

# Aggressive approach revitalizes pro shop

by Joe Gambatese, contributing editor



Is your golf shop facility up-to-date? Does it measure up to the needs and desires of your members or customers?

Or could it be that your shop has outgrown present facilities, which has led to inconveniences for both the customers and the professional staff?

Such a situation confronted Manor Country Club, Rockville, Md., which for years had been regarded as having one of the better shop operations in the Washington, D. C., area. The club, which has hosted the USGA's 1957 and 1971 junior and 1959 girls' national championships, is proud of how it dealt with it and the change that has come about.

It began when the golf professional, who had been on the job 37 years, retired to Professional Emeritus status. Club officials then, in keeping with Manor's tradition of providing the best for its members, sought and found another professional who was young and well trained. He also had the progressive ideas and imagination to create an entirely new operation and professional atmosphere which the club was seeking. That was almost 3 years ago.

Today Manor Country Club has the finest golf shop setup any club would want, and the members couldn't be happier with the change. For they now enjoy a new, modern golf shop more than three times larger than the old one, a newly constructed golf car stor-

age building and a new fleet of 80 electric cars.

The golf shop and the car and bag storage facilities, previously separated, are now centrally located and more efficiently managed.

The entire operation is being run by a 31-year-old, expertly trained professional with a larger, conscientious staff, who has been able to more than triple the volume of business utilizing modern merchandising techniques.

## A very professional pro

The golf professional who has turned things around so remarkably at Manor Country Club is Kim Hand.

He had the good fortune to be trained in good business practices by Max Elbin of Burning Tree Club, Bethesda, Md., former national PGA president, and two other professionals who had also worked for Elbin.

Kim left college to work for Alan Johnson, an Elbin protege, at Burlington (Iowa) Golf Club. Then in 1969, while in Washington winding up his Army career after service in Vietnam, he worked part-time for Elbin alongside the No. 1 assistant, Don Saylor.

When Saylor moved to become head pro at River Bend Country Club on the other side of the Potomac River in Great Falls, Va., he took Hand with him. Under Saylor's tutelage, Kim absorbed more of the Elbin concepts of a sound business approach to the golf

professional's job. He became a PGA Junior A member in 1972.

By 1975, when the Manor post opened up, Hand was more than ready to move up to head professional. He went for his interview armed with a detailed, colorful presentation between plastic sheets in a looseleaf notebook.

Howard Seney, then Manor president, and his selection committee were most impressed by the excellence of the presentation.

Hand used color pictures to illustrate his duties at River Bend, how he functioned, and what he was confident he could do for Manor. In business-like fashion he laid before the committee a positive approach to a new program and the new, professional climate Manor was seeking.

"I gave them completely new thinking on what we could do together for Manor, while at the same time giving me a fair opportunity to make a good living," Hand told GOLF BUSINESS.

## A professional proposal

Hand and the club agreed that the golf shop should be moved from the inadequate quarters in the clubhouse to the old carriage house of the property's original estate, where the cars and bags were being stored. This would bring all three functions close together, with the shop about 50 feet from the clubhouse and convenient to the

## “A printed folder, sent to all members each month with their bill, is devoted largely to information on sales.”

locker rooms and parking.

Then, Hand proposed that a new building be erected for the golf cars, making room in the existing structure for a much larger golf shop next to the bag storage.

He illustrated and promised to provide a modern golf shop stocked with top-quality apparel and equipment which would be professionally merchandised. He made sales and profit projections which would adequately support the enlarged operation and larger staff he was planning for. And he assured the committee he would run a highly professional operation with improved rapport between the shop staff and the club committees and members, and that the satisfaction they received would be worth the club's investment in both new facilities and their young pro, Hand.

The golf car storage building, designed by Hand, is of white cinder block, 40 by 90 feet. It stores 60 cars in six rows of 10. Cars are brought in from the rear and taken out the front, in rotation, through three 10-foot doors.

“The charging units are on shelves suspended from the ceiling,” Hand points out, “and there is plenty of aisle space and room for walking along and between the cars. This eliminates any need to climb over them or back them up, which cuts down on wear and tear.”

Dirt and debris are removed after each use with a high-pressure washer at the rear of the building. Detergent is used on the seats. The cleaning is done by two part-time workers on a 4 to 8 p.m. shift; They also clean the clubs and gather the range balls.

