

by PAT JONES

IT PLAYS IN Peoria

Making integrated facility management more than just lip service

There's no question the traditional American private golf club currently is more vulnerable than a baby bunny in a cage full of hungry pythons.

Though the number of golf courses has increased almost 40 percent during the past two decades, the number of private facilities is actually just about the same – about 4,500. That means for every new club that's opened, another has converted to a semiprivate or daily-fee facility, or simply ceased to exist. The golf boom has been a public phenomenon, and clubs have been the victim of the free market.

Society, too, has changed. The days of dad visiting the club four or five days a week to play golf, hang out and spend money are over. And mom's not playing as much golf or sitting in for bridge games every Tuesday and Thursday. She's either working or running the local PTA. The kids? Well, instead of being "club rats," they're busy playing video games, cram-

ming for the SAT, surfing on MySpace.com or going to lacrosse, dance or soccer practices.

So, how does a traditional private club – historically run "the way we've always done it" with almost separate operations in maintenance, food and beverage, and the pro shop – survive in this hostile environment? Two words: teamwork and creativity.

Clubs throughout America are reinventing themselves because, quite simply, they have to. One traditional private facility – the Country Club of Peoria in Illinois – is breaking the mold, becoming more businesslike and taking its destiny into its own hands. As the old show biz saying goes: If it plays in Peoria, it'll play anywhere.

TYPICAL CLUB, UNIQUE STAFF

The Country Club of Peoria is a classic Midwestern gem. Formed 110 years ago, the club sits near the Illinois River on an

unusually hilly spot in an otherwise flat-as-a-pancake part of the nation.

Like many century courses, the club has undergone numerous development phases, expansions and redesigns through the years. The core design of the golf course is credited to F.M. Birks, one of the club's organizers, but the course was rebuilt dramatically in 1997. It's short (6,200+ yards), tight and woody.

And, like many mature clubs in smaller markets, the facility began feeling the pinch of economic pressures, particularly as the fortunes of Caterpillar – the region's dominant employer – rose and fell. At the same time, membership and revenue declined because of the social challenges facing all clubs.

That was the situation facing the management team that came together in 2005: golf course superintendent Andrew Morris, general manager Mark Bado, CCM, and golf professional Scott Brownfield.

"Before I came here, I worked for an ac-

At the Country Club of Peoria in Illinois, golf course superintendent Andrew Morris (right), general manager Mark Bado, CCM, (below left) and golf professional Scott Brownfield have worked well together to increase membership and find new revenue sources. Photos: Terry Farmer



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FACILITY OPERATIONS



The golf course irrigation system needed to be replaced, and that tied to the club's need to host golf outings to generate more revenue. Photo: Country Club of Peoria

counting firm in Pittsburgh that handled club business," Bado says. "With that background, I learned how important it is to open yourself to the whole operation. I never knew there were walls between departments at some clubs, so it was natural for the three of us to team up."

Morris also has a nontraditional background for a superintendent. It's his second career after serving as an executive chef at SeaWorld in San Diego and working in restaurant management.

"Obviously, my experience helps me have a much better understanding of the food-and-beverage side, but I also got indoctrinated in management cultures that emphasized teamwork," he says.

Brownfield has been at the club almost continuously for about 20 years and, obviously, had seen numerous management and leadership changes.

"But I immediately liked these guys," he says. "It was easy to get excited about doing new things."

THE "TO DO" LIST

The new things that needed to be done in-

cluded reversing the decline of memberships, finding new revenue sources, replacing an aging and unreliable irrigation system and making the club more family-friendly in the modern sense.

"Clubs can no longer be a one-stop just for the head of the household," Bado says. "We have to cater to the whole family. Twenty-five percent of our members have been here 30 years or more, but another 25 percent have been here three years or less. We have to meet all of those differing expectations and needs. Essentially, we have to be an extension of the home."

The first order of business building the team and accomplishing its multiple goals was setting up better lines of communication within the entire staff.

"We (the managers) meet weekly on a formal basis, but daily on an informal basis," Brownfield says. "We made a conscious attempt to work as a team."

Morris – who will conduct a seminar about the subject of team management at the GCSAA national conference in Anaheim – outlines his staffwide communication program:

- Weekly management team meetings

- Weekly meeting with the PGA pro
- Weekly meeting with the general manager/facility manager
- Daily meeting with the maintenance crew
- Daily communication with the support staff and assistants
- Ongoing communication with green committee and golf membership
- Facility communication board.

"A big part of our success has been letting each other into each others' areas," Morris says. "I have a better understanding what they do, and we've developed a level of trust. If they tell me things are OK, I know things are OK. We don't always agree, but we'll agree to disagree and laugh about it later."

One might question whether that threatens Morris' autonomy over the turf program.

"One thing I hear superintendents say is 'why would you share that information with them,' like somehow they don't want their g.m. or golf pro to know what they do. That's the complete opposite of what we should be doing. I let him know everything. He doesn't want my job. The more he knows about me and my operation, the better off we'll be.

