

# Service-To-Customer Program Pays Big!

By MARIE G. HEUER

A 9-hole public golf course has had a jump, in permits issued, from 15,000 in 1936 to 35,450 in 1940, a rise from 13 to 60 members in the women's golf club, and a steady increase in season tickets issued to both men and women during that time. When records at that club show you that sales of golf clubs and equipment had tripled in those five years, that income from private lessons had tripled, too, and that profits on refreshments had jumped even higher, you'd recognize that a smart merchandiser must be on the job.

This progress has been registered at the Washington Park Golf Course at Racine, Wisconsin—the little course once cited by Bob Ripley as the only one in the world situated in the heart of a city. Lying in a natural ravine, it has a stream running through it to make several attractive water hazards, and deep gullies providing several sporting shots. But with the competition of a number of excellent 18-hole courses in the city and surrounding area, the Washington Park course used to be thought of as a place for office and factory workers to go after work on week-days when time was limited. Today, increasing numbers of men and women think of it as a spot for play anytime and all through the daylight hours.

## Strive for 'Private Club' Service

All this didn't happen accidentally. It was the result of a program to give customers of this public course the personalized service they might expect from a private club.

"Everything we've done to increase each customer's feeling that we're personally interested in his enjoyment of the game, has sparked up interest—and business," Irv Peterson, pro at Washington Park, told us.

Maintaining the course in excellent condition is, of course, a major point in service. Greens are top dressed fairly frequently, and are watered beginning at 3 a. m. so as not to interfere with the course's heavy play. Fairway cutting also is done with minimum interference with play. Tee plates and cups are changed often.

"We keep a record of suggestions made

by customers," said Irv Peterson, "and I make a point of playing the course frequently to check up on those suggestions and to find out new things for myself. On the ninth hole, for instance, a tree right in the middle of the fairway was unfair to the go'fer who hit a straight shot off the tee. Now we have trees on either side of that direct line to tantalize the fellow who slices or hooks, but the center tree is gone. Building up the back end of the greens, putting in an extra tree or two in picturesque spots, changing the size of a bunker; all these changes draw appreciative comments from our customers—and keep them coming back."

Re-arranging the pro-shop, refreshment counter, and recreation room paid big dividends in profits and in increased good will from men and women customers. A few years ago the permit counter and the display of golf equipment were huddled in a small 18'x12' room. Refreshments were served in a 20'x30' room adjoining. Since the smaller room was nearer to the first tee, most customers hurried in to buy a permit without even noticing the refreshment facilities, often got into their cars directly after the game was over—and the profit to the course



THE BULLDOG BREED: "OF COURSE I SHALL PLAY IT!"

Rule 6—A ball must be played wherever it lies.

Gotta hand it to the British. Here's an illustration from a Silver King ball ad in *Golf Monthly* of Edinburgh.

The ad copy reads: In any case, who wouldn't (in these difficult days) take some risk to retrieve his precious Silver King."

And we Americans should bellyache about our problems in the golf business!



Open display racks around the center of the floor and around the walls give Washington Park customers a chance to touch and inspect equipment—which Pro Irv Peterson has found is a sure way to close a sale.

from their playing was no more than the price of their permit.

By transposing the pro-shop to the larger room, and emphasizing variety of equipment and sparkling cleanliness and color in the display, profit jumped on refreshments and equipment, as well as permit sales. Now customers must walk through the refreshment room at least once each time they buy a permit. Seeing someone drinking a 'coke' or eating is a strong sales builder. When players come in from the course, again they sit down to fan over a soft drink—with no sa'es talk interference whatever.

Time-saving adjustments were also worked in. Formerly the pro-shop and refreshment rooms were separated by a door which was a whole wall length from the cash register. By cutting an opening in the wall, about 50 steps are saved if the pro or his assistants need to go from one counter to another.

An extension phone installed in the pro-shop next to the pro's desk saves him another 40 steps and is a big help in giving close attention to calls that come in, even when the clubhouse is crowded. The pay phone on the wall of the refreshment room is now used mostly by the customers.

