

# Golfdom

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Skokie's toboggan slide, a major feature of the winter program.

## A Winter Sport Program Will Reduce Overhead

By JOHN W. FULTON JR.

ONE evening about four years ago, a small group of members sat around the fire in the men's grill of a country club near Chicago. They were discussing the ever-present problem of operating a club on an economical basis and at the same time provide all the comforts and niceties that the members demand.

"One factor that makes annual assessments so common, as I see it," remarked one member, "is that we can operate only a little more than half the year. The rest of the time, because the weather is unsuitable for golf, we must close this elaborate establishment of ours, reduce overhead to a minimum, and sit back to wait for the

opening of the next season. It is too bad we haven't weather like Hawaii or some equally blessed spot, so our members could use what we have to offer all the year around. Golf would be less expensive under those conditions.

"Well, why not keep open all year?" suggested another of the men. "Why couldn't we make it worth while for our members to use the club every month in the year? We could put in a skating rink and a toboggan...."

Thus was the winter sport idea started at the Skokie Country club. It is located within the limits of a Chicago suburb, Glencoe. Most of its members live within

a few blocks of the club property and even in the winter season find it reasonably easy to get to the club in comfort.

A committee was appointed to consider the winter sport idea. They decided it was worth a trial and started conservatively. The tennis courts were flooded for skating. It was felt that a toboggan was needed and to cover the cost of the equipment, the members were asked to contribute twenty dollars each, with the understanding that the club would reimburse them the following summer with an equal credit applied on their house accounts. Not all the members contributed, but enough money was raised to cover what purchases needed to be made. The toboggan was erected.

The response to the winter program was even more than the committee in charge hoped. Skating parties were organized particularly in the evenings. The toboggan was in constant use. There were always two or three bridge games in progress in the clubhouse. The dining room did a comfortable business.

At the end of the winter, the committee was able to report practically an even break between income and expenses, even with winter sports charged with a fair proportion of the cost of operating all departments except the dining room, which bore its own burden. And the innovation proved so popular that the board of governors included, for the following year, a generous budget for an enlarged program. Meanwhile, the twenty-dollar contributions of the members were returned to them.

Each year, Skokie's winter season grows in importance. It begins the second week in November and lasts until the fourth week in February and ranks very favorably in popularity with the summer activities of the club.

The program has been greatly elaborated. An artificial pond, which acts as a water hazard in summer and the skating rink in winter, has been formed near the clubhouse. A ski-slide has been erected next to the toboggan.

The committee noticed that a great many members came to the club, not themselves to take part in the activities, but to bring their children. Those members sat about the clubhouse with nothing to do. So a pool table was rented and installed in the men's grill-room. It was welcomed by the idle parents and used constantly,—whenever other members, at the club for outdoor play, did not beat them to the table.

Later, a ping-pong table and complete equipment for the game was added in the grillroom. It proved even more popular than the pool table, since the game offered more exercise. Ping-pong tournaments were organized and from six in the evening until ten there was hardly a night when the table was not in constant use.

About the third year the committee went farther and announced dinner dances, bridge tournaments and moving picture shows, to be held every other Saturday. Invitation announcements rather elaborately printed, were mailed the members in advance, outlining the event next planned. It was the committee's aim to offer at least one novelty on each of these nights.

Take the dinner dances for example. One night the party would be heralded as a "Chinese" dinner dance and the food, prepared by a Chinese chef specially imported for the occasion, would be oriental throughout. The dining room was decorated in appropriate fashion with lanterns and the like.

Another night was "Deep-Sea" night, with a well-planned sea-food dinner offered the members. Other dinners were called "Southern," "Italian" and "Spanish," with menus planned accordingly. The New Year's Eve party jams the clubhouse.

Obviously, not all the members of Skokie cared to participate in the winter activities. A number of them travel south for the winter. This left room in the club for additional members and accordingly 35 special Winter Memberships, carrying all privileges during the winter season, were created. Dues were fixed at \$50.00 a year. The memberships were avidly snapped up by desirable residents of Glencoe, most of them members of neighboring clubs with no program of winter sports in their schedules. Thus \$1,750.00 in dues, plus what these added members spent at the club, was added to the club's income with no overcrowding.

Guests are permitted upon payment of nominal fees. For use of the skating rink and toboggan, the charge is fifty cents week-days, \$1.00 Saturdays and Sundays. Guests are charged for at the dances at the rate of \$1.00 each, unless the guest dines at the club, in which case there is no charge.

Skokie's income from all sources, excluding the dining room (which is considered a separate department and self-supporting), runs in the neighborhood of \$6,500.00 during the winter season, according to William G. Lerch, who has been

chairman and guiding light of the winter sports committee since its beginning four years ago. The expenses run a trifle less, say \$6,000.00 a season, and included in these expenses are all general overhead items that other clubs must make up during the summer season. Thus Skokie not only offers its members a twelve month

that the announcements are printed and mailed the members. The third committeeman concerns himself with the smooth running of the bridge evenings and the moving picture shows, which consist, it might be mentioned, not only of pre-releases of regular program films, but also of moving pictures taken during the sum-

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**A** WELL-PLANNED combination of winter sports outdoors and social activities indoors has given Skokie a winter season which ranks very favorably in popularity with the summer activities of the club.

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club, but actually reduces the cost of golf.

Nor do the advantages of a winter program stop with this point. There are a number of others. For example, Skokie avoids that bug-bear of most clubs, the annual dismissal in the fall of trained employes and the re-hiring of them, if possible, in the spring. Skokie keeps practically the same force the year around. The green-men who keep the course in shape during the summer are employed keeping the skating rink and slides in shape during the winter. The caddy-master, a Norwegian by birth, acts as skating instructor. The gardener makes himself useful keeping the walks and paths in shape, and tending to the shelter house built near the rink. The professional, who is also the greenkeeper during the summer, fits up the caddy house with a driving net and is busy with lessons. His sales of golf supplies to members about to leave for the south are considerable.

Obviously, employes within the clubhouse perform essentially the same duties during the winter as during the summer season, since all departments of the club remain open twelve months in the year.

The organization of the Winter Sports committee is simple. There are three members in addition to the chairman, who has general supervision of all activities. One committeeman, who lives very close to the club property and so can be on hand daily, is in charge of all outdoor activities. He keeps a close watch on the weather and the condition of the rink and slides, orders the equipment flooded or surfaced when needed, and keeps a weather eye on the work done by the groundsmen. Another committeeman is responsible for the bi-weekly dances, plans the menus, hires the orchestras and sees

mer of members of the club themselves. These latter films make a particular hit and the attendance on the nights they are shown more than makes up the expense of taking them.

Skokie's winter program is a sensible one, started conservatively, and carried out with an intelligent eye toward economies of operation and appeal to the members. There is no reason why hundreds of clubs, located north of the Mason-Dixon line cannot inaugurate a similar plan, modified perhaps to meet local conditions. In particular, it seems an eminently practical scheme for those clubs whose bonded indebtedness or excessive ground rental is burdening them down with heavy carrying charges. It seems rather unbusinesslike to allow an investment of such magnitude to remain idle anywhere from four to seven months every year.

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### DON'T FAIL

as soon as your annual elections are over to notify GOLFDOM of the name and address of your new president and green-chairman. Also notify us promptly if your club has engaged a new professional, greenkeeper or manager.

We want a copy of GOLFDOM to reach the proper individuals each month and must depend on your cooperation to do this.

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