The bag storage room, about 1,300 square feet, is connected to the golf shop. It has a capacity of 400 bags and room for 20 carts and a work bench. When planned improvements are made, it will hold 900 bags, 20 carts, and a complete club repair shop.

When Hand took over in mid-1975, only 125 bags were being stored, on a monthly basis for \$1.25. Through service and salesmanship, he has increased the storage to 320 bags despite a gradual increase in the charge to \$33 a year.

Clubs are cleaned electronically after every use and minor repairs are made without the asking.

### A professional shop

The golf shop is Hand's pride and joy. It is almost 1,350 square feet — 28 by 48 — three times the size of the old shop in the club house, and includes a corner office, 8 by 12 feet.

The club gutted the inside of the old golf car shed, poured a new concrete floor, installed a dropped ceiling with built-in fluorescent lighting, paneled the walls in mahogany, built the office, and carpeted the entire floor to Hand's taste.

Hand took care of the rest. He designed and invested more than \$20,000 in custom-made showcases, cabinets, racks, fixtures, and furnishings.

Cabinets along the walls are 4 feet wide, covered with the same paneling as the walls, with rust-colored Formica tops to match the carpeting. Glass shelves above the cabinets can be added to or removed, depending on the amount of merchandise on hand.

The Hand-designed shoe rack extends from floor to ceiling along an 11-foot wall, with some shoes on display and boxes of 200 more pairs visible covering all size ranges.

Clubs are displayed on a wall with the bags below them.

Hand also designed revolving umbrella and putter racks. The center support posts consist of an interlocking of his initials, K and H, about 2 feet high and covered with the same paneling as the walls. On rainy days the umbrellas, with all colors visible at a glance, are placed near the door.

Focal point of the shop is a circular glass showcase, near the center, which Hand also designed. It contains the customary balls, gloves, complimentary tees, bug repellents, and other small items. But more importantly, it serves as a command post from which one person can manage a cluster of activities and survey virtually the entire shop while facing the front door to greet incoming members (who later exit through a side door, thus viewing and being able to touch much of the merchandise along the way).

Charge slips for golf cars, guest fees, and goods purchased are signed at this counter. By telephone with intercom connections, whoever is manning the counter can get in touch almost instantly with the first tee, bag room, and the pro's office.

Hand's office has an 8-foot counter with fluorescent lighting for gift wrapping, with cabinets above and below for storing wrapping paper, bags, and other supplies. A curtained area at one end for trying on clothes will be converted into a separate try-on room with entrance directly from the shop.

### Professional business practices

Many other factors besides the facilities contribute to Hand's merchandising success at Manor. Other elements include arrangement of the shop, timely buying and display of the right merchandise, accounting and handling of credit, marketing and sales promotion, and service.

As previously noted, the service counter with balls, gloves, etc., faces the front door. On the back wall facing the member as he enters is a 4-by-6-foot bulletin board which usually features a poster announcing a sale or calling attention to an approaching gift-giving holiday. To his right are the shoe and equipment departments. To the left and right, as the member exits through the side door where the car and clubs are waiting, are the men's and ladies' departments, with apparel on reachable circular racks as well as on shelves. Wall space is utilized to the maximum to give the floor space an open feeling.

Displays are changed weekly to give the shop a new look. Glass shelves are adjusted to accommodate the merchandising comfortably and avoid a look of being over- or under-stocked.

Merchandise is ordered well in advance, so that it is stocked in sufficient quantity, variety, styles, and sizes as a new season approaches. Hand deals with all of the major suppliers, buying only top quality. He emphasizes the old standbys, like cardigan sweaters, but will also sprinkle newer offbeat items like rugby shorts when they came on the market (and sold so fast he had to reorder quickly).

Smart buying helps avoid the need for special orders, which Kim discourages because of the difficulty in filling them. By the time you place the order the manufacturer quite often



## Kim Hand: "Above all, everything you do, do in a professional manner."

has stopped making the item because he may already be producing quite different apparel for the next season.

The Manor shop honors all major credit cards. This involves some added cost, but Hand feels it is worth it for convenience to some members, particularly those with expense accounts. Cash is acceptable.

Most of the sales are charged to the member's club account. The club's billing cycle is from the 26th of one month to the 25th of the next. On the 10th of each month the club pays Hand by check for all shop charges through the 25th of the previous month.