Team character

Golf course superintendent Andrew Morris has looked beyond his own operation to prepare for his presentation about integrated team management at the GCSAA education conference. He identified these key characteristics of a good team:

- The majority usually consists of fewer than 10 members.
- It strives for something greater than team members could achieve individually.
- Members are accountable with and to their teammates.
- Members have the ability to engage in constructive conflict or agree to disagree.
- Members have commitment and trust in each other.

(Katzenbach and Smith, Harvard Business Review, 2004)

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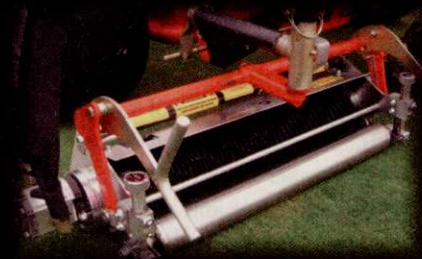
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By hosting 13 new events, the club raised \$750,000 for the community and exposed hundreds of golfers to the course and club. Photo: Country Club of Peoria

That information sharing is a huge part of our success.”

HIGH-TECH MARKETING

To address the need to recruit new members, this granddaddy of a club used a new-fangled idea: They produced a membership package that includes a slick DVD that focuses on the people and culture of the club. Surprisingly, it was Morris who wrote the script and helped drive the production.

“Potential members used to get two pieces of paper stapled together,” Morris says. “It just wasn’t representative of the type of club we are. Now we have a nice package to give to potential

members. Most of the time a superintendent would never have been involved, but Mark and Scott were more than willing to listen. I wrote the rough presentation and the dialogue and even presented some of the initial ideas to the board. We got professionals involved to clean it up and put some shine on it.”

Bado loved it.

“Andy really got engaged in the process,” he says. “He captured things about the club that the rest of us might not have understood as well.”

The DVD campaign was a roaring success, and the club attracted 52 new members at the standard initiation fee of \$22,000.

But, the new approach didn’t stop once the new member signed on the dotted line.

“When people join a club, it’s a huge commitment of money and time,” Bado says. “Part of our orientation is for members to go around to each department to meet the people who

might be serving them for the next 20 or 30 years. They meet everyone. They can put a face to a name and a name to a face.”

Brownfield agrees: “It puts a personal touch on the operation,” he says. “They feel much more comfortable using the facility. It can be a little intimidating, but it should feel like an extension of the home.”

Bado sums it up: “Clubs will go the way of the dinosaur unless they’re dynamic,” he says. “As a club, we have to change. It’s like grocery stores. In the ’70s, you just got your milk and meat there. Now, you have banks, ATMs, videos, etc. We have to be a one-stop shop for all of our members’ needs. So, we have wi-fi, a business center, etc. We have to embrace change without losing track of what makes clubs an extension of the home.”

OPENING THE DOORS

The club had historically avoided hosting

Between new revenue from member recruitment and the outside events, the club could now afford the new irrigation system.

COURSE M

outside events, but times had changed and new non-dues revenue was needed. Morris, Brownfield and Bado put their heads together to sell the idea to the membership.

"We needed an irrigation system and really had to market the idea (of more outings) to our members," Bado says. "Instead of sitting on the sidelines and waiting for things to happen, we put some really nice Power-Point presentations together to educate our members.

"Scott and I got leads from the membership," he adds. "And, with Andy's help, we reached out to event managers and created these outings that didn't exist three years ago. Once we sold them on holding the event here, we guided them through the process: how to set it up, how to get golfers, logistics, members, etc. We attend their committee meetings. We're active participants. We even help with sponsorships, holes-in-one, etc."

The result: 13 new events that raised \$750,000 for the community and exposed hundreds of golfers to the course and club.

"It definitely helped our recruiting," Brownfield says. "We got tons of leads out of the process."

But, he adds, successfully building an event business isn't easy.

"Every department has to come together," he says. "We do that as a team very well. When we have events here, everyone's working together because it's an opportunity to show the club off. But, when it's over, the members don't care what you've done the past three days. You can't lose sight of the fact that it's their club."

Between new revenue from member recruitment and the outside events, the club could now afford the new irrigation system. But, they didn't take approval for granted.

"It was a two-year process," Morris says. "There was no way that any one of us individually could have gotten it approved. Scott fielded numerous questions from golfers. Mark did the same. They got the same information about it from all of us. We were all on the same page."

Thanks to the new revenue and the "got

your back" team approach to communicating with the membership, the new irrigation system was approved recently and will be installed in 2008.

LESSONS LEARNED

The atmosphere of teamwork at Peoria is obviously a product of effort, but good relationships matter, too.

"We're friends, and we genuinely like each other, but we've also worked on building our relationships," Morris says. "You have to actively develop the type of relationships we have here. If you wait around for this to happen, it won't. There's too much involved. You have to consciously know that you're going to do this."

Bado echoes that.

"Everything we do is common sense," he says. "There's nothing we do here that's brain surgery. We help each other out and pull each other through. We actually attend each oth-

ers' education sessions. You can't be afraid to change, and you can't be afraid to grow."

So how much of their success can translate to other operations where this type of relationship doesn't yet exist?

"The first thing I would recommend to a club if they were in the situation we were in five years ago is to develop a team relationship," Morris says. "Those three managers have to be on board. Otherwise, it's a fist fight."

