

SECRET SHOPPING

As the publisher of Golf Course Industry and our sister publication, Lawn & Landscape, I'm occasionally "forced" to travel to events being held at nice resorts. Yes, it's a tough job, but I do my best to put up with it.

My most recent trip was to a well-known golf/conference facility in Georgia. It was a gorgeous place with a great course and I enjoyed some wonderful time with green industry colleagues. That said, a number of things – both good and bad – really struck me:

- Given the airlines' new restrictions on bags (e.g., charging \$50 to take your golf clubs along), why wouldn't every course that does any level of travel-golf business do a better job of promoting rental sets? The cost of bringing your clubs has, as the author Malcolm Gladwell says, reached the "tipping point" vs. the cost of renting them on site.

Rental revenue is found money for most facilities. Why not do a better job of promoting easy rental services at your facility for the typical harried business traveler? Club rental information, including the quality of the clubs you offer, should figure prominently into all your communications to guests and others coming to outings. Consider finding a way to encourage or partner with the event's organizing group to promote your club rental program as a convenience to attendees.

- The resort we stayed at did a helluva job of maximizing revenue from our group while apparently offering us value. For example, everyone in the group was offered a significant discount at the pro shop. It was a great incentive for golfers – and non-golfers – in our group to pick up that wind shirt or polo. It felt special. You sort of felt like you'd won a prize even though you played like crap (which I did).

- Speaking of prizes, the course also set up a closest-to-the-pin contest with a revenue-generating twist. The assistant pro was waiting on a par 3 with a table of golf shirts. If you bought a shirt for 40 percent off, you got a shot against the assistant pro. If you beat him, he

gave you your money back. If not, you still got a shirt for almost half off. I've seen similar setups before, but never in a way that felt like such a win-win for the golfer and never in a way that seemed to bring in dollars so easily. Of course, I might just be biased because I won a free shirt.

- I'm guessing that 95 percent of the participants in our group (about 100 people) had never seen the course. Why not provide at least one yardage book per group as part of the event package? Just build it into the package price. Obviously, it's an extra cost but it may help you attract repeat business. After all, do you really want participants to walk away from the outing hating your course because they had no idea what was in front of them most of the time?



Kevin Gilbride Publisher

As someone who ends up being a "secret shopper" at corporate outings, I thought it might be helpful to pass these observations along. Though I was in Georgia as a golf traveler, these observations don't apply just to destination courses. Most golf facilities have private outings and other events they can turn into creative, revenue-generating opportunities.

As someone intimately involved in the industry, I think it's also helpful to consider why these little things make a big difference. The bottom line is creativity: trying new things, listening to your customers and being willing to think differently about your facility and how you treat guests and drive revenue.

At what point will other services you provide reach that tipping point Gladwell talks about? Do you consistently seek to identify these opportunities? Does every employee across your organization know that his or her ideas are encouraged and welcomed? If so, we'd like to hear about your unique programs. Send them to us at gci@gie.net, and we'll print our favorites. **GCI**

GOLF COURSE INDUSTRY

Serving the Business of Golf Course Management

Vol. 21 No. 8

EDITORIAL

GIE Media, Inc.
4020 Kinross Lakes Pkwy, 2nd floor
Richfield, OH 44286
Phone: 800-456-0707
Fax: 330-659-0823

Mike Zawacki

Editor
mzawacki@gie.net

Marisa Palmieri

Senior editor
mpalmieri@gie.net

EDITORIAL ADVISORY BOARD

Terry Buchen, CGCS, MG
Golf Agronomy International

Raymond Davies, CGCS
CourseCo

Tim Hiers, CGCS
The Old Collier Golf Club

Laurence Hirsh
Golf Property Analysts

Ted Horton, CGCS
Ted Horton Consulting

Michael Hurdzan, Ph.D.
Hurdzan/Fry Golf Course Design

Pat Jones
Flagstick LLC

Mike Kriel
The Brick Cos.

Joe Livingston, CGCS
River Crest Country Club

Matt Rostal
Interlachen Country Club

AGRONOMIC RESEARCH COUNCIL

Rob Golembiewski, Ph.D.
Department of Horticulture
Oregon State University

David Kopec, Ph.D.
Department of Plant Science
University of Arizona

Dara Park, Ph.D.
Pee Dee Research and Education Center
Clemson University

John Stier, Ph.D.
Department of Horticulture
University of Wisconsin-Madison

Nathan Walker, Ph.D.
Department of Entomology and Plant Pathology
Oklahoma State University

Fred Yelverton, Ph.D.
Department of Crop Science
North Carolina State University