

# Self-Financing Improvements to Get Non-Golfing Members

By J. W. FULTON  
Club Bureau, Inc.

IT WAS pointed out in the last issue of GOLFDOM that a list of seventeen country clubs operating twenty-four courses on which the conventional number of golfers were accommodated, in addition have an average of 1,350 auxiliary members per club contributing to the cost of club operation.

The survey on which those statements were based indicated that the cost of golf was less than one-half the average annual cost in golf clubs attempting social activities, but limiting their memberships to capacity play on week ends. It was also stated that the dues of non-golfing members averaged \$50.00 per year.

Golfing members, say an average of 350 per course, contribute approximately \$35,000 per year to the annual budget of expenditures, while an average of 1,350 social members contribute nearly double that amount in dues without in any way encroaching on the privilege or perquisites of the former.

Obviously, then, any golf club that is able to augment or adapt its present facilities to the accommodation of auxiliary members is in position to solve the problem of too expensive golf. In effect such clubs are able to correct in a measure the early mistakes of over-expansion, and become country clubs in fact, rather than golf clubs with country club facilities and the consequent burden of high dues and assessments.

Only a few years ago a golf club was essentially a club for men—not for wives, sons and daughters, many of whom today play more golf than does the member. The family demanded—and were justly entitled to—refinements and luxuries that had but scant appeal to men players, and golfing organizations were automatically converted into more or less "family clubs." The sale of auxiliary memberships is simply extending somewhat those features that are responsible for high operation costs and capitalizing them for increased revenues.

A limited number of more exclusive,

"swanky" clubs for men of affluence will always find support. High dues cost and ultimate expense is not a serious consideration. But there is a large group comprising the vast majority of enthusiastic golfers for whom the modern golf club with its over-built clubhouse and attendant expensive cost of operation are rapidly becoming economic impossibilities. And this is not entirely a reflection of general financial conditions; it began to manifest itself while conditions were still normal.

## It's Yearly Cost That Matters

The proof of this statement lies in the very evident change of members' private clubs to pay-as-you-play courses. While a few years ago there was only an occasional fee course, they now comprise nearly twenty-five per cent of the total. Additional evidence is suggested by the fact that membership prices in the metropolitan districts have been reduced to an amount somewhat less than the transfer charge of a few years ago. The initial cost no longer interests the buyer. His attention has been called to the annual expense, and the club requiring additional members is confronted with grave difficulties.

It appears, therefore, that the sort of club we are discussing—the club that has over-invested and whose inadequate membership is probably paying something like 40 per cent of the contribution to general expense for golf, 35 per cent for house facilities and frills, and 25 per cent for interest and amortization charges—can greatly increase its income by making a small investment necessary to accommodate auxiliary members.

This simply means building your business up to your investment instead of permitting over-expansion to ruin your business.

How much capital investment is required for the transition? How many social members should a club take in? What changes are necessary for their entertainment? We don't know. That is the individual club's

problem, and no two organizations will find conditions alike. The following suggestions, however, based on a considerable study of the question, may indicate that the solution is not difficult.

### These House Attractions Needed

The clubhouse itself must, of course, be adequate. Most of them are—few clubhouses are taxed to more than 20 per cent capacity, even on week ends. Provision must be made for cards and dancing. A children's playground should be furnished. A swimming pool, forming the greatest attraction to young people from whom your future members must be recruited, is almost a necessity. Tennis, already furnished in many ranking golf clubs, should be included. If winter sports are to be indulged in, a toboggan slide and skating area are desirable.

As to costs, swimming pools with modern filtration systems can now be installed for from \$10,000 to \$25,000, according to size, complete with showers, under-water lighting, lockers, dryers, landscaping and complete equipment. You can spend as much more than the amount necessary just as you did on your clubhouse if you so desire.

A children's playground can be installed and equipped for a few hundred dollars.

An excellent four-net tennis court can be built for \$2,000 to \$3,500.

If the club building can spare only a limited area for dancing, an outdoor platform can be constructed at anywhere from \$1,000 to \$5,000. They are much in vogue and very popular during fine summer evenings.

### Food Departments Okay As Is

As to dining space and kitchen equipment, you will recall how that far-sighted and big-hearted architect insisted on providing dining facilities for the "peak load" when he planned your clubhouse, and how since that time you have had only two peak loads per season—one at the annual Harvest Home dinner, and again when you meet to pass on the size of the assessment. Well, don't worry if you have peak loads several times a week, because all the world loves a crowd, if composed of the right people; and the first concrete evidence of profitable club operations will come when it is necessary for the members to make reservations in advance. Crowds beget crowds—only the aged desire calm and quiet; and, at that, many of the old boys prefer their quiet in a comfortable

seat along the side lines on dance nights where the light is right.

A vast majority of modern clubhouses are too large—and that is one of the reasons why it costs several times as much to play golf as it did a decade or so ago.