Bado also stresses the need for a club's leadership to buy into the team concept.

"You have to educate your board and get advocates," he says. "Everyone has to know the rules. The g.m. concept is great, but you have to have the right people in the right spots."

Brownfield agrees.

"Stretch yourself and reach out to members, employees and the community," he says. "You have to be an active part of the community. You can't sit at your desk."

Getting everyone on the team

Building a good team structure among managers is key, but if employees aren't part of the plan, then failure is still possible. So, golf course superintendent Andy Morris, general manager Mark Bado, CCM, and golf professional Scott Brownfield of the Country Club of Peoria in Illinois reach out to staff as well.

"We actually take it a step farther by communicating as much as possible with the line level employees – the guys who are edging bunkers – to help them understand the goals of the club and the department," Morris says. "It's empowering for them. We have open communications sessions through the year."

And it's not just maintenance staff, Bado says.

"We do the same kind of orientation sessions with employees as we do with members," he says. "Dishwashers understand about the pro shop and the maintenance facility."

TEAM CHANGES

So what happens if one of the three moves on? Well, the team has a plan that describes the long-range vision for the club.

"The club itself is dynamic, but so is the golf course," Morris says. "We never want to fall behind. But, if one leaves, the other two will stay behind and keep on track. That said, beyond the people, we have policies and procedures in place that go beyond personality. You can replace a person and recover."

Bado agrees the system in place helps cope with a personnel change.

"The system is right," he says. "We have all the pieces in place. Hopefully, if we changed people, we'd still be going in the right direction."

Brownfield concurs.

"We're making long-term decisions that go beyond our tenure," he says. "We might not be here, but the things we're putting in place will still be happening. We have something special going on right now. There's only two ways to go ... forward or back. We want to go forward." GCI

BUSINESS BOOSTERS

Acquiring information from golfers helps focus marketing and increase rounds

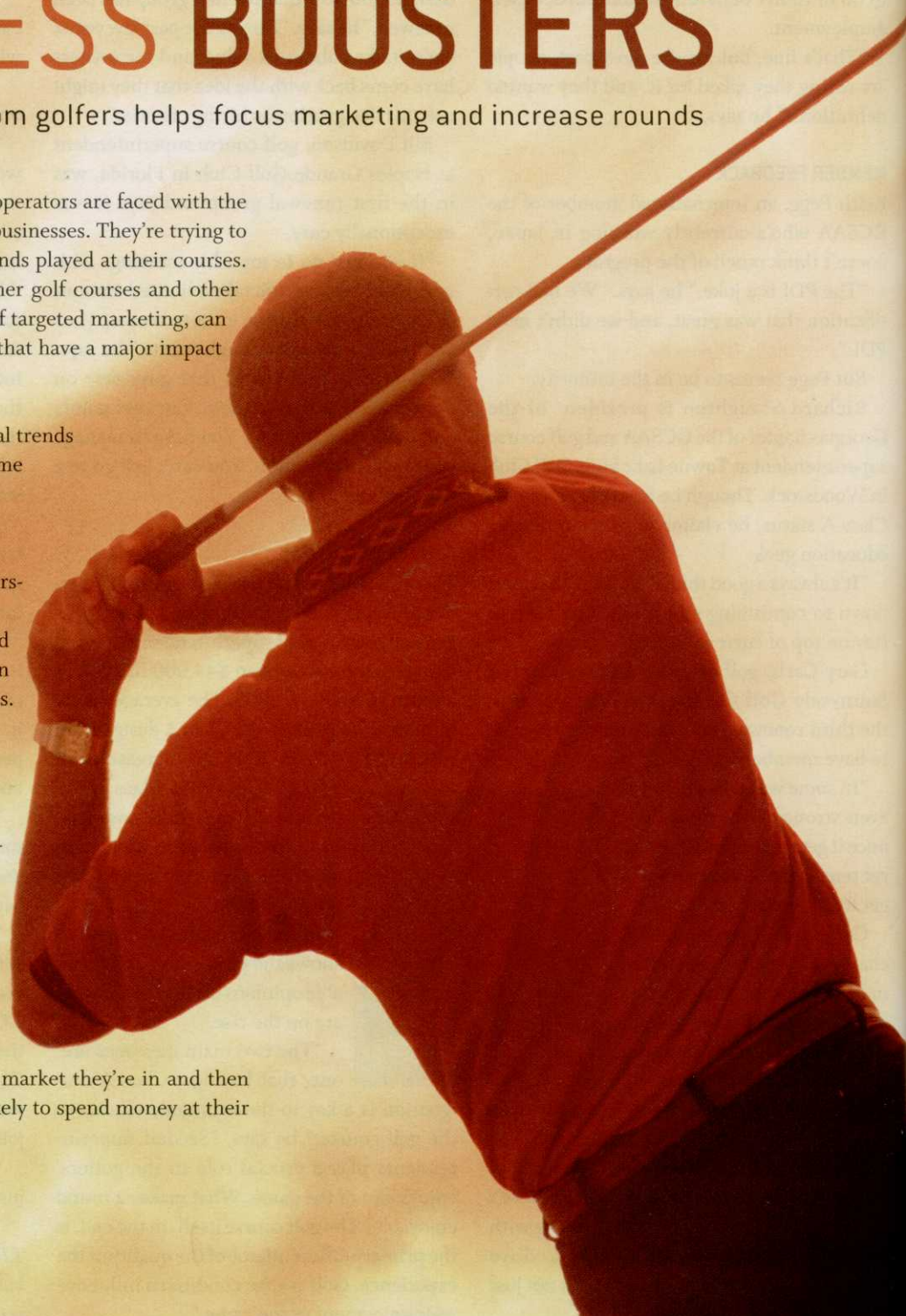
Presently, many golf course operators are faced with the challenge of growing their businesses. They're trying to increase the number of rounds played at their courses. But competition – with other golf courses and other leisure activities – as well as a lack of targeted marketing, can hinder that growth. Societal factors that have a major impact on the golf business are:

