

Club 18 helps private clubs generate additional revenue

By ELAINE FITZGERALD

A Florida company is helping private courses hold down membership costs by encouraging visiting Europeans to play the layouts during off-peak times.

Fort Lauderdale-based Club 18 International provides European golfers access to hundreds of private, semi-private and up-scale public courses throughout the United States.

Participating facilities admit Club 18 International cardholders during the course's down times, taking business only when they need it.

Club 18 members make their own tee times, identify themselves with a club card and passport and pay fees directly to the pro shop.

It costs clubs nothing to participate. Club 18 members pay \$75 to join. Airlines have also given away memberships as promotional tools.

For many courses, the added revenue can lessen the need for additional member assessments, larger initiation fees or higher dues.

Maintenance payrolls receive a boost during slack periods.

"It's not our intent to make golf courses rich on our clientele. What we are helping them do is offset the loss of revenues during slow periods," said Club 18's Richard Graves.

Graves and partner Roger Paul Roman are experienced international marketers, having spent 20 years with major hotel chains and airlines.

Club 18 advertises member courses throughout Europe.

"The European golf community is one of the most dynamic and fastest growing markets available to American golf clubs," Roman said.

Golf's growth and a weak U.S. dollar make the United States the top long-haul destination for Europeans.

The U.S. Tour and Travel Agency (a division of the Department of Commerce) says 45 million foreigners will visit the United States in 1992 and spend \$50 billion (Overseas visitors spend seven times more than domestic tourists). And more than 12 percent want to play golf.

"I come to the United States about five times a year on business and to play golf," said Bob Corney, a corporate executive from England.

"All of my friends play golf, and we look forward to having the chance to play on some of the best U.S. courses."

The big problem in Europe is a shortage of golf facilities. Most are private and very expensive.

"When Europeans come to the United States they realize fabulous buying power," Roman said. "They pay full price for golf clubs in the pro shop and, to them, it's a bargain."

Club 18 International has offices in Germany, England and Sweden.

The company has also contracted with European travel firms specializing in corporate, incentive and upper-income travelers.

Graves and Roman are preparing a nationwide list of golf courses wanting to join the program.

The directory will be distributed throughout Europe. Roman expects between 300 to 400 U.S. courses to sign on. Initial course

recruiting efforts were made in Florida. Among those signing contracts were Cobblestone Country Club in Stuart, Glen Abbey Golf Club in De Bary and Presidential Country Club in North Miami Beach.

"We're not looking for nine-hole executive courses or free buckets of balls. We're looking for access to courses that will excite our clients," Graves said.

Club 18 International can be reached by telephoning 305-565-6558 or by writing to 757 SE 17th Street, Fort Lauderdale, Fla. 33316.



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