assume an 8-month growing period, such as in Maryland, from mid-March to mid-November, the yearly nitrogen requirement on a bentgrass green would be from 6 to 11 pounds of actual nitrogen per 1,000

square feet annually. Certainly one would not consider applying this amount in equal increments over the entire growing season. Instead, research has shown that one-half to three-quarters of the total nitrogen should be applied during the fall and early winter. (A.J. Powell, 1967; A.J. Powell, R.E. Blaser, and R.E. Schmidt, 1967)

In experiments conducted in Virginia, root growth rate of bentgrass maintained at ¼ inch was greatest from October to December, increased only slightly from late December through February, and then increased at a moderate rate until June. This response was found under nitrogen rates ranging from 0 to 8 per 1,000 square feet over the fall and early winter. It is interesting to note that this root growth response occurred even where no nitrogen was applied. In fact, it was found that applications of nitrogen in the fall and early winter reduced the immediate root growth but enhanced the future root production in the early spring. Another important finding was that the amount applied — 1 or 2 pounds per 1,000 square feet — made little difference in spring root production, however lower root weights were measured for monthly rather than bimonthly additions of nitrogen.

These studies emphasize the importance of providing nitrogen to bentgrasses in the fall. Once temperatures have begun to decline in late September or early October, bentgrass greens should receive 1 to 1½ pounds of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet. One to two additional bimonthly applications of similar amounts of nitrogen should then be applied to promote the best total root growth in the spring. Using less nitrogen in the fall and early winter will result in poor color and a lower photosynthesis rate, which results in less carbohydrates being available for foot growth. (A.J. Powell, R.E. Blaser, and R.E. Schmidt, 1967)

Nitrogen fertilization in the late spring and early summer must be tailored on an individual basis. Although it is important to maintain a green, actively growing surface on a putting green during the summer,

interval ownership apartment. When we came home, our son also bought one, although he'd never seen it."

Member courses receive free publicity through their listing in the course directory in *The Golf Traveler* magazine, through possible editorial coverage in the magazine, or through mention in *The Golf Card's* occasional advertising in national magazines such as *Golf Digest*.

Additional exposure can come from cardholders bringing nonmembers to play your course and from word-of-mouth advertising from golfers who visit your course and tell others about it.

It is possible, too, for a course or a designated person (such as your pro or general manager) to receive commissions on card memberships sold through your pro shop.

Goals for *The Golf Card* in the future, according to Ben Lampert, "evolve around being able to provide more and more benefits for participating courses. These potential services would include group casualty and liability insurance, tournaments, a centralized purchasing division, and management training."

For now, however, probably the best testimony to the effectiveness of *The Golf Card* would be the words of a current member course owner. Ed Membery, owner/operator of Golf/Ski Haven Country Club in Ontario, recently wrote to the Canadian division of *The Golf Card*:

"Golf/Ski Haven has been a member of *The Golf Card* group in Canada for only 3 months, and we are already reaping the benefits. It has been especially beneficial in boosting our weekday play. It is not restricted to weekdays only, but we find that most users of the card are tourists and they prefer to play during the Monday-to-Friday periods to avoid the weekend crowds.

"My purpose in writing this testimonial is to convince other Canadian golf clubs to join *The Golf Card* group as the more we have listed, the better we can attract our American visitors."

That, really, is how *The Golf Card* can help an operator build his business: by attracting more golfers to his course. □

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