- A changing economy
- Demographic, social and cultural trends
- Availability and use of leisure time
- Technological trends
- Environmental trends
- Political and legislative trends
- Competition from other golf courses and other leisure activities.

Yet, there are opportunities and market segments golf operators can target to help improve their businesses. Those include:

- Youth development
- Family development
- Senior services
- Universal access to and the design of golf courses
- Diverse population groups
- Opportunities to address social trends such as health and wellness, lifelong learning and technology-based recreation.

To better their businesses, owners and managers need to research the market they're in and then market to consumer groups most likely to spend money at their facilities.



Attendees at the National Institute of Golf Management held last month at Oglebay Resort in Wheeling, W.Va., received tips about that. The event was sponsored by the National Golf Foundation, Club Car, the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America and Oglebay.

Looking at the macro golf market, NGF expects a net loss of 30 golf courses in 2006 once stats are finalized. The bright side, however, is that loss is alleviating competitive environments, says Ben Fowler, golf facility research and consulting sales manager for NGF. NGF predicts 2007 will be flat – there won't be a negative supply of golf courses – and Florida, Texas and California will experience the most growth.

Regarding rounds, NGF predicts 502.5 million will have been played in 2006. Comparatively, there were 499.6 million played in 2005, 499.7 million in 2004 and 495 million in 2003. Weather, the economy, competition and reduced demand are reasons for the stagnant number of rounds, Fowler says.

To weather the storm, it's critical for operators to have loyal customers who they understand, Fowler says. Knowing this is the first step to increasing the number of rounds. If owners and managers aren't surveying their golfers, they should. According to Fowler, a good base of knowledge should include:

- An understanding of your customers. Get their profiles.
- An understanding of performance measures, your share of rounds in the market, and programs such as The First Tee and Play Golf America.

- An understanding of loyalty. Have a perceived value and a perceived relationship (a good feeling). Measure loyalty by determining if a golfer would recommend your course to a friend or relative.

- An understanding of how your share of the market relates to loyalty.

- A competitive analysis. Know where else your golfers are playing and how many rounds they're playing at each course.

"If you find out where your customers are coming from, then you can market specifically to them in the areas where they live," Fowler says. "You get more bang for your advertising buck."

It's also crucial to know the relationship between satisfaction and importance factors. It's not very beneficial if golfers have a high satisfaction rating of aspects of a facility that aren't very important to them. The goal is for golfers to have high satisfaction ratings of things that are most important to them.

Getting feedback from golfers is key to bettering one's business. Fowler cites two examples. The first is a premium daily-fee facility in Indiana. It needed to renovate its bunkers but the board pushed back. So the golf course superintendent quantified responses from golfers about the bunkers to

show why the renovation was needed. The board approved the renovation after hearing the golfers' feedback.

The second is a management company in Washington state that sent out an e-mail blast to the previous day's customers. It was trying to determine why certain customers had a bad experience, remedy that, and convince them to return.

However, acquiring golfer feedback isn't always easy. For example, one NGIM attendee from a municipal golf course says he has been having a hard time getting golfers to respond to his surveys. He's sending surveys to their homes through the mail, but unfortunately, he's had to resort to giving away a free round of golf to incentivize people to respond.

Irene Khattar, manager of communications and public relations at Cape Breton University in Sydney, Nova Scotia, Canada, and a member of the board of regents for the NIGM, says operators need to contact golfers twice a year. She suggests putting a survey in the tee packet so golfers can fill them out while waiting to tee off at the first tee. Effective elements of a golfer survey include:

- Keeping it to one page
- Taking no more than five to seven minutes to complete

National Institute of Golf Management is a week-long educational seminar about golf facility operations taught by various golf industry experts for golf course owners, operators, managers, superintendents and PGA professionals. The NIGM, which has been around for more than 25 years, is held every year in January at Oglebay Resort in Wheeling W.Va. For more information, visit www.ngf.org/nigm.



Understanding as much about the golfers who play their courses as they can helps golf course operators focus their marketing efforts and spend their marketing dollars more wisely.



- Generating actionable information
- Asking neutral questions
- Not asking double questions
- Asking one open-ended question.

