

# ONLY YOUR MEMBERS CAN SELL

By P. E. BURTON

*What golf clubs have done, are doing and can do to balance their budgets and fill membership rolls.*

**A**BOUT three years ago a survey developed the fact that the average golf, athletic and social club had lost not less than a third of its members, that the number of checks ran about a third less and also that the amount of these checks was about a third less than Before the Crash. Clubs were hard pushed. It wasn't funny to be on a Board and at every meeting drop members for failure to pay dues, or read resignations.

When they tried to fill the vacancies, they usually met about the same story—"can't afford it now, maybe later." Cutting expenses was the order of the day. One result is the biggest surplus of club managers ever turned loose. Some clubs are operated by loyal members who assumed direction. In other cases subordinates were not promoted but told to run the clubs. One club with which the writer is familiar cut the maintenance of its 18-hole course from \$33,000 to \$15,000. Some clubs took over the caddie shops in order to make a little monthly profit. Others used the caddie masters for professionals. Painting and decorating were postponed. High fixed charges for amortization and interest on indebtedness made many take advantage of Clause 77-B of the new bankruptcy act and compromise these items all the way from 40 to 60 per cent.

## Pick-up in Membership

These operating problems were not solved by such maneuvering. It was only a temporary expedient. Hope really began to spring in the breasts of governing boards a year or so ago when former members occasionally changed their attitude and applied for reinstatement. Let it be understood first of all that no golf, athletic or social club can operate without dues-paying "regular" members. No associates, juniors, intermediates or non-residents can keep a club on a profitable basis. These classes of membership must be considered as a sort of missionary effort, commendable but costly. The full dues-paying regulars keep the club going. Let their number shrink out of propor-

tion, let their dues be cut too much, let their initiation fees be cut off and the club is in grief.

It has been my observation that only members can secure worthwhile new members. A club is simply an enlarged family group. No professional solicitor can bring units into this group and keep them there. An older member must help in this process of absorption of the new blood, for the new member expects this social chaperonage. There may be the finest fairways, the sportiest greens, most entrancing scenery and the best cuisine, but unless the recent member is absorbed by a real fellowship he does not remain.

## Paid Pressure Flops

Illustrating this point, the writer knows of one athletic club in Chicago which needed members—needed them pronto. A crew of professional solicitors attempted to do the job. In one year they brought in 900 applications and at the end of a year 100 of them were still in the club, with indications that this remainder were not for long. A club in Detroit, through the same methods, brought in 150 members, who paid the first quarter's dues. At the end of the third quarter, not one of these members was still a member of the club.

Another factor which is all important and which a great many clubs have felt constrained to ignore is the waiving of the initiation or transfer fee. Every club which has done this has paid a dear price for a temporary hope. Initiation fees are supposed to take care of the capital invested. It may be argued that in recent years the club's equity in its property is nil. Even so, a new member who pays an initiation fee is about three or four times more apt to stick than the fellow who has not. The man without a preliminary investment in the club will make no

sacrifices to remain, for he is held by no investment or tradition.

During the past years many golf clubs have restored their initiation or transfer fees and indications are that many more will do so. Some clubs have found it advisable to have a campaign for members with a reduced initiation fee and immediately thereafter increase this charge.

Assuming that new members can and should be brought in by the older members, two methods of doing so are patent. One is to keep eternally at it. If the governors or committeemen will keep this on their minds throughout the year—something which is rarely done—a club's roster may be filled. This is a slow process and in the long run the most costly, for if it takes a year to secure the missing third, the dues not paid until the end of the year are more than sufficient to have put the club in first-class financial shape, without worry.

### Quick

#### Campaigns Succeed

It is the belief of the writer that the sensible thing, the revenue producing thing, is to have a short intensive campaign using the members as solicitors and not "letting down the bars." Professional direction saves the time, worry and energy of those most interested in the club. Two weeks' intensive effort will ordinarily bring in the desired number of members who start paying dues immediately. This fact makes the cost of the campaign, as compared with the other method, nothing. Usually, the campaign is profitable, for if any sort of an initiation fee is charged, this more than takes care of all the expenses, including the director's fee, postage, literature and stenographic help. It is the way out for the club that has felt the depression. Filling the roster is the ONLY way out, for then the dues will take care of maintenance, operating expenses, and the other costs.

**Bap Woods Uninjured by Flood**—A set of MacGregor Bap woods, held under 14 feet of water for five days when the Johnstown flood swept through the Penn Traffic store, provided a demonstration of the excellent finishing treatment given the clubs. E. L. Hoffman of the store wrote Clarence Rickey of MacGregor's that after the clubs were salvaged and cleaned no evidence of swelling or cracking in the wood or of deterioration in the finish was discovered.

### Burten Brothers Have Able

#### Merchandising Policy

By FRED E. KUNKEL

**ALLAN J.** and **Danny Burten**, brothers and co-pros at the Army and Navy CC, Washington, D.C., act as caddiemasters, give lessons, run a golf shop, and in general perform all the duties of managing a golf department. They take care of everything but the greens.

Both were caddies together at Chevy Chase and both worked in the golf shop. Nearly three years ago they learned that the pro job at Army and Navy was available. They went after it in characteristic Burten fashion and got it. Allan runs the shop, does the selling, and gives most of the golf lessons. Danny is caddymaster and all-around handy man.

Speaking to these youthful pros, still in their twenties, one gets the impression of gathering "wisdom from the mouth of babes." They use their heads. Yet they have never defined the principles which make for success. They just think, grope around in the corners of their brains and stumble upon them through experimenting on "how to do it."

#### Tricks of the Pro Trade

The Burtens have learned many, if not all, of the little tricks of the pro trade, without being aware of them as "theorem" or as a "principle" to be applied. They just know they are there, and use them. Here are some of their ideas:

- 1—Don't charge for every little thing. If you do put in a charge for everything a member gets, he doesn't like it;
- 2—Put yourself out to do a member a favor—it always pays back dividends;
- 3—Give your members what appear to be bargains, but are really only common sense buys in swaddling clothes;
- 4—Don't be too proud to be a servant to the members;
- 5—Don't try obviously to make too much money—the less you appear to make the more you are really making;
- 6—Don't take bread with a member—in other words, don't drink tea with the ladies or sit down at the 19th hole for a snack.

Suppose a driver needs wrapping. Some pros would charge 15c to a quarter. The Burten Brothers fix it, and when the member asks "How much?" the answer is "No charge."

From here on, it's the Burtens talking:

We let them off, it was explained, and they invariably come back for a bigger