



This beautiful little clubhouse between a lake and the first tee, was built from a dirty, dilapidated old structure.

"Home Town Boy" Makes Good With Pals Building Club

By **HOWARD J. FIFE**

Mgr., Guthrie (Okla.) Golf and Country Club

LOOKING BACK now, at the hard work and headaches in the task of getting the Guthrie (Okla.) G&CC into its present condition, I don't believe I would have the nerve or the energy to attempt such an undertaking again; but Mrs. Fife and I are very happy because we feel as if we are doing a worthwhile thing in making our members proud of our club.

We feel as if, after being gone from our old home town for many, many years—our contribution to the community, as a whole, fills a great need. We are proud to know that our efforts are appreciated.

Both Mrs. Fife and I were reared in this little town. We were married here — our

boy was born here — and we have many friends in the community. The fact that our son, Phil, after many years of study, came back to Guthrie to establish his medical practice — and his family of a wonderful wife and three sweet little daughters—naturally made our desire, when we retired, more intense to return "Back home". After being gone for almost 30 years — from 1921 to 1950 — we were tired of cities.

We had reached the age where we realized that old friends are the best — where every one calls every one else by his first name, and where one can really enjoy life without being pushed around.

I have received a great deal of personal credit for building the Guthrie G&CC; but all I have done is practice the first rule in salesmanship — make others want what you have to sell.

To make anything sell there first has to be the need — and there certainly was a need for this club in a thriving community of 10,000. There was no place for the young folks to go and enjoy themselves except at beer joints at the edge of town and along the roads.

This was a thriving club back in the 20s. True, we had no food facilities. We brought our own food. Families would get together, each bringing different dishes and we all had a wonderful time.

We swam in the lake instead of in a modern pool. We had sand greens instead of bent grass. We danced on an old screened-in porch.

(Continued on page 52)

In Guthrie, Okla., there wouldn't be any hesitation among the good neighbors in voting Howard J. Fife the Golf Writers' Assn. award as "the man who has done most for golf." The story of how Mr. Fife and his wife came back home and with enormous work, enthusiasm, faith, resourcefulness — and the inspired help of fellow citizens—established a fine country club in a town of 10,000 population, is the best article on small town country club development ever printed.

You'll agree to that, and take your hats off to Mr. and Mrs. Fife.

HERB GRAFFIS,
Editor, **GOLFDOM.**



Howard J. Fife stands against the wall of a pro shop he has built and stocked to give Guthrie golfers big-city shop service.

East Wall of the Guthrie pro shop shows additional evidence of the shop's valuable service.



We didn't care if the clubhouse had no ceilings or walls — just rafters and stud-dings — but darn it, we had a pretty good time. We walked all over the place in our spiked shoes, and no one bawled us out because everybody else was doing the same thing.

And we don't have anyone around now shooting better scores than we did then. Some of the boys were pretty good—even then.

I'm giving you this picture, in order that you will be able to understand why I wanted to come back to the "old home town" and build a real country club.

An outsider would never have had the desire — and believe me, in the building of a small town country club, if the one who has the bright idea doesn't have plenty of that commodity, the undertaking is doomed before he starts.

To begin with, he can't make any money out of it. It just isn't in the cards. He almost has to be a retired business man, who wants something to do as a hobby, with no thoughts of personal gain, and with a sincere desire to contribute to the good of the community. There will be millions of headaches; but if he really loves the place, he will win.

No Wealthy Angel

Most "angels" of country clubs are wealthy men; but in our case that is far from the case. Mrs. Fife and I are in very moderate circumstances. Neither of us had ever done anything like this before. We had to learn it from the ground up. Our success in this undertaking has been possible be-

cause we have succeeded in binding people from all walks of life into a solid enthusiastic group — creating a spirit of cooperation — a willingness on the part of the members to assume a great many of the responsibilities in the operation of the club, without pay.

No one makes any money out of this club. I don't and I don't want to. I have no desire to ever make any more money. I have all I need.