“You need the research first so you can spend your money more wisely and effectively,” Khattar says. “If you’re going to spend money on research, you should use it at every available opportunity. You need to reallocate marketing dollars because most likely budgets won’t increase.

“We’re not simply in the golf business,” she adds. “We’re in the entertainment business. We’re competing against a lot of other options such as hockey, movies, soccer, etc. We’re not just competing against golf courses.”

When trying to solicit information from golfers, incentive programs such as sweepstakes don’t work, Khattar says.

“You need to conduct market research on an individual level,” she says.

Survey methods include the Internet, mail, paper/pencil and e-mail. Khattar says 300 completed surveys in 30 to 60 days is a good goal to validate a survey. One can track a survey, for example, by having a coupon on the facility’s site that golfers have to print out and bring in to receive the reward.

Khattar recommends facility owners who have tight budgets share marketing expenses with others in the area to ease any financial burden.

“Competition isn’t always your enemy; it can be your ally,” she says. “Sharing ad dollars can benefit all courses. Keep in mind that every lost tee time is lost revenue.”

Khattar also cites an owner who was asked what the most scenic part of a golf course is. The owner replied: “a full parking lot.”

Owners and managers also need to look at all aspects of their businesses and develop target action plans for each. Some areas to evaluate include:

- Marketing plan
- Operational improvements
- Capital expenditure schedule
- Yield management
- Loyalty programs
- Accountability/ performances bonuses
- Tournaments/outings.

Monitoring, comparing and enhancing an operation are keys to a better business, Khattar says. Owners and managers need external benchmarks and internal goals.

“Hold yourself and your staff accountable,” she says. “Set your benchmarks against other

regional or national benchmarks. It can be convincing and persuasive.”

BUDGETING, FORECASTING

Generating revenue isn’t easy, and because of that, the revenue side of the budget is where all the forecasting and planning take place.

“The expense side is so easy a caveman could do it,” says John Potts, a consultant from Chillicothe, Ill.

Before the budgeting starts, a facility’s framework needs to be firmly established. That framework includes core values, a mission, a vision, key trends and opportunities, core competencies and strategies. Some golf attributes facilities could include as part of their framework are:

- Strengthens the community
- Protects the environment
- Fosters human development
- Supports economic development
- Provides friendly competition
- Promotes health and wellness
- Provides an activity.

A business plan is needed for a facility to succeed, says Rich Richeson, owner of Richeson Player Development LLC and director of Adams Golf Learning Center in Plano, Texas.

“A business plan is a roadmap to reach a destination and adds focus and clarity for ideas and goals,” he says.

Operators need to take the time to write a business plan before budgeting, make it accessible and readable, and reference it throughout the year, Richeson says. And when forecasting, operators should identify key focal areas. For example, he suggests operators call their suppliers and ask what they’ll be charged for items the following year. This will help make the budgeting process easier.

“Use the budget numbers to get what you need,” he says.

Also, software can be used to help budget, forecast and plan. Software can track what each golfer spent in one year in each area of the golf facility, such as the pro shop, the food-and-beverage area and the golf course itself. **GCI**

Course conditions, functions, marketing and staff are keys to a profitable business

BY BOB SELIGMAN

Here's a recipe for making golf course owners happy:

Take a well-conditioned golf course, preferably with a playability level that will make golfers want to return. Add a clubhouse facility that can handle bottom-line stimulators such as outings, weddings and other appropriate functions. Throw in a food-service operation that provides more than the basics like hot dogs and burgers. Mix in the importance of keeping the facility fresh and inviting, along with having the proper amenities to continually attract new members. Top all that with satisfied golfers who are glad they've come to the facility and not somewhere else.

"The most important thing to me is that people enjoy themselves when they come," says Joe Hills, managing member of Blue Mash Golf Course in Laytonsville, Md., and Waverly Woods Golf Club in Marriottsville, Md., two upscale public courses.

Having excellent course conditions goes a long way toward that end. Hills says course conditioning is the No. 1 thing, and it's extremely important to golfers, particularly when attracting new players.

"It's word-of-mouth advertising regarding what kind of shape the course is in," he says. "Customer service is important, but if you had to choose one or the other, I would choose maintenance over anything else."

The most important asset of the private Cape Girardeau (Mo.) Country Club is the golf course, says Don Staples, managing trustee of the club.

"Without that, the rest of the stuff would mean very



Many owners rank the golf course and its condition as the most important aspect of a golf facility's success.

owners' needs

FACILITY OPERATIONS

A clubhouse that can properly accommodate various social functions allows a golf facility to generate additional revenue aside from the golf course. Photo: Winchester Country Club



little," he says.

With any golf course, there should be a conditioning level that people look for, says Jim Scott, golf director at Gull Lake View Golf Club in Augusta, Mich. Gull Lake View owns five 18-hole courses at three different facilities within a 12-mile radius in southwest Michigan. Scott says fairways should be cut at a good height, yet greens don't have to read 12 on the Stimpmeter – eight or nine is enough. Courses also have to have fairly smooth putting surfaces, and the rough can't be so tall people can't find their balls.

"You should be able to play without losing two dozen golf balls because the grass is so long," Scott says.

