

# Minimum House Account Plan Endorsed by 3 Year Use

By **HERB GRAFFIS**

Maybe when you think of George S. May and his Tam O'Shanter CC on the northwest corner of Chicago, you think of the tournament pros hitting the jackpot and a three-ring circus of pro and amateur men and women stars in the Tam big annual tournament or George's "Sunrise in the Grand Canyon" shirts. "Golf is a hell of a lot of fun to that guy and since he's willing to pay for it, why not?" you may think and let it go at that.

But you don't know the canny Georgie back-stage. He applies to his country club the ideas of business management his organization sells to its industrial clients. There are a lot of details in those ideas but they all boil down to "if you can't make money at it, don't do it."

Although most private country clubs are organized "not for profit" none of them yet has found it isn't wise to have a good piece of cash on the right side of the ledger. Some of them already have been disillusioned thinking they were making enough in the fat years to finance overdue improvement and rehabilitation work. When costs mounted higher than the funds ear-marked for the work the officials and members were sharply reminded that a country club is a business run for the enjoyment of its members.

George S. May learned that the hard way. He took Tam O'Shanter over after the club had experienced depressions, fires and the usual routine of other adversities. He's put more than a million dollars into the plant and that wasn't done just so good fellows could come in and have George pour more money in to enjoy their company. He built Tam O'Shanter as a private membership golf plant that would be a sound investment.

May found, as innumerable club officials have discovered before him, that a

course and a clubhouse may draw business but if people won't spend when they are at the club the initiation fee and dues won't take care of operating expenses.

He wrestled with the house problem for years and in 1945 put into effect the plan that has achieved what almost every club wants—members using the club more.

The plan simply was to have a "Minimum Spending House Account" which called for regular members being charged a minimum of \$20 a month for house account. Social, limited and women members were to spend a minimum of \$10 a month. Limited members at Tam are those who do not have golf privileges Saturday, Sunday or holidays.

Now the minimum is \$30 a month for all classes.

That's because the plan worked.

It did ease out some members, but not many. Analysis of house accounts before the plan was adopted showed that 224 of the 297 regular members had house accounts in excess of the minimum, 22 of the 73 remaining had house accounts of more than \$200 a year, and only 51 had house accounts of less than \$200 a year.

With food costs, wages and other operating expenses constantly increasing, the country club has the problem of making a delicate balance based on steady, high volume of restaurant and bar business. The country club member eats away from home fairly often and usually entertains far more than the non-club member. Getting him in the habit of doing a considerable part of his dining-out and entertaining at the club brings the volume the club needs. A private club can make money with a menu and drink charge

(Continued on page 73)

plant with deep enough roots and strong enough to prevent soil erosion and make our melting snows and rain water walk down hill instead of run down. For in the past lives have been lost and much valuable property has been destroyed by the onrush of water down our mountain sides, and given the time and the funds I believe it is possible for some young agrostologist to produce such a grass plant. A grass plant that will beautify our hills and prevent this colossal waste and destruction from taking place.

Then again we should have produced for us a fine textured grass with plenty of deep roots, free from disease, a root structure that will dig deep and secure for itself sufficient soil water to sustain a healthy and vigorous growth without the constant irrigation and flooding that is now necessary to keep our turf alive and healthy.

Experiments should be made with different kinds of fertilizer that will suit a particular kind of soil and have more lasting qualities than the bulk of the fertilizers we use today. All these experiments mean hard work and slow procedure. We must be patient and sympathetic, for there are no royal and easy roads to success. Nature is in no hurry and abhors quick transitions. We see this slow process of fixing a type in the seaside bents. We look over a bent green and see the various shades of color. We notice the different texture; some coarse and some very fine. We see them change from a light color to a dark color and fine plants developing a coarse habit for the genes are not finally fixed, but by thoughtful experimentation we shall discover a fixed type, one that will permanently retain its color and texture.

These are some of the things that must be included in our program and, given the right kind of personal care, much can be accomplished.

## MINIMUM ACCOUNT

(Continued from page 27)

somewhat lower than those of the night clubs and cafes which country club members patronize.

### Habit Is Formed

Tam O'Shanter prior to the adoption of the minimum charge plan, as now, had lively entertainment programs calculated to bring out members. That entertainment didn't draw in the pre-minimum days as it does now. The habit of coming to the club was established when everyone wanted to make sure that they were ahead of the minimum. The push was psychological rather than logical, as most of the members normally were spending more than the minimum.

July, 1948



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To show how the minimum plan has worked, figures for eight months reveal the regular members spending an average of \$398.12; limited members, \$298.63; social members, \$283.11 and women memberse, \$183.82. Some members who, for various reasons, haven't been able to get to the club are behind the minimum expense figure but making no complaint, and neither is the club because such members have paid their \$20 minimum monthly.

There are 7.9 per cent of the regular members spending under the minimum. Of all classes of members 89.5 per cent spend over the minimum.

In the latest eight months analyzed 2.4 per cent of the members spent over \$1,000 each at the club during the period. The largest class was the 18.9 per cent who spent from \$240 to \$300 during the eight months. Next largest class was the 16.5 per cent who spent from \$300 to \$400 in the eight month period.

One way of looking at the minimum charge plan is that if a man can't afford to spend \$30 a month at a club like Tam O'Shanter, he shouldn't belong. May is a realist that way and is convinced by experience and observation that in some cases he has been doing border-line cases a favor by presenting the situation bluntly.

Adoption of the minimum house account plan has meant that member accounts receivable can be more closely estimated and expense budgets forecast with greater precision. With each member under agreement to carry his minimum share of the load the fellows who consistently patronize the club don't have to pay higher dues to carry the load of the trailers.

Explanation of the plan proved to be a tactful factor in adding prestige to Tam O'Shanter membership. It didn't necessarily give a member the notoriety of



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being a big spender who was tossing money around but it did identify him as one who was able and willing to pay his way in meeting the legitimate costs of club membership and operation.

Now nobody has any complaints to offer about the minimum house spending plan. It's just as much a recognized part of club membership expense as the dues—and it very definitely is accountable for keeping the dues down and assessments nil.

## BEING A BUSINESSMAN

(Continued from page 28)

ply. When we're short on caddies for a special event all we do is call our friend the director of athletics who is happy to cooperate.

For a good many years our club handicap system has been handled by a committee appointed by the club president. This committee depended entirely upon the individual to post his own score with the result that many scores were not posted either through negligence or other reasons. The final result was a generally unsatisfactory handicapping system.

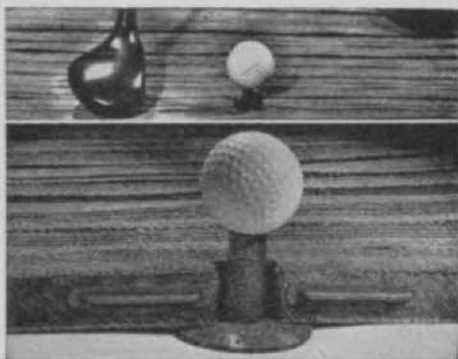
The solution to the handicapping problem was that the pro staff would undertake to establish equitable handicaps. Our big problem was to get every score made. This we did by making a special effort to meet all players as they came from the 18th green and discuss their score and game with them. It's a big job but it pays handsome dividends. You get the score and it gives the player the impression that the pro staff is genuinely interested in his game. We now have 238 handicaps posted and established and are making room for more.

I think we all know the importance of equitable handicaps. I would advise all pros who have much the same set-up as I

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