People living in large cities don't know what they're missing. A man has to have fought and struggled to send a boy through medical school — fought competition for a living — and succeeded — to get my viewpoint on life. He must have reached the age in life, and be financially satisfied, with no thought or desires for personal gain to realize that the only path to happiness is in making other people happy. If there is any secret to our success — that is it.

Discouraging Job

This was the most discouraging thing I ever attempted in my life. I'd have quit a hundred times if I could. Even my best friends discouraged me.

The thriving club of the 20s had gone bankrupt years ago. It had reverted back to the city and was used as a public recreational center. Since it lost money all the time very little money was spent on upkeep and improvements. It was dirty and filthy. No one would even think of bringing his family out. Just a few fishermen and die-hard golfers used it.

The clubhouse was just about ready to fall down. The roof leaked like a sieve, the



This bright dining pavilion overlooking a lake, is one of the Guthrie club's two dining rooms. It's highly popular with golfers and attracts many service club lunches, dinner parties, and social affairs of Guthrie's youngsters.

plumbing was all stopped up, the wiring all shot, the water supply was gone, the corner supports of the house were all rotted out. There was not a wall or ceiling in the place — just bare rafters and studdings covered with cobwebs and dirt.

The water pump was worn out. The maintenance machinery for the golf course — tractor, gang mowers, greens mowers, etc., were just a pile of junk.

The golf course itself should have been a rock quarry instead of a golf course — a series of rocky, washed gullies, or blow sand and rocks.

There were, however, 9 grass greens which were built six years previous by popular subscription. They were small and dome-shaped and due to limited funds, were not properly constructed as to soil structure, drainage, etc. Several were lost every summer. The only redeeming feature in the entire set-up was the site. It was beautiful; located just at the east edge of town, a rolling terrain covered with trees and a beautiful 80 acre lake filled with fish; and room to expand.

Two weeks were spent in interviewing prospective members, most of whom expressed the desire for a nice club but also were firm in their belief that it couldn't be done. The consensus was that I'd be lucky if 50 memberships were sold and that I'd succeed only in sinking a lot of my own capital in the venture. I was told repeatedly the town was too small.

A committee of my friends finally told me that the only way it might succeed was to sell separate permits for golfing, fishing, etc., for \$20 or \$30 a year. I was certain that this wouldn't work. My idea was to make the club so nice, with a variety of different facilities, that it would appeal to everyone, and that everyone had to be a stockholder and pay yearly dues, and be willing to help support the club as a whole, even tho they might be interested in only one activity. This proved to be correct.

Start with \$10,000

The city fathers were happy to get the monkey off their backs. They gave me a long term lease. Being personally acquainted with every one, the first shares of stock were sold within a few days at \$100 per share, with no dues the first year.

This gave me \$10,000 capital, and a contract was let with one of the members. Remodeling was started at once. I worked on the job every day seeing that my plans were carried out, and doing all the painting myself.

A new asbestos roof was put on. The old

green shingles on the outside were replaced with white asbestos siding. The dilapidated old screened-in porch, running the full width of the building, was turned into a lovely pavilion, all glassed in, with beamed ceilings of Celotex tile trim and knotty pine overlooking the lake.

Polished hardwood floors appeared throughout. Rotted corner supports were rebuilt; floors braced. Knotty pine walls appeared, and beautiful specially designed Windsor doors replaced old ones.

The old pro shop was turned into a beautiful lounge room 18 by 33 ft., with knotty pine walls, finished with a coat of white paint, quickly wiped off and then finished with two coats of clear shellac.

This room was furnished by one of my members in red upholstered furniture at cost. The ladies' golf club donated money to buy attractive brass wall adornments and waste basket.

Our local furniture factory made my dining room tables and chairs at their cost. Every one fell in with my idea that no one was to make any money—it was their club.

New plumbing and wiring was installed. Club rooms and rest rooms were built, as well as ladies' and men's locker and shower rooms. Everything we bought was the very best. A new water supply was obtained from a deep well and new pipes put in with proper storage tanks.