Course renovations also can please course owners, even when they come in the face of adversity. Cape Girardeau is located right next to the Mississippi River. Flooding put the course under water twice in two years during the mid-1990s. After the second episode, Staples knew the club would be in trouble if it didn't do something dramatic, especially

because the course was closed for three to five months both times. He put together a drive to change and raise the affected holes.

"It ended up to be the best move we ever made," Staples says. "It modernized the golf course and the greens, fairways and tee boxes. It caused a lot of excitement for several years. Two years after we opened up again, it was the largest membership we've ever had."

Cape Girardeau, like many other clubs, has a good superintendent who helps meet its goals for the facility.

"I see the superintendent, Mike Fitzgerald every day at Blue Mash, and I'll be out on the course at least once a week," Hills says. "It's been a constant thing of improving the golf courses. We're always adding new drainage, adding tree work, improving the turf, working on bunkers. We're always going at it every year."

HOSTING VARIOUS EVENTS

Excellent course conditions set the stage for making golf course owners happy, but adding

to the bottom line by hosting outings, weddings and other social functions is another source of business. But in order for the cha-ching to sing, one has to work at it. It's not only having a clubhouse or facility that can properly accommodate various functions, it's making sure the facility is aesthetically pleasing.

Some clubs, such as Cape Girardeau, might completely renovate the clubhouse with new bars, chairs, furniture, carpet and a paint job. Blue Mash's annual initiatives to improve the clubhouse include the recent completion of a new locker room and installing a plasma TV behind the bar.

The corporate outing business also is important for Gull Lake View, Scott says.

"We try very hard to promote those outings," he says. "It gets into a bidding war sometimes. We'll put our bid in, and we'll try to sell our golf course on the fact that we can provide them with better entertainment value for the dollar than the golf courses that might underbid us. We're professionals. We have good equipment, a good building, a good staff.

FACILITY OPERATIONS

With a higher-end food-and-beverage operation, a golf facility has the potential to generate more revenue from outings. Photo: Contraband Bayou Golf Club at L'Auberge

We know how to do it.”

But clubs like Blue Mash might also elect to stay within a smaller operating or capital expenditure budget, which is good and bad, especially when trying to attract more outings to the facility.

“We have relatively modest clubhouses compared to other clubhouses in the area, and our food-and-beverage operations are pretty simple,” Hills says. “That’s just how things have evolved for us. We don’t have the expertise to do more of a higher-end type operation. Unless you’re really good at it and can have someone that can really focus on it, your bottom line gets hurt. With a better food-and-beverage operation, if it’s done right, we can make a lot more money on outings. It requires a certain amount of expertise, which we’re bringing in.

“If you have something nice and clean and decent for the daily-fee golfer, they’re happy with that, and they focus more on their experience on the golf course,” Hills adds. “We lose an outing here and there to clubs that have more ambiance in their clubhouse, but in terms of what happens to the bottom line, what we’re doing is pretty good.”

Promoting business is important for a golf facility, particularly in difficult economic times. As Scott says, every round of golf in today’s market is important to every golf course owner. Particularly in an area like his, which has been affected by the exodus of local manufacturers and the diminishing auto supply and manufacturing business in Michigan. However, Scott says Gull Lake View is holding its own.

“In 2006, we were level with 2005, maybe



a touch above it,” he says. “The economy is starting to show some signs of recovery. I’m still bullish on the golf market.”

Gull Lake View, which promotes itself as a golfing destination and puts together golf packages for out-of-town golfers, works hard marketing itself to major metropolitan areas within a five-hour driving radius, including Detroit, Chicago, Indianapolis and Toledo.

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The marketing includes a Web site, www.gulllakeview.com, and exhibiting at golf shows within driving distance of that area.

"We'll do them individually as a destination, and then we do them with a co-op that we're part of in Battle Creek with other golf courses and lodging facilities so we can market for the traveling golfer," Scott says.

RETAINING MEMBERSHIP

Private clubs are also striving for new members while doing what they can to retain members.

"There's a continuing battle every year to keep membership up," says Staples, who has seen his membership drop slightly to 380 members from 425 members. "The lifeblood of a country club is the dues, and if you don't have the dues, you don't have a country club very long."

Normal attrition will happen and isn't always preventable, but clubs are trying to avoid many resignations, says Bill McMahon, chairman of The McMahon Group, a consulting firm based in St. Louis that tracks the private club industry.

"The best way we find for retaining members in clubs is just making sure you're providing everything you're supposed to do at a high-quality level that's good quality for the cost of membership," he says.

Cape Girardeau is taking a proactive approach to increasing membership. The club encourages its members to become involved in a spring membership drive. They benefit from this involvement because the drive helps keep the dues at a more reasonable level than if they were ignored, Hills says. That resulted in 36 new members last year. A consulting firm, Graves Associates of Manhattan, Kan., has helped the membership become more involved in several of the drives.

"If the members don't get involved, we can't advertise and things like that," Staples says. "Other than direct mail to an individual, we can't run ads in papers because of the structure of our club."

Attracting younger members is a key to strengthening a club's membership. Cape Girardeau is enticing people age 25 to 35 with families by offering them full memberships with a low initiation and lower dues structure. When they reach age 35, they pay full-membership prices.

