

Golf Clubs Are for Golfers!

That's the philosophy at Merion where the members don't feel that change necessarily means improvement

By **JOSEPH W. DRAGONETTI**

The trend in recent years has been to more "country club living" and diversified sports facilities for the whole family in many golf and country clubs throughout the country. But one holdout is the famed Merion GC, Ardmore, Pa. It still takes its golf straight . . . and will for some time to come. This conclusion is drawn from an interview with Jerome B. Gray, pres. of Merion and a partner in a Philadelphia advertising and public relations agency.

As a top advertising man, Gray would not be expected to ignore any projects which help increase business and keep clubs solvent. Nor does he criticize other clubs. But, speaking as the pres. of Merion, he underscores the fact that Merion's sole reason for existence is golf and that the attitude of a majority of the club's 660 members is to keep things as they are.

Gray doesn't deny that pressure has been exerted to install a swimming pool and other facilities at his club. He concedes the possibility that such pressure may some day be successful. "The demand and need for recreational facilities of all sorts are growing and have to be satisfied," Gray says. But he adds: "On the other hand the popularity of golf is also growing, and a club's willingness to specialize in golf alone is sure to find more and more takers."

Retains Original Beauty

Week-end social events are varied and popular at Merion. But the clubhouse is in no sense fancy. An expansion and improvement program is under way here but on a pay-as-you-go basis. The club has no intention of tearing things apart and

rebuilding a million-dollar plant. It doesn't intend to impair the architectural beauty of the original clubhouse or its atmosphere. Recent improvements have resulted in essential expansion and refurbishing of the cocktail lounge and the men's grillroom.

Character Retained

Speaking of complementary sports facilities, Gray, who is serving his fourth term as the club's pres., says that the pressure for a swimming pool comes primarily from the younger generation of members. "After a thorough investigation of costs and returns and a possible site for a pool," Gray explains, "the club's governors decided that a pool would be impractical for several reasons. The board refused to bite off more than it can chew economically and it took a decidedly dim



Jerry Gray, Merion president, is seen with his daughter, Alice, Pennsylvania women's champion.

view of approving anything that might change Merion's basic character and tradition."

Concentration on Golf

Merion's concentration on golf has, of course, attracted a membership that includes men and women, young and old. Its waiting list is fairly impressive. This indicates that the market for those who primarily want to play golf has scarcely been tapped. Naturally, no one who insists upon diverse facilities would apply for membership in the first place. Applicants know that golf alone is available at Merion. They have their choice of two excellent 18-hole courses.

Gray emphasizes that he doesn't want Merion's rejection of complementary sports facilities to imply that the club is administered by a group of old fogies who resist change of any sort. Smiling, he says: "If I resisted change, I would be impeached as Merion's pres. and maybe drummed out of my business, a business of change. But any change must be a change for the better. I agree wholeheartedly with the club's governors that as long as Merion is a golf club the biggest share of its annual budget should be appropriated to maintain the best possible golfing conditions."

Close Adherence to Rules

Merion runs a "tight" course where it goes without saying that everyone is expected to closely observe the game's rules and etiquette. Fast, if not hurried, play is stressed. It is considered a grievous sin to overlook the replacing of divots or the smoothing out of footprints in sandtraps. Respect for the homes adjoining the course is considered an obligation of every member or player, regardless of how young or inexperienced a golfer he may be. There also are constant reminders to keep the course and club grounds free of debris.

Membership regulations are designed so that it is relatively inexpensive for sons and daughters of members to join the club as Junior Individual members when they reach their 21st birthdays. There is a Junior family membership for married men under 31 that entitles him, his wife and children to play golf and enjoy other club privileges. There also is a non-resident membership for men and women who live beyond a 50-mile radius of the club.

Guests may play both Merion courses a total of four times a year regardless of the number of members introducing them. A record of registrations kept in the pro

Club Managers' Conference in Miami Beach

The 35th conference of the Club Managers' Association of America will be held Feb. 28-Mar. 3, 1962, at the Deauville and Carillon Hotels in Miami Beach, Fla. According to Harry B. Manning, vice chairman of arrangements, the CMAA is scheduling all seminars and meetings so that persons attending the conference will be able to work in the education program with vacationing.

shop enables any member to ascertain the current playing privilege status of any guest.

Restrictions on Women

There are also some unwritten rules and regulations at the club. Although Merion has a growing number of women players, including the president's daughter, Alice Gray, the Pennsylvania State women's champion, it is generally understood that they do not play on Saturday mornings, which are reserved for men golfers whose business prevents them playing other than on weekends. Mixed foursomes, however, are customary on Saturday afternoons.

Perhaps there is fear that traditions and established rules may be jeopardized if complementary sports facilities are introduced at Merion. Gray doesn't say so in so many words, but the impression is there nevertheless. Yet, there must be appeal in the rather strict regulations, judging from the club's waiting list.

Gray hints strongly, however, that Merion is not interested in men who are merely out for exercise or "customer-type golf." He says bluntly: "They don't care about their score or other players. Few of them ever take a lesson from the pro, although they could improve their games by doing so. It isn't money that prevents this type of golfer from taking lessons from the pro. It is just a false sense of pride and not taking the game seriously."

Merion standards are also strict in the areas of service of food, drink and dress. Ladies are not permitted at the bar, nor are they served in the Men's Grill. However, they may be served alcoholic beverages in the dining room. Shorts are not permitted in the dining rooms or on the terraces at dinnertime. Ladies are

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expected to wear skirts or dresses and gentlemen, neckties and jackets.

Pay As You Go Operation

Figures aren't made public but Merion is run on a solid business basis. There is enough enthusiasm for golf to make the club self-sustaining. New facilities have to be financed out of available funds. Under the by-laws, members can't be assessed for any deficits or to finance new ventures.

Complementary sports may come to Merion, but right now the prospect is remote. So much so, that recently when one member suggested that a bowling alley be installed, he was made to understand that he was speaking in terms close to sacrilege as far as Merion and its golf is concerned.

Perhaps young people may someday demand more typical country-club activity, but now at least and probably for some years to come Merion will, Jerry Gray repeats, "take its golf straight." The members want it that way apparently because they can't see any other sport that quite comes up to golf.

Joe Black Promoted to PGA Tournament Supervisor Post

Joe Ed Black of Dallas, Tex., has been named PGA tournament supervisor, filling the vacancy created when Harvey Raynor resigned that post last May. Black had been filling the supervisor's job since Raynor's resignation. A onetime Hardin-Simmons University golfer, Joe played the circuit for about two years and formerly served as an assistant pro to Morgan Hampton at Abilene (Tex.) CC and to Vern Farquhar at Ross Rogers GC, Amarillo.

Mark Thomas, Monterey Park, Calif., has been appointed assistant tournament supervisor, moving up from co-ordinator or "advance man," a job that has been taken over by John Tuthill, West Islip, L.I., N.Y. Ron Pawlyck, La Puente, Calif., has been added to the tournament bureau as second assistant to Black.

"This Wonderful World of Golf", Shell Oil Co's weekly hour (4-5 EST) of stars playing great courses will begin Sunday, Jan. 7 on the CBS network. Gene Sarazen will be the commentator.

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