

Caddie Crusade

by Don Ferreri

Thinking back to my days on the grounds crew at Butterfield Country Club, I never thought I would say putting caddies on the golf course was a positive thing. In fact, I could list many negatives. For example:

1. Replacing sod in the caddie yard.
2. Finding pop cans placed in the crotch of a tree.
3. Fixing basketball hoops.
4. Softballs hit off the cars in the employee parking lot.
5. Always thinking a caddie was making more money than I was.

6. Working hard while they golfed and swam every Monday morning (this one was the worst by far).

Those days are gone now and I feel I have grown in my opinion of caddies. Never having been a caddie I may have been slightly narrow minded.

Five years ago Seven Bridges Golf Club opened to the public. We had joined the upscale public golf course roster in Chicagoland and our goal was to become the best overall facility in condition and service. Seven Bridges adopted the philosophy of country club services and a mandatory golf cart policy. This worked very well and seemed to fill the niche of would be country clubbers very well. Getting to the top of any industry requires being innovative. In 1993, we put our heads together on how we could introduce junior golf to our club. The thought led to the introduction of fore caddies to our carts only golf course. There were many pros and cons to our discussions but the pros far outweighed the cons. To start with the negatives we had to consider the customers support of another cost to the round of golf. Also, the ability to provide a well trained and knowledgeable caddie every time. Insurance and liability were a huge concern. The task of providing a good roster of kids and how many are enough, posed a problem.

Getting to the top of any industry requires being innovative.

Let's take a look at the upside of the program. I was fast to back the program and became a player in pulling it together. A lot of my reasons to start the program were selfish. We were trying to provide a country club for public golfers, like many of you are. Manicuring and top conditions every day are required. I saw the fore caddie as another member of my grounds crew, to be properly trained in raking bunkers, fixing ball marks, picking up litter and knowing when and how to replace divots. I also solicit comments from our caddies as to the golfers concerns, whether it be the rough is too long or the greens too soft, etc.

Other positives we talked about were the start of our junior golf program which allows the youth of our community, ages 13 and up, the experience to learn the game of golf and make money at the same time. The caddies can also be a tool to help keep the pace of play by locating balls from the landing area that are hit off line. Caddies
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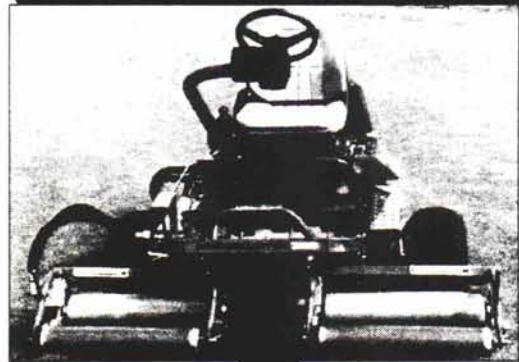
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*Dan Dinelli, Superintendent Grounds,
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(Caddie Crusade continued)

add another amenity to our guest for that client golf game. We also discovered a good fore caddie program would allow eligibility in the Evans Scholarship Program. And finally, it would create an employee pool for other golf course jobs as the caddies get older.

An overwhelming decision was made by the maintenance and professional staff to start this program. Myself and an assistant professional worked together to set up this program. To assemble a roster of fore caddies, we first placed an ad in the local newspapers, second we sent letters to or consulted with the athletic directors and golf coaches of the area high schools. We set a day up to hand out applications and give a one page test of golf knowledge. One hundred twenty boys and girls picked up applications on that day. Not knowing how many requests we would have for caddies we went with a roster of thirty kids. Because we received so many applicants we were able to sign up thirty kids with interest and some knowledge of the game. Training consisted of two classes on caddie procedure and two classes where they practiced these procedures on the golf course. We decided to charge the foursome \$15.00 plus tip paid directly to the fore caddie. Making him or her an independent contractor of sorts. Even though technically the caddies are not employees of the golf course, the workmen's comp of the golf course would cover them if an accident occurred.

Not wanting to have a caddie yard set up we used our seven day in advance reservation system to offer the fore caddie service to our guests. This works very well and almost always allows two to three days to fill the reservation with a caddie. We have the caddies check in a half an hour before their tee time. At this time they locate and introduce themselves to their foursome.

In the first summer of our fore caddie program, 1993, four hundred fifty reservations requested the use of a fore caddie. The response and comments by those golfers were in favor of the program. The next year, 1994, was similar to the year before, but we had a lot of requests by our golfers to add bag carrying caddies. So in 1995 we decided to take our program one step further with the addition of bag carrying caddie. We raised the price for a caddie to twenty dollars plus a tip per bag on top of our greens fee which does not seem to be a deterrent. The caddie roster was increased to forty caddies and requests are up thirty percent.

In the first summer of our fore caddie program, 1993, four hundred fifty reservations requested the use of a fore caddie.

The U.S.G.A. has declared the 90's the decade of the caddie. Caddies are not just for private clubs anymore, they can also be used for public courses. So take on the challenge to enhance your course with caddies. It is very rewarding to see these caddies heading up the first fairway early in the morning playing the game of golf the way it should be played. If you need any help setting up your program or have any questions, please call me.

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