Best of all, the larger display room has enabled Peterson to double his stock, and

to set it up on open display racks that give customers a better chance to touch and try equipment—the surest way that's known to close a sale. Display racks follow a neat path around the center of the floor and around the walls so they won't get into the way of traffic. Display boxes are mixed so there's a pleasing harmony of color, a device that seems to lead customers to pause more quickly than they did before solid masses of the same color.

"When we sell a set of clubs," said Irv, "we make a point of leaving the empty box up for a day or two. The psychology of that almost always pulls another sale soon after. Customers get the feeling that the clubs are moving, and they're more encouraged to make investigations of their own."

We heard a carpet sweeper going in the next room as we talked, and noticed one of the caddies picking up some papers that had dropped on the floor.

"That's our daily housecleaning," laughed Irv, "to keep everything nice and bright. All our display boxes are dusted every morning. Our fiber rugs are taken outdoors, brushed, and aired in the sun at seven o'clock each morning, and grass brought in by c'eats during the day is swept up with the carpet sweeper. We can

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**CUSTOMER SERVICE** (Continued from page 16)

clean up the entire clubhouse in 30 minutes. By picking up at odd moments throughout the day, we avoid ever having that drab look that dulls the selling interest of our merchandise."

It's a big point—cleanliness—in drawing women customers, as any good merchandiser will agree. Men, too, notice clean stock more easily and buy it faster.

The elimination of card games and gambling on the counter also proved a sales builder. The boys at the counter formerly killed time in that way but they noticed a good many women were sending someone in to buy their permits for them.

"After all, we're here to make a living from our course and clubhouse. So we cut out the counter games, and soon the women came in themselves. We found that the new atmosphere induces more sales from the men folks, as well as from the women.

"The repair bench has a prominent spot in the pro-shop, and customers often pause to watch a job going on." The smell of the leather and shellac," Irv observed, "has a fascination for most of them. That gives us a chance to explain what goes into the making of a good club—good groundwork for future sales."

Until a few years ago shower facilities were for men only. Women's showers, built on the second floor, have increased female play at the course. An inside stairway leading directly to the upstairs lounge has encouraged customers to use this spot more in the last two years than it was used in the twenty years before.

But it's the friendly way services are

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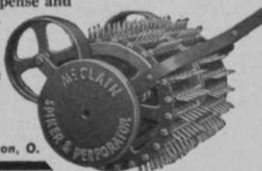


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played up which really turned the trick. All of the boys from the pro down to the caddies take an active interest in each customer who comes in, and train themselves to learn their names as soon as possible. Every customer gets a friendly greeting, and a definite point is made of saying "Thank You" whenever a purchase of even a nickel's worth of tees is made.

It may sound a bit thick to greet a golfer who plays only a fair game with a remark like, "Now we can really go on with the season, that you're back again," when he comes in for the first time in the spring. Said with a sincere and friendly smile, it goes over at Washington Park—and brings them back, and makes them regular visitors.

A friendly question about their game leads customers to confide a difficulty with a shot. Watching players at the first tee whenever he has time helps Irv see for himself what individual players are doing. A tip on the grip or any other default of the swing builds good will and leads to lessons and to equipment sales. When a customer is dubious about the worth of a new set of clubs he purchased, a brief

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lesson or two, given free, builds up confidence and frequently interests customers in following through with a series of paid lessons.

Special instructions for high school classes every day during the spring and fall are also offered free. Players on the high school team are encouraged to come in for free advice on golfing problems they may have. The extra time, Irv finds, is paying dividends in swelling the number of golf enthusiasts who become regular paying patrons of the course.

What about slow players? A good many women—and men too, come in and say, "I hate to start." Irv encourages them to take their time, but to let the other party go through. The kindly caution keeps the good will of faster players as well.

It's the recognition that mediocre players as well as top-notch golfers get, that is important in building up profits on a public course. That's the secret of Irv's increased profits in every department of his club. Both types of customers must be pleased, just as all types of customers are catered to in the stores downtown.

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