Food Service Organized

The dirty old kitchen was enameled white, and all the old equipment was thrown away.

Here was where I began spending my own money. I equipped it completely with every modern appliance for the serving of food — and we serve only the very best.

Our steaks come from Pfaelzer Brothers in Chicago — prime top sirloins 1½ inches thick. They are all broiled and served with a complete dinner for \$2.50. Our chickens are from Swift & Co. and fried Southern style for \$2.00. The kitchen has shown a loss of around \$60 a month.

Mrs. Fife and I operate the food end of the business and the pro shop as personal ventures — she handling the food and I the pro shop. Between the two we show a profit of just a few hundred dollars a year.

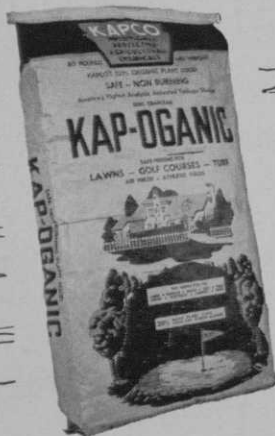
We get quite a nice play from the kitchen, getting lots of parties, banquets and dinners. Practically all the business organizations in town use the club for their annual parties. We print a schedule each month for each member of all events. Each Sunday night we have a large buffet din-

(Continued on page 88)

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feel that they were actually doing more good through education that is so much more complete than merely giving a 45 minute report once a year. We found also that once a subject is developed for a clinic such as we held, it can be repeated for other local groups without a great deal of work in preparation.

Another way in which our local association plans to be of greater help to our superintendents and to our golfers is through a committee recently organized by Ray Gerber of Glen Oak CC. Ray has volunteered the services of his committee to the Chicago District Golf Association to work with its greens committee. We hope that through their cooperation we shall progress together.

"HOMETOWN BOY"

(Continued from page 54)

ner, followed by a bingo game, serving from 70 to 80 meals.

Each activity of the club is handled by a special committee, the chairman of each being under the supervision of a board member. This plan works like a charm. Every one is glad to do his part.

Rebuild the Course

Then we started on the golf course. During the past two years it has been completely rebuilt. The rocks we couldn't blast or bulldoze out were covered up. Hundreds of trees which caused lack of air drainage were removed. Good topsoil was brought in and new fairways built and sodded with Bermuda. Deep gullies were filled. Five greens were built, replacing the old ones which gave so much trouble every summer. Two brand new greens of 10,000 sq. ft. built correctly were opened for play last May. Most of these things were financed by my own money, as well as most of the new maintenance equipment. I have bought an Aerifier, power sprayer, two new greens-mowers, a heavy duty utility mower, and all the other things necessary for the proper maintenance of the course. I bought a new Verticut also.

I owe a debt of gratitude to Bob Dunning of Tulsa for teaching me how to build greens and maintain them. I know nothing whatever about it. All of this work on the course, with very little extra help, had been done by my chef Bob Neely and myself. We haven't even slowed down during the past two years and are still at it. In addition to all this, Bob has done an admirable job in the kitchen. Our only tools have been an old road grader lent to us by a neighbor, our tractor and a borrowed spring tooth

harrow and a disc. All of the material used in the new greens was bought and hauled in, as all our soil is either silt or pure clay.

You Think You Work?

I sleep with my greens, doing all the watering—mostly by hand—and with the exception of mowing, they are not touched unless I am there.

I am up at 5 every morning and on the job — and many a night during the critical months I am out on the course at midnight.

I stay at the club all the time, seven days a week, and 24 hours every day — being the club manager, professional, and green superintendent — and then am on the job every night to take care of the members who come to the club. I don't get any too much sleep but I love this work.

Money couldn't hire me to work this way —and yet I'm happier than I've ever been in my life with this hobby. I love to look at a beautiful green and think I BUILT IT! I love to have the members come to me and tell me how nice everything is—and how they appreciate what I've done. Man—that's living!

