



Ted Pasko (left) and Don Lawrence suggested ways to increase rounds at golf facilities during the OTF conference and trade show. Photo: Heather Wood

## Events, partnerships can help boost rounds

**W**hen times are trying (or even when they aren't), it pays to be creative with golf course operations.

This was the message a panel of golf course owners and managers sent to attendees at the session "Marketing your golf course – thinking outside the box" at the Ohio Turfgrass Foundation's conference and trade show in Columbus, Ohio, in November. Some panel members acknowledged rounds have been decreasing this decade and outlined ways they're trying to remedy the situation.

As far as Don Lawrence of Red Hawk Run Golf Course in Findlay, Ohio, is concerned, electronic organization of tee sheets is a marketing must. The system allows a golf course manager to track customers and see what type of customer spends the most and on which items at a course. The manager can send out e-mail blasts to these customers to alert them about special events or for other reasons.

Likewise, Lawrence keeps the course's clubhouse available for weddings and banquets, primarily in the winter months when

course business is slow.

Ed Fisher of the Hamilton County Ohio Park District values programs in which golf courses partner with organizations to promote the game of golf. One day last spring, the county opened up one of its courses for the Professional Golfers' Association of America's Play Golf America promotion.

"About 950 people came; 400 of them were already customers, but 500 of them were new families," he says, adding that a higher number of families came during the months following the





event to sign up for programs. "We'll jump on it if the PGA does it again."

The county's courses also have partnered with the PGA for Link Up To Golf, which offers a welcome package to new golfers. The course offers lessons and opportunities to play with the golf pro for a discounted price.

Rich Kitchen knew little about golf course management when he first started Locust Hills Golf Club in Springfield, Ohio, with his twin brother, John, in 1966.

The course is located in a dry township, which limits his refreshment offerings. He hasn't let that slow down business, though. Pork chops and ice cream have become popular



food items. The course is also a hit with church groups and other organizations who aren't interested in serving alcohol at their outings.

The food offerings are some of the characteristics for which the course is known, and Kitchen relies primarily on word of mouth to drum up business.

Another marketing tool is the

course's dedicated times for discounted fees for college students. The fee is reduced to \$5 for nine or 18 holes. Kitchen doesn't budget money to advertise this special.

"The advertising is right there in the price," he says.

The course also offers specials to appeal to golf outing groups, couples and families.

Attracting families, becoming part of a golf program, offering golf lessons and hosting charity events are a few ways to help increase the number of rounds at a facility.

Ted Pasko, owner of Deer Ridge Golf Course in Bellville, Ohio, hosts events with local charities as a way to gain publicity. Public service announcements advertise the events on the local media. For example, they hosted a food drive in which golfers bring food items instead of paying the green fees.

Pasko has tried different types of advertising, but in the end, he agrees with Kitchen's marketing strategy, the kind that money can't buy.

"Golfers aren't going to play your place if they haven't heard from a buddy that it's a good place to play," he says. —HW


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