In selling the idea of auxiliary memberships to your own club members, it is well to bear constantly in mind that the golfer wants his golf course, his locker room and his quick lunch from the grill; and he will object only when these facilities are encroached upon. On the other hand, the golfer is demanding some change in policy calculated to reduce the expense of the game.

A few members may occasionally want to dine more or less formally with their families or friends; but we have yet to locate a modern clubhouse that does not more resemble a morgue than a scene of social activities and enjoyment during the five week days.

It is suggested that these clubs, having already an investment from a quarter to half a million dollars, can in many cases convert their present hybrid clubs into real country clubs, double their dues income, increase house patronage and reduce the annual burden on the active golfers—all by an additional capital investment of five to ten per cent.

### New Members Buy Improvements

This investment can be amortized in a very few years through increased dues receipts, but the method of raising the money presents a problem somewhat difficult with most clubs—already struggling for a more placid financial existence.

Assessments are not to be thought of, because like major operations in the emergency ward, they make the patient who is already sick, still weaker. Besides which most patients, if still alive, already carry the scars of too many such operations. Popular subscriptions, donations and debenture note issues are not likely to interest the members under present financial conditions.

In our opinion there is a much easier way and a method that can be employed without the club increasing its current liabilities. Sell your social memberships on a contract with the buyer to provide the added attractions, setting up all or part of the initiation fee as a special fund for that purpose. Sell enough memberships to provide the necessary funds on a carefully pre-determined budget for improvements.

Investigation discloses that social memberships in country clubs are unquestionably easy to dispose of if proper care is exercised in selecting only the most desirable prospects—much easier than equity golf memberships.

The question of permitting social members to play golf on payment of green fees, such play being limited to week days only, is one that each club must determine for itself. The income thus brought in appears at least preferable to granting tournament privileges, and makes it possible to realize a more constant flow of income from operations.

If anyone believes it is easier to maintain a full membership in the present economically unsound club organizations—with the cost of golf mounting and the membership price declining—than it is to sell a supporting number of auxiliary memberships, we fear he has not a clear vision of the present trend. Some road must be discovered to reduce cost of golf and through this reduction the financial emancipation of modern golf clubs.

If yours is a ranking club its facilities can be made salable to ranking people, thousands of whom desire a spot in the country where family and guests can dine, dance or swim in the atmosphere of country club life among their social equals.

### Greenkeepers, Pros, Managers in Joint Meeting Nov. 16

**R**EPRESENTATIVES of the greenkeepers', pros' and managers' associations will meet at Boston, November 16, in the first formal session of the joint committee on club operation formed at the conference officials of the three associations held at Long Vue club, Pittsburgh, Pa., Feb. 24. The P. G. A. of America annual meeting will start on that date, and the National Association of Greenkeepers will have their executive committee meeting at Hotel Statler, Boston, November 16 and 17.

Assured presence of the entire committee indicates that the club operating heads will make a concerted effort to pass on to club officials definite facts and figures on the lessons of 1931 operation. This year's problems were severe for all departments of golf club operation and by handling them successfully the operating executives learned much of value in club policies. Just what specific lessons were most important will be decided by the joint committee and a report of its findings and rec-

ommendations probably will be sent to the president of each American golf club.

One of the major ambitions of the committee meeting is to promote closer co-operation between the department heads. Lack of informed and harmonious contact between some department heads is deplored as a detriment to profitable club operation and to the increase in earning power of each of the department heads involved. The initial meeting at Pittsburgh did much to clarify the atmosphere of suspicion. Causes of conflict were considered frankly and to such excellent general effect that a number of clubs may attribute their satisfactory operating and financial showing this season to a better understanding between their operating bosses.

Attention will be given at the Boston meeting to operating statements of representative golf clubs with a view to making comment and recommendations based on the analysis of experts in the course, house and pro departments.

### Golf Is Busy, Paying Business at Public Parks

**P**USH IS GIVEN to the extension of golf in public parks by the authoritative figures for 1930 appearing in the 1931 *Yearbook* of the National Recreation ass'n, 315 Fourth ave., New York city. A total of 233 municipalities report 312 golf courses, of which 160 are 18-hole courses and 152 nine-hole. Income from the nine-hole courses reporting is \$781,343.38, which exceeds the operating costs by \$192,056.94. Income from the reporting 18-hole courses is \$2,544,200.43, which exceeds the operating cost by \$769,720.12. This excess is not to be pro-rated as 67 courses reported income and 63 reported cost of operation.

Participants per season at the 65 18-hole courses giving this information were 5,110,142, an average of 78,617 rounds per reporting course. Average length of season at the 18-hole courses was nine months and three weeks.

At the 55 nine-hole courses reporting the amount of play, there were 2,410,409 rounds, an average of 43,825 rounds per course during a season reported as averaging 8.27 months. There were 87,668 fewer baseball participants than golf participants, although 4,322 baseball diamonds were reported.

Golf courses and stadiums were the only public recreation plants having income exceeding operating cost.