Fred Grau was here not long ago and pronounced my greens, "championship".

Our course, which formerly was an easy 35 par, rated by pro playing standards, and a 66 for 18, is now a plenty tough 35 par. Holes have been lengthened, traps built and greens enlarged and undulated. We have built 13 Bermuda tees averaging around 2000 sq. ft. Some of them are U-3. I have a nursery all built of 6000 sq. ft. to grow my own strains of grasses — Merion Blue, and Fred Grau's special "Zoysia", as well as U-3 Bermuda. Give me another year, and I'll challenge anyone to show me a finer 9-hole golf course in the country.

Members Work Cheerfully

As I am writing this, we have just finished painting our swimming pool — 35 members did the job in an hour and a half, followed by a picnic supper. This shows the spirit of cooperation and pride of my members in their club.

They'll dig crabgrass, build boat docks, or anything asked of them. A small town club with limited membership and low dues just can't afford to hire these things done.

Our club financially is as sound as a new dollar. We owe no one a cent outside of current bills and no outstanding indebtedness. I write vouchers each month for all bills, the Board of Directors passes on them and the treasurer writes the checks.

In my own personal affairs, the kitchen and pro shop, I do not keep an accounts payable file. Each invoice is paid at once



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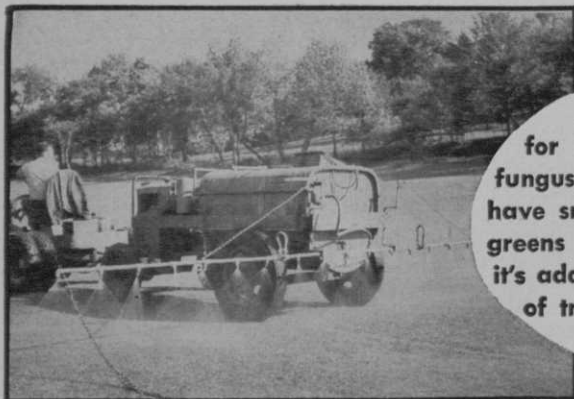
upon receipt of the merchandise. All discounts are taken. The pro shop has just been enlarged and remodeled in knotty pine. A new rubber tile floor has been installed. This cost me over \$1000. It has chromium furniture and formica topped tables.

I carry a large stock of merchandise for the convenience of the members — much larger than would be considered good business by a merchant working for a profit. From where I sit I can see 18 golf bags, 10 carts, a rack of slacks and sport coats, shoes, gloves, a wide selection of shirts, 16 sets of clubs, luggage, and a 10 ft. show case filled with balls, socks, head covers, etc.

I have a deepfreeze, an 18 case Frigid-air drink cooler, a safe, and a new cash register, a cigarette machine, and a large stock of hats and caps.

Behind the clubhouse, on a Bermuda lawn, we have a large playground for the kiddies, with chutes, swings, merry-go-round, teter-totter, and May pole. We have a nice picnic ground with tables and benches. There is a new garage and work shop just completed, with cement floor, and plenty of storage space for fertilizers and our equipment.

There is a new boat dock and aluminum



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Our membership at present is close to 200 stockholders and about 40 non-resident members from nearby towns. Our stock is still only \$100 per share, with \$61.00 yearly dues.

Local people can only come to the club as guests four times a year; but we have no limit on guests from outside the county. The "four times a year" rule is waived in the case of teen-agers. They can come as guests of members as often as they like but all guests must be accompanied by a member at all times.

Our golf course is open to the public by paying the green fee of \$1 on week days, \$1.50 on Sundays and holidays. We have made numerous changes in our original rules to meet the occasions. All in all, I believe we are organized on a pretty sound basis throughout. I honestly believe that we have one of the finest small town clubs in United States. It will continue to improve.

Like all other clubs the world over, we still have a few members who will not repair ball divots on the greens and think only of themselves; but most of the members are considerate of others and are proud of our club.

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