"Probably the thing we need the most is to attract young people," Staples says. "That's where our nemesis is. Our weakest point is not attracting enough young people. The reason is that our pool facility needs to be torn out and a new junior Olympic pool needs to be put in."

A PROVIDER

Club owners say there are other things they want and need from their golf facilities – a PGA Class A golf professional, for example. So is having a professional and courteous staff that knows the value of customer service. A well-stocked pro shop helps attract golfers, especially when outing organizers are looking for quality goods when they hand out gift certificates to participants. A neat cart area is important, too.

Scott sums up what he expects from the golf facilities he owns.

"What we want out of our golf courses is to provide us with a steady income that we can live on," he says. "We've been able to do that. We've been profitable enough to maintain a lifestyle and raise our families and educate them and bring them along in the world. We've provided our employees with stable and fairly good benefits, and we're providing the community with an entertainment opportunity to play our golf courses for recreation and exercise and all the things they play golf for." GCI

Bob Seligman is a freelancer writer based in Suffren, N.Y. He can be reached at bhseligman@aol.com.

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NEAT AND CLEAN

KEEPING A TIDY AND ORGANIZED MAINTENANCE FACILITY IMPROVES EFFICIENCY

Maintenance facilities often are tucked away on a golf property and, for many, are usually out of site and out of mind. Some facilities are nice and tidy; others are slovenly. Maintenance budgets and a primary focus on golf course conditions impact maintenance building conditions. Yet some (perhaps many) golf course superintendents take pride in keeping a neat and clean office, and feel it reflects them and their maintenance operation.

At the private, 36-hole Palmas Del Mar Country Club, which sits on about 250 acres in Humacua, Puerto Rico, the maintenance facility includes a lunch room, locker room, full-size bath, irrigation department area, mechanic's area, the superintendent's office, the assistant's office and the secretary's office.

Maintenance crew members clean and take care of the shop at least three times a week, says golf course superintendent Osvaldo Cruz. The outside of the shop looks better than the inside, Cruz says.

"We planted gardens and pine trees around the facility," he says. "On the interior, we follow all (Occupational Safety and Health Administration) rules with chemical wash areas. We paint and check everything, and pick up trash – sometimes more often, sometimes less often."

Cruz says there are 21 golf course superintendents on the island of Puerto Rico, and they receive a lot of pressure from owners and golfers to keep their golf courses well conditioned, and many times they forget about the maintenance facility.

Additionally, many superintendents might not have the staff or the money to invest as much as they should in their maintenance facility. Cruz, whose staff consists of between 35 and 40 workers including the assistant superintendent, spends about \$2,500 to \$3,000 a year maintaining the maintenance facility at Palmas Del Mar.



BY JOHN WALSH

“If you spend time maintaining it regularly, you spend less every month doing so,” he says.

BIGGER THAN MOST

At the private 54-hole DuPont Country Club in Wilmington, Del., the maintenance facility is located on the outskirts of one of the courses on the property, which has about 225 maintained acres. The 15-year-old facility, which is a model for others, was built with efficiency in mind, says general superintendent Tristan Engle.

“We’re part of DuPont, so it was overengineered,” she says. “We can put a fully loaded

stake truck in and raise it all the way up on a 5-ton lift. We have a paint booth that’s big enough to fit a car. Most facilities don’t have a paint area. We have a fertilizer room separate from the chemical building. There’s also a well underneath it. It’s all encapsulated.”

The maintenance facility also includes 60 lockers, a high school locker room-size shower room and an elevator that goes up to the second floor. It’s also big enough to park all the equipment – \$4 million worth of inventory – inside. Engle says the staff takes pride in the fact the facility is top-notch.

“We spruce everything up in the winter, including painting some of the equipment,” she says. “Each course is assigned certain parts of the building to clean weekly or bi-weekly. Superintendents and assistants are held accountable for cleanliness. Even the outside has to be maintained. We have to maintain it at all times for safety and to keep our image. We have to keep resources like this polished like our own. It boils down to safety.”

Engle, who has been at the corporate club for 12 years, says a clean and organized maintenance facility, in a small way, reflects a golf course’s condition.

“With the focus on members and guests, we can’t afford time looking for equipment and other items we use to maintain the courses,” she says. “We need to find equipment right away. Everything is labeled and hung up properly. It’s efficient. We have a five- to seven-minute meeting first thing in the morning, and then we’re out on the courses. We don’t

want to get out the door wrong in the morning because then we’ll need to shift our focus.”

