

# "Never a Dull Moment" Policy Pays

By Carl F. Schlingmann

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THE statement frequently has been made that excessive investment in clubhouses is the chief source of country club financial headaches. That statement is only partially true. Upon careful investigation it may be found that failure to utilize the investment, rather than the size of the investment, may be the trouble.

It has been said that the country clubhouse may be compared with a church as a building investment. The church's capacity is used for a few hours a week, then the plant is only intermittently used and to a limited extent, the rest of the time. The church enjoys a considerable advantage over the country clubhouse. The church is tax-free and has a small staff. The club generally attracts fine residential building operations to its neighborhood to eventually increase the club's own taxes out of reason and punish it for its pioneering, constructive work.

## Found Irem Had All Facilities

I came into club management after having had considerable experience in selling investment securities in 40 states, and in hotel auditing and business promotion. Naturally, then, my initial thought about the broad aspects of club management was concerned with the investment status of the club plant. Irem had been operating at a loss. Its facilities were fundamentally sound as a social and recreation plant for a select element of its community. Some of the plant had been allowed to run down, possibly due to the thinking that the plant investment already was too heavy a burden and did not warrant tip-top maintenance and operation.

The club is located about 8 miles from Wilkes-Barre, Pa. It has more than 400 acres, 27 holes of golf, swimming pool, tennis courts, dancing pavilion and gun club. The main clubhouse has grill, bar, dining room to seat 400, private dining rooms and guests rooms.

The first thing that had to be done to make the plant investment productive was to put the plant in first-class condition. This was done by the installation of about \$5,000 in new kitchen equipment, enlarge-

ment of the bar, painting and repairing at most-needed places throughout the house, and installation of a service bar in the main dining room.

Then what had to be done was a job of selling. I went on the job in October, 1938, and the first autumn I "sold" Irem and its facilities until I was blue in the face. By New Year's Eve things looked promising. We had 600 attend our New Year's Eve party and had to turn down another 600 because we didn't have room. Veteran club managers have warned me of the danger of over-selling. Some important and touchy member who delays in making his reservations and who, therefore, isn't able to get accommodations is very apt to raise all kinds of hell.

That is true. But, inasmuch as there are bound to be some conflicts in managing a club in fairness for the enjoyment of all its members, the manager might as well be reconciled to them. It is the manager's good luck if the kicks are about the parties being too popular. You have noticed, of course, that the entertainment places customers are most anxious to enter, are those wherein the headwaiter has a rope across the entrance and is able to admit only a few of the waiting crowd at a time.

By May 1st, May and June were booked solid at Irem, and during the rest of the season patronage of the club was so brisk that the year's volume of party income more than doubled the previous year's figure.

## Full Program Brings Profits

The basic policy was simple. It was merely to make sure that there never was a dull moment at the club. The manager or his committee members (should they take an active interest in the selling campaign) can't sell the beauty and convenience of the club facilities, no matter how attractive-looking and costly these facilities may be. Enjoyable use of these facilities without every member being required to go to any effort other than signing the check, is the product to present.

In working out the schedule of entertainment features I had in mind a program that would be so distinctive and

lively that those who didn't attend—or who couldn't because of lack of Irem membership or invitation—would have the consciousness of having missed something. The live American citizen of the type that makes the best country club member really hates to miss anything.

Among entertainment features that increase Irem's patronage and value to its members were:

Friday Ladies' Day luncheons including bridge and a prize for each table; the Sunday Dog House Club during autumn and spring (this was a special Sunday dinner to which husbands would invite their wives as a certain means of restoring the husbands to good domestic standing); mixed bridge dinners; lectures; testimonial dinners to prominent members; Wednesday night pavilion dances; Saturday night dinner dances; mixed evening swimming parties; mother and daughter banquet; father and son banquet; Sunday night concerts; special daily golfers' luncheon.

I made it a special point to get among the club members who entertained and to see that their luncheons, dinners, and other parties were staged at the club.

An outdoor picnic luncheon for the men was one of the popular features. At one of these affairs 100 halves of beer was consumed, which gives you a rather clear idea that the guests enjoyed themselves.

#### Epicure Idea Pays Here

One of the most satisfactory reflections of the selling campaign is apparent from a study of the food and beverage operations at Irem. Logically, with bigger than normal volume, the members and guests can be served with better food and drink for the customary charges, or with average food and drink at less than average prices. We chose the first method, inasmuch as the whole campaign of membership solicitation was based on providing superior entertainment to palate, eye and ear. Our food cost was 48%; food payroll, 18%; beverage cost, 36%; and beverage payroll, 10%. At all times we were exceedingly careful to protect the idea of fine cuisine notwithstanding advertising emphasis on the more spectacular details of the entertainments.

Irem's success with this policy has been much greater than that indicated by the black figures of the financial statement.

# IT'S ON THE HOUSE

By TOM REAM  
Mgr., Westmoreland C C

The real club man considers the welfare of his employees of equal importance to the welfare of his members. He knows that a dissatisfied employee cannot give satisfactory service.

*No money has ever been made buying bargains in food.*

When a man flatters you or your club, don't go into a long dissertation on why it is so. Thank him, that's enough.

*Keep your club in tune with the times.*

Employees' attractive, well-groomed physical appearance is a decided asset for those "contact employees."

*The profits from better business are going back into betterments.*

The personality of the manager reflects down through the organization, for good or bad. It determines the kind of club he operates.

*What is the standard of health among your employees?*

Start that reconditioning program.

*Executive time costs too much to waste it babying the fellow who gives up easily.*

There is an enthusiastic club interest among the members, and an appreciation of the club as the community's foremost fine entertainment center for those of high social desirability. That development helps considerably to reduce the work of the membership committee.

From our experience, the answer to the problem of the club that believes itself to be "over-clubhoused" is plain and profitable. Make use of that clubhouse by arranging and selling a busy, interesting program of clubhouse events.