

Modernizing Club Policy Accents Family Appeal

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★ Only in the larger metropolitan districts can the ultra-exclusive country club get by and by limiting its dignified service to those of high incomes and reserved social temperaments exist in a sphere which apparently is diminishing.

To what further extent the wartime disruption of the social scheme will effect the so-called country club set is anybody's guess. But it is certain that the long lasting tendency to imitate, in smaller communities, the austerity of the chilly distinguished old clubs of the large cities has ended. No factor of social change was accountable for this imitative and worshipful attitude of the smaller cities' country clubs being abandoned. The first class country clubs in the small cities had to become far more alive than the glacial and grand old clubs. Either the smaller clubs had to liven and extend their attractions and services or go out of business as the older and severely conservative members dwindled in numbers and willingness to meet club deficits.

We are confident that at the Fort Wayne Country club the change to the new order has been made with great success financially and socially. The balance sheet shows satisfactory figures and the roster of members plainly reveals that no lowering of membership standards is involved in making a club a briskly conducted family center keyed to the interests of the most desirable people of a community. In fact, our club is a demonstration of the logic of securing the most desirable members by offering the most desirable program and facilities.

Club officials and members may recall the Fort Wayne Country club being featured in a nine-page picture story in *Life* magazine as an American family club. Family is the keynote of all of our operations. No private club, no more than any business enterprise, can depend for enduring stability on an appeal mainly to older people who are getting to the years when their enthusiasm for golf and country club life is bound to diminish. Replacements must be educated among the children of members. This is more important during wartime than ever before.

The older children are away in uniform. Contact must be maintained with them. The younger children, also, are subject to the effect of war. They catch the rebound of the parents' wartime work and worries and feel other effects of war on domestic life.

Consequently, clubs instead of attempting to exist only for the service of a few selfish elder members, are being virtually compelled to expand in friendlier, democratic, youthful spirit.

We saw earlier this season how the spirit of youth around a club is a great thing for the older members, especially in these times when the rarity of boys between 18 and 26 in communities has a subconsciously depressing effect on grown-ups.

Easter Sunday we had an egg hunt party for children. We'd intended to have the Easter eggs hid around the course but weather interfered, so the eggs were put around the porch and clubhouse. More than a hundred children came and we gave each of them a basket. It was easy to supply enough eggs to keep them happy as the government was almost begging the public to buy eggs.

We had a magician entertain the youngsters and he put on a show in which they participated. Ice cream and cake was supplied. All this was free. It came out of our entertainment fund. One of the features that especially interested the youngsters was a pen of live rabbits. The Easter bunny item is one of those little things that the children remember and which makes them want to go to the club. We do our best to have the children plead with their parents to take them to the club, and to make a club visit a reward parents can promise their youngsters.

One of the things we notice more and more is that the actions of these youngsters are entertaining to the older people. I have been pleasantly surprised any number of times by hearing older members who I suspected might have been not altogether cordial to the idea of having youngsters around the club comment "isn't she cute", or "isn't he a fine little fellow"

about some youngsters whose parents have brought them out.

Like every other club we have our problem of help shortage. Many managers might figure that the presence of children around the club would add to the labors of available help. But it's been the experience of our people that when youngsters get in the habit of coming to the club they are not any trouble to handle. When there are quite a few of them they're like a large family and anyone who's observed large families has seen that the kids in those menages generally are much better behaved than the only child.

Last Fourth of July we had a circus with bleachers in the practice golf area for the youngsters. The circus ran for an hour and 40 minutes. We also had ponies for the youngsters to ride. Then, too, we noticed that the elders got great entertainment as well as the youngsters, and that the pride of grandparents in showing off their grandchildren surpassed that of some venerable gentleman who has shot a golf score far below his usual figure.

At Christmas, when most northern country clubs are closed, Santa Claus sends a personal letter to the children of members inviting them to the country club party. Santa Claus greets them when they enter and gifts from the tree are passed out just before the children go home. Christmas carols are sung by the youngsters.

When we who conduct the club's operations see that party we forget that the club is our job. It is our family. A similar reaction is experienced by the members. They forget that it is a club to which they pay dues and think of it as an intimate part of their family life.

Something that is paramount among club activities having to do with its members' boys and girls is maintaining close contact with those in the armed services. We now have 112 members out of a total male membership of 350 now in uniform. Each week our members write group letters to two club members in service, the names of the two being drawn, and the overseas members getting first call.

I don't know of a thing that the club has missed in tying itself into war effort. Anyone who says our membership is neglecting the war because it can take some legitimate and needed recreation at the club is mentally unbalanced.

Our lecture programs supply the best available adult informative and entertainment features of this character. Such men as Henry Cassidy, Associated Press correspondent from Moscow and Harry Flan-

nery, formerly Columbia Broadcasting's representative at Berlin, are representative of the class of talent we book.

Wednesday afternoon our bridge affairs bring out an older group of members' wives for a respite from war service schedules in which they are deeply engaged. Many of the war benefit affairs are held at the club.

Our club is frequently and strongly represented in women's page news because we see to it that the news is made and supplied. My observation is that when clubs and club management complain of difficulty in getting society or women's page publicity it is because the events haven't been made newsworthy and the data fully and promptly supplied to local papers.

Not only have we done everything within reason to make ours a family club, but we also have made sure that the public is made conscious of the nature of our club. We book a limited number of organization dinners that are scheduled to avoid interference with our service to regular members. This gives the organization guests a close-up of the attractions of our club and helps spur desire to belong to the club. And, of course, this outside business is a factor in leveling our club patronage figures on a plane high enough to give us the revenue we need for first class steady operation.

Our experience indicates that many clubs have a tremendous job ahead of them in establishing a sound and broad basis of popularity and patronage. The club can no more expect to stay on the "yesterday" basis than any other enterprise that caters to the public.

We are looking forward to postwar construction of an artificial ice rink to tie into the great growth of figure skating among the young and middle-aged. This and bowling alleys will help us to achieve a lively year-around program.

I am positive that the country club, if properly managed, is due for tremendous growth after the war. I am sure they can give more for the money and be solid financially if competent management is allowed to plan and operate unimpeded by a tangle of inexpert committees.

We have seen that despite the increase of stockholders in large corporations the operating authority is kept sharply limited so the stockholders can get returns on their investment. The same principle applies to the country club and will be more generally adopted as the wartime and postwar revision in club management takes place.