

Corporate memberships at public courses

By PETER BLAIS

SAN ANTONIO, Texas—Public course owners seeking ways to attract corporate customers might want to consider something similar to The Quarry Corporate Card.

The card provides a local company with a convenient means for business associates and key employees to play at a high-quality course without having to invest in private club memberships.

For the club, it provides thousands of dollars in up-front capital and course exposure to some of the highest-income professionals

and business people in the area.

"It's very attractive to men and women over 30. They often have good enough incomes to join a private club, but don't have the time to get the full benefits from a private facility," said Courtney Connell, head pro at the Keith Foster-designed layout, which opened several months ago. "They are treated like members and get to play a course that is as good or better than any private club."

The Quarry Corporate Card provides 50 rounds of golf (25 weekdays and 25 weekends) with

a shared golf car. It includes unlimited practice area privileges, early tee-time reservations (eight days in advance rather than the seven allowed regular players), access to the new clubhouse, free locker usage and shoe shine service. The card is valid for 12 months.

The cost is \$2,700, a 10-percent discount over regular green fees. A portion of the cost *may* be tax-deductible as a gift to clients.

"It sounds like an innovative program," said Michael Hughes, executive director of the National Golf Course Owners Association.

"It could be especially effective if a developer wanted to sell *some* memberships. Getting high-profile people onto your course is the first step toward selling memberships."

Connell agreed, but said The Quarry has no plans to sell memberships.

"We have a big enough job just filling the demand for public play," the head pro said. "The program is designed to recognize the importance of our repeat customers and give them a break. We want to give them the opportunity to entertain clients and valued employees at a nice club."

Connell sold a dozen cards through the first week of March and expected to sell another 20 by mid-month. The goal is to sell 100 and then review the program.

"Many of the banks and hospitals have called. They want to buy two at a time and get more as they need them," the head pro said.

"Getting the money up front and collecting the interest is nice. But the biggest benefit is establishing close relationships with corporate people and discovering what you can do for them."

The only potential drawback, according to Hughes, is the 10-percent discount.

"The problem with discounts is that it creates the mentality in the mind of the consumer that no one should pay full price," the NCGOA director said. "Discounts should be used only to fill in down times if at all."

"In Florida, for instance, you have these golf-around discount cards all over the place. In some places you can use them 12 months a year and they are damaging the market."

Connell acknowledged that discounting is a legitimate concern. The corporate card is the only discount The Quarry offers on its \$55 weekday and \$65 weekend greens fees. The 10 percent is a minor amount and is intended simply to thank corporations for committing to the club, he added. The card also requires golfers to play half their rounds on less-busy weekdays.

Has the program been successful? Two new San Antonio courses scheduled to open within the next year, La Canterra and Silverhorn, have expressed interest in offering similar programs, Connell said.

What is it they say about imitation being the sincerest form of flattery?



The 17th at the Quarry, where this daily-fee course is accepting corporate memberships.



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