As for his own credit with suppliers, Hand believes in ordering early and spreading the purchases over a period of several months so that he can pay the bills easier from sales revenues as he goes along. For example, instead of placing a \$5,000 order, he will spread the same amount over, say, 3 months, with several purchases of around \$1,500. As the later bills come in they will be easier to pay with income from the sale of goods delivered earlier.

"You've got to be able to project your sales and inventories — and how you are going to pay for what you buy," he advises.

"Each day my staff totals up sales and makes deposits. I run the book-keeping and purchasing. I hire a computerized accounting service which gives me a monthly operating analysis sheet showing my purchases, sales, inventory, and profit and loss. It's broken down into six sales departments — men's, ladies', equipment (clubs, bags, and accessories), balls, gloves, and shoes.

"The analysis also includes five other revenue-producing areas — cart fees, bag storage, club repairs, practice range, and lessons.

"I try to turn over my inventory four or five times a year for the entire shop. My inventory usually ranges between \$25,000 and \$35,000, so that my annual volume runs about \$130,000."

Perhaps Hand's best marketing tool is a printed folder, called "PROgrams," which is produced for him by a friend in the advertising business at a cost of about \$100. All 1,000 members, 700 of them golfers, get it every

month with their bill and the Newslette sent out by the club.

PROgrams is devoted largely to information on sales, accenting gift-giving occasions like Christmas, Mother's Day and Father's Day, or discounts on merchandise which the shop wants to clear out.

"When an item isn't selling, it costs money to keep it in stock," Hand says. "It's better to get rid of it with as little loss as possible and put the money to work buying other goods that will move."

To cope with discount house and department store competition, Hand gives 20 percent off on all clubs and bags, hoping to get full prices for shirts, sweaters, and other items.

A special feature of PROgrams, however, is a personal column by Hand, illustrated with his picture.

"I try to communicate with my members on a professional basis," he says, "discussing new developments in golf or merchandise or anything else I may want to get across to them."

On one occasion he discussed the importance of keeping golf equipment in good repair and enclosed a price list for repairs. On others he has talked about the training of a golf professional, the problems of running the business as well as the rewards, the USGA Handicap System, shaft characteristics, club grips, a device available in the shop with which a member can test a used ball's concentricity and compression, and Hand's visit to the Foot-Joy plant in introducing a discussion of the complicated process for making good golf shoes.

He also has used PROgrams to introduce new staff members, with their pictures.

Kim's staff consists of two assistants (two more added during the season) and two men for bag and car storage, plus part-time help. Staggered shifts start at 8 and 12 o'clock.

"I look for young assistants who are conscientious, want to get ahead, and have the potential to become a head pro," he says. "I bring them along as quickly as I can. I don't want future tour players."

One assistant is Dennis Myers, 27, from Indiana, who Kim had trained to succeed him at River Bend. He

became a PGA Junior A member last September. The other is Skip Tendall, 25, graduate of Arizona State, who is working toward PGA membership.

The shop staff is paid a weekly salary by check every Sunday for the previous week's work. Occasional bonuses are passed out based on performance and sales and after big holiday weekends and tournaments like the 3-day member-guest.

The professional whom Hand succeeded is Clagett Stevens, who has continued an interest he has long had in a distributorship of E-Z-Go golf cars. With his retired Pro Emeritus status he was given a lifetime membership and pension.

### Golf cars, too

Until this year the club leased 65 cars from Stevens, with Kim sharing in the revenue, supplementing his salary.

Under a new 6-year agreement which became effective January 1, the club turned the golf car operation completely over to the golf shop in return for a share of the revenue. One reason for relinquishing the cars was a desire to reward Hand for the fine job he was doing.

In turn, Hand bought — not leased — an entire fleet of 80 brand-new E-Z-Go cars from Stevens, 15 more than the old leased fleet. They are snappy looking, white with black trim to match the shop and clubhouse buildings, with wire sweater baskets between the seat back and the clubs. Kim borrowed in excess of \$100,000 to make the purchase. He plans to repay the bank in 4 years.

Naturally the members are delighted to be riding the new and better cars and having less, if any, waiting time during peak periods.

To sum up, Kim feels that good facilities are a big help but, in the end, the "real key to a profitable shop operation is service to your members.

"To meet competition with a limited club membership, you have to give better service — something your member can't get elsewhere.

"You also have to plan, work hard, invest in the future — in terms of both people and merchandise — and not be afraid to take sound risks. Above all, everything you do, do in a professional manner." □