



Owner John Polakovic is shown in front of clubhouse at Midwest CC, one of country's finest semi-private operations.

Capitalize on that "Dead Time"

Nearly 20 per cent of the course laborer's time may be non-productive. Here is how one semi-private club owner uses it to increase the value of his investment

GETTING eight hour a day value out of course labor is a problem that has been confronting private, semi-private and public courses practically since the time the eight-hour day was universally accepted more than four decades ago. Because of the playing schedule on which courses necessarily have to be operated, it is doubtful if more than 6½ hours of a laborer's 8-hour day is put to productive use. The 1½ hour's difference between truly productive effort and non-productive work may not be completely "dead" time because through skillful juggling of the overall course work load with laborers' time schedules, many supts. arrange to get jobs done that normally would be neglected. Yet, in the estimation of many persons close to the golf maintenance scene, there is a certain amount of boondoggling that must be considered inherent. This undoubtedly is due to the fact that even though the average laborer's day is in effect a 6½ hour one, he must be employed or paid for eight hours or his services aren't available.

At Midwest Country Club in Hinsdale, Ill., one of the most profitable semi-private operations in the northern part of the U.S.,

John Polakovic has pretty effectively solved the excess labor or excess time problem. He has simply capitalized on it in the 13 years he has owned the club by using this labor or time in constantly re-modelling his layout.

Didn't Look Too Promising

When he took over the course in 1947, Midwest was a down-at-the-heels, 27-hole affair with inadequate clubhouse facilities. Polakovic, onetime owner of a suburban Chicago newspaper, had just a sample of retirement but found that a man and his wife can only find so many places to travel to. So, it was back to some kind of work. A golfer all his life, he decided that he could find much less profitable investments for his retirement fund than a golf course, so he took the plunge. At first glance, Midwest didn't look too promising. But it had great potential, the former newspaper executive decided, if a fellow were willing to put back some of the profits. In addition, it was located in the midst of several expanding communities and, of course, the game was already showing strong promise of its unprecedented postwar boom.

After his first profit and loss statement was drawn up and the new Midwest owner was convinced that he had a going operation, he started plowing money back into the club. The clubhouse was expanded, section by section, until now it is more than three times the size it was when Polakovic inherited it. To give an idea of what a sound investment this has been, Midwest has become a kind of mecca for Chicago area business and industrial firms which wait in line to hold golf outings and sales meetings there. Possibly 25 per cent of Midwest's institutional reservations are already booked for 1952.

Expands to 36

Meanwhile, Polakovic kept putting money into the 27 original holes in an attempt to bring them up to what he considers to be true country club standards. In 1957, incidentally, he bought land adjoining the course and had Robert Bruce Harris design another 9 to bring the entire layout to 36 holes.

Face lifting of the course has gone on for at least 12 years and Polakovic estimates it will be 1963 before the job is completed. Tees on practically every one of the original 27 have been rebuilt, water hazards have been added, there has been much recontouring of holes to put in traps — but the big job has been the rebuilding

of the greens. Twenty-one putting surfaces have been reworked with six to go. Midwest's greens now range from 7,000 to 8,500 sq. ft. where the range used to be from 5,000 to 7,000 sq. ft. In all cases the new green has been built back of an old one so as not to interfere with play. Traps have been added in numerous cases because the Midwest owner sampled enough of his patrons' opinions to become convinced that the majority of semi-private players want a course that fairly tests their skills and not one that offers only few obstacles.

Renovation Costs Absorbed

Something like 75 or 80 per cent of the cost of making these various renovations have been absorbed through so called "dead time" labor expense. It is charged against current income, of course, and naturally reduces the annual net profit. But, at the same time, it adds to Midwest's net worth. If Polakovic were to sell Midwest tomorrow he would, of course, take this "dead time" construction into consideration in fixing the value of his property.

Midwest has a year-around crew of seven men who work under Marv Gruening, a capable and conscientious supt. From April through October, a dozen work for the maintenance department. When play is at its heaviest from June through August, there are 20 men employed. Several semi-private operators in and around Chicago have argued that Midwest is overstaffed. But John Polakovic has a convincing counter argument. "We have enough manpower to quickly get the course into shape for each day's play," he says. "It isn't often that we have to hold up players to complete a mowing operation or take care of some other chore. It costs money to hire the so-called extra help to be able to keep the players moving, but the volume of play at Midwest justifies this. We advertise that there is less waiting at Midwest than at most semi-private courses and we're willing to spend money to prove it. Quicker play is one of the commodities we're selling."

No Sweeping and Re-Sweeping

Continuing, Polakovic says: "If we didn't have a constant remodeling program that is adding value to our property going on, we probably couldn't employ as many persons as we do. We'd have to cut back to 15 men in the summer because figuring on the basis of 1½ hours per man "dead time," a crew of 20 undoubtedly

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ly would cost too much. There'd be just too many fellows out there sweeping and re-sweeping the maintenance building trying to keep busy," Polakovic points out as a kind of an aside with an amused twinkle in his eye. "But," he goes on, "we can absorb this alleged extra labor cost as long as we keep men productively employed on our remodeling program."

As a final justification of what some of his competitors say is unnecessary labor expensive, Polakovic has this to say: "I never have seen a golf course, private or public, that couldn't stand improvement. All things considered, what is cheaper than spending a little money for materials and equipment, if necessary, to add to or take advantage of that "dead labor time" to make your property more valuable? Probably too many semi-private club owners are trying to take too much out of their properties without putting anything back into them. When their courses begin to show it they start losing patronage and profits. Taking a long range view, courses depreciate quickly if they aren't remodelled when necessary. Nothing eats into an investment like depreciation."

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