MORE TOGETHER

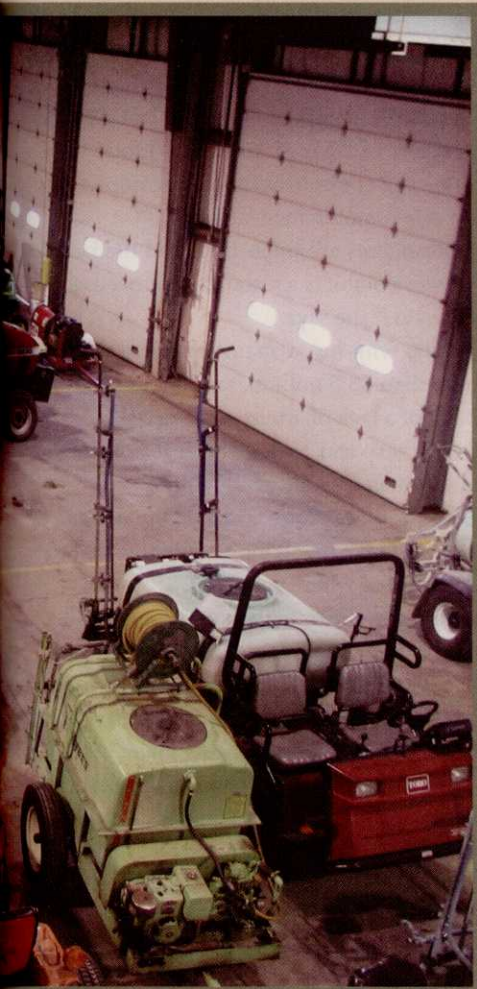
The golf courses at the newly opened 28-hole Kukio Beach Club in Kona, Hawaii, were finished in 2003, and the maintenance building was completed in September 2005. Golf course superintendent Scott Nair’s predecessor provided input for the design of the building. Some changes needed to be made, such as adding more Cat 5 cable, tweaking the design of the equipment wash area and additions of air power to multiple locations.

The maintenance facility at Kukio Beach is quite different than most others. About 100 people work out of the maintenance facility, which includes:

- A housekeeping staff that cleans it daily;
- A shop attendant who, among other tasks, cleans the outside of the building, maintains uniform inventory, refills fuel tanks and washes storage areas;
- A 35-person landscape department;
- A lunch room with a kitchen steward; and
- A parking lot for 95 cars.

The maintenance facility footprint is five acres and the actual maintenance building is 12,000 square feet. Nair, who has been at Kukio Beach for two years and has a staff of 45 year-round, says Kukio is changing the concept of the maintenance facility. He says many in the industry look at maintenance as part of the back of the house, and the people who maintain the grounds are separated from other club employees into another facility.

“We have a different approach,” he says. “Our building costs are expensive – \$1,000 to \$1,800 a square foot. Accounting, human resources, landscaping, engineering are all in the maintenance facility. This improves efficiency. When I have an accounting problem, I



The maintenance building at the DuPont Country Club, which is bigger than most, was built 15 years ago with efficiency in mind. Photo: DuPont Country Club

Tristan Engle, general superintendent at the DuPont Country Club, says it's up to her and her staff to educate the members about the importance of a safe maintenance facility. Photo: DuPont Country Club



go down the hall. I don't have to make phone calls. This keeps traffic away from the clubhouse and reduces building costs. It keeps all departments close together, and maintenance doesn't have the stigma of being separated. It helps create a more friendly teamwork atmosphere that is vital to the operation."

Nair and his staff keep the maintenance facility clean and organized because they're accountable and are entrusted with an asset, he says.

PHILOSOPHY

Cruz, Engle and Nair all share a similar philosophy in that they put significant importance on a neat and clean maintenance facility. Cruz, who's been at Palmas Del Mar for three years, says a maintenance facility has to be clean and organized like the course it's used to maintain. He says the extent of how nice a maintenance facility depends on the budget. He says superintendents need to have the facility presentable while realizing the golf course is more important, but at the same time realizing the maintenance facility is important, too.

"My motto is show that the maintenance facility is being taken care of," he says. "If you

work at a place and the maintenance facility is beautiful, then the staff will want to go out and make the course beautiful. If employees see a beautiful shop, they'll go the extra mile and won't let it run down. You have to have pride. It starts in the shop and is carried out to the course."

Cruz encourages superintendents not to procrastinate when it comes to shop maintenance.

"Have a checklist," he says. "If you see something wrong, don't wait. Get it done within a week. Treat the maintenance facility like a golf course, but not better than the golf course."

Engle, who has a staff of 60 during peak season and 15 in the off season, says organization is important, as well as getting employees the resources they need to do the job efficiently and effectively.

"Assistant superintendents have to be as organized as the laborers," she says. "Each course doesn't have its own equipment. We share. We don't have the luxury of time to look for things. It all boils down to money. We can't afford to pay someone to look for something."

Engle says it's up to her and her staff to

educate the members – there are 2,500 golfing members of DuPont and 13,000 total members – and committees about the importance of a safe maintenance facility.

"Resources are important, and the facility you work out of is a resource that needs to be looked at," she says.

Nair, who has a maintenance budget of more than \$3.5 million, says uncleanliness is a sign of a lack of attention to detail.

"It's very sad to see the level of care of maintenance facilities out there," he says. "Some are very professional. Many are messy. It doesn't take much money to show that you are proud of where you work."

Nair says club members and course owners need to know the people they have entrusted respect their work space, and if members come into the maintenance facility, they should see their asset is being taken care of.

"Clutter creates safety hazards and contributes to laziness and bad attitudes," he says. "If everything is maintained well and respected, workers will do the same. Respect starts at the top. If managers don't respect the space, they are doing a disservice to the people who write the checks." GCI