



Bill Hardgree (inset), pro at Keeler, can't restrain a smile as he contemplates the future possibilities in the bright surroundings of his shop.

Get Opportunity to Spend

Keeler Shop Thrives on Daily Fee Players



Steadily improving business that has marked the progress of the shop at the year-old O. B. Keeler GC in Kennesaw, Ga., dispels the rather traditional idea that a publicly owned operation has to carry the label of "poor cousin". Bill Hardgree, a reformed golf sales rep and pro at Keeler, will quickly set you right on that point.

"Take a look around," says Bill. "Where will you find a better looking or better stocked shop? Public course or daily fee players, whatever you may want to call them, will spend money with you if you give them the opportunity."

Part of this opportunity at Keeler, Hardgree points out, is in an average stock inventory of about \$10,000 that is turned over four or five times a year in a 12-month season. But ample merchandise isn't the answer if it is displayed with no more flair than you may find in a second hand store. "It has to bristle with sales appeal," Bill declares. "It has to jump out at the golfer. And, you have to back up your colorful displays with some sales savvy."



Features of the Keeler shop include: Brown cork tile flooring; walls in green and beige with green pegboard for display; four large windows and two doors; six large spherical overhead lamps and four spots that are trained on the club displays.

Part of this savvy was learned by Hardigree when he was traveling the Southeastern section between 1957 and 1960 as a pro sales rep for A. G. Spalding & Bros. In those years he got a chance to size up every type of shop operation from the ones below par to those that produce comfortable profits for their operators. When Bill took over the Keeler shop he had some pretty firm ideas as to what to do and what not to do to make it go.

Displays His Specialty

The big problem as he saw it was to set up just the right number of displays. He is just a little fanatical on this point. The Keeler shop being new and probably more than ample spacewise, especially in comparison with many other shops Hardigree had seen, suggested a temptation to overcrowd the merchandise. But he practiced restraint, striving for plenty of aisle space and that airy look that gives clubs,



sportswear, shoes, etc. the bright appearance that has so much inherent sell. As can be seen from the photos on these pages, Bill doesn't move anything around just to be moving it. He gives everything the "engineered display" eye before touching it and that applies even to such items as head covers.

Displays have to do much of the work at Keeler because Hardigree, who was graduated from the University of Georgia

in 1942, has only one assistant. He is Bert Seagraves who ranges from the sales floor to the back of the shop to the lesson tee and takes all in competent stride. Play is heavy at least nine months of the year at the Kennesaw course, which was built by the Cobb County Recreation Authority, and Bill and Bert are pre-breakfast to late evening toilers during at least this many months. There are so many encroachments on their time because of the demands of running the shop in addition to handling playing traffic that they need the assistance of eye-catching displays in their saleswork.

Break Down Resistance

Practically all classes of golfers play at Keeler. At the start it was rather difficult to persuade many of them that an investment in top quality equipment and accessories was to their advantage, but Bill Hardigree and Bert Seagraves have kept chipping away on this theme until they have at least a majority of their players pro-only conscious. One thing that the former feels has helped in this persuasion is that he keeps catalogs featuring top-line merchandise conspicuous among the reading matter in the shop lounge. "If you don't have those catalogs sprinkled around," Hardigree advises other pros, "it would pay you to start. Some of those four-color pages make any golfer's mouth water."

The Keeler shop sales predominantly are to men. Women, at first, were reluctant to spend their money with Hardigree, but after he finally broke the ice by selling several sets of starter clubs to feminine swingers there was a step-up in women's business. Today he depends quite heavily on the ladies for sportswear sales, and he also credits them with having much to do with the steady month to month increase in overall volume that he has enjoyed since the Kennesaw course was opened.

Will Take Some Plugging

As for clubs, Hardigree hasn't yet been able to determine just how they are going to sell in the future. A new club with many new players is largely responsible for this. There is a rather strong market for used clubs and rental sets, but to offset this the Keeler pro has established a very liberal trade-in policy as part of an effort to woo his golfers over to the pro-line side. But he has become resigned to the fact that establishing top quality clubs

as best sellers isn't going to be an overnight accomplishment. It may take two or three years.

Because the club is new and got plenty of fanfare while it was in the process of being built, there is no lack of traffic in and around the pro shop. Hardigree hasn't yet found it necessary to do much advertising outside the club, but he does have a small display ad in the yellow pages of the local phone book. For the most part he has depended upon clinics and free lesson sessions for men, women and juniors to promote his shop. An offer to give a free lesson with the purchase of a set of clubs also is used as a promotion. But these and the aforementioned display setups and the rather casual but pointed use of catalogs just about constitute Hardigree's advertising program.

Two-Way Inventory

Golf car fees at Keeler are \$3.50 for 9 holes and \$6.50 for 18. Cleaning and storage charges run \$1.50 per month. For inventory control, the Kennesaw pro uses a combination of ledger accounts and a physical method of checking on stock. Hardigree is just as particular about the latter as he is about his display setups. Every piece of stock is assigned a place either in the front or the back of the shop and every effort is made to keep it in one of the two locations. A check of either of these locations tells immediately what has to be re-ordered. This physical method of counting also serves as a check on the ledger or vice versa. The two-way inventory system calls for a good deal of hard work to maintain it, and isn't completely foolproof, but as far as Bill is concerned, nobody ever has improved on it. He's of the school that feels that the inventory control system is the heart of any business, golf or otherwise.

As to whether daily fee players are willing to spend the kind of money to produce just a fair profit or a substantial one is a matter of a pro's attitude, according to Hardigree. "When I took over the shop at Keeler," he says, "I reasoned that if the golfers were offered a large share of first class merchandise in first class surroundings they would support me. So far, I certainly have no kicks. And, I'm optimistic enough to feel that things are going to be better. There has been a steady upgrading in the buying habits of our players